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In 2021, as Mayor of Strathbogie Shire Council, I wrote to the Minister for Local Government asking for the appointment of a Municipal Monitor.

All Councillors bar me were first-time Councillors, and we were all navigating the requirements of a new Local Government Act.

We were lucky to be appointed Janet Dore who had significant experience in senior management at local government and government agencies.

Ms Dore's role was to provide Councillors with guidance, education, and support.

At this time, we were experiencing some governance and conduct issues.

I strongly believed the support offered by Ms Dore would help us overcome these.

Councillors just needed a little independent support.

I reminded myself that asking for help was a good thing. It was a commitment from us, that we were true leaders with an unwavering commitment to good governance.

At least that's what I thought.

While Ms Dore was with us, Councillors had an independent person in the room to offer governance advice.

She pulled us up when we were doing the wrong thing and set us on the right track.

Good governance was possible with an independent expert in the room to guide us.

There was increased trust, greater honesty and we were able to participate in healthy debate.

Unfortunately, when Ms Dore left the wheels again began to fall off.

The final straw for me was in our February 2023 meeting when an amended motion to refer the Mid-Year Review to the Audit and Risk Committee for its review.

Officer's advice, that this was not in the Audit and Risk Committee's role, was ignored.

More than this, officers also stressed not approving the Mid-Year Review could mean a delay in the adoption of the Mid-Year Review, placing the sustainability of next year's budget and our shire at great risk. An unacceptable and avoidable risk.

Officers all told us delays could also mean losing important flood recovery contracts, which they had worked around the clock to ensure Strathbogie Shire was ahead of the game.

All this advice was ignored.

Following a raft of code of conduct violations and a refusal from some Councillors to work collaboratively with officers I supported the current Mayor, Cr Laura Binks, to again ask the Minister for help.

Mr Peter Stephenson was appointed as Council's second Monitor in May 2023, but his Terms of Reference were very different to our first Monitor.

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Mr Stephenson's job was to determine if we could continue to function as a Council.

I strongly believe in democracy. In robust discussion and debate that needs everyone's voices to work.

I believe in community engagement, listening to our community and making better decisions with the people we represent.

I believe in respect and treating people well.

This was not happening behind closed doors in our Council chambers. I truly hope our community understands we tried.

Sadly, there was a clear division that was in favour of the Councillors behaving badly.

Even worse our ratepayers have had to fork out funds for monitors' fees, legal advice and training.

I believe so much of this spend could have been avoided if Councillors were willing to listen, reflect and learn.

I am so proud to call Strathbogie Shire Council home. I'm proud that I have been strong, that I have stood up for what I believe in.

Local Government needs to change.

We need greater opportunity to support those doing the right thing.

At present all a Councillor has to do is resign to make the consequences of a Code of Conduct breach disappear.

How is this transparent? How does this help Council explain what's happening behind closed doors?

We have had almost 30 code of conduct breaches – the details of which are confidential.

So today if anyone would like to know why, despite all of this I didn't resign my answer is simple, **I didn't need to.**

- **Chris Raeburn**