

Chief Ombudsman says Horowhenua District Council to remain in the spotlight over email blocking

Date 13 December 2017

The Chief Ombudsman Peter Boshier says his preliminary enquiries into Horowhenua District Council’s email blocking practices have raised a number of questions about local authority transparency and accountability.

Mr Boshier asked his staff to start initial work on the issue after the email interception policy at the Horowhenua District Council was revealed publicly in July.

“There was no formal written record of the policy’s existence. Some individuals, including elected representatives may have had their emails diverted without their knowledge.”

Staff from the Office of the Ombudsman discussed these issues with the Council, along with the Offices of the Auditor-General and the Privacy Commissioner, the Department of Internal Affairs, Local Government New Zealand and the Society of Local Government Managers.

“I was seriously concerned about the ongoing impact of these practices and was considering a systemic intervention into Horowhenua District Council’s email blocking.”

“The Council has stopped blocking emails and adopted a new Electronic Communications (Email Quarantine) Policy in October.”

“I have written to Horowhenua District Council Chief Executive David Clapperton and advised him that while this change in policy addresses my most pressing concerns this will not be the end of the matter.”

“We will not be conducting a systemic review at this stage.”

However, Mr Boshier says he will still be considering the complaints of four individuals whose emails were intercepted prior to the introduction of the new policy.

“I have handed those specific cases over to my investigators for further action. I will also be providing the Council with detailed feedback on its Electronic Communications Policy and closely monitoring developments to make sure the Council follows through.”

“In view of what I have seen, I have asked my staff to monitor local government issues closely and strengthen lines of communication with other agencies with oversight of the sector.”

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