

Commissioner will investigate claims

SOUTHWARK: Simon Hughes is now being formally investigated by the Commissioner for Parliamentary Standards, the *News* can confirm.

Last week it was revealed that a complaint had been made about the Lib Dem deputy leader by Southwark Labour, just a week ahead of the hard-fought East Walworth by-election vote, but it was unclear if the commissioner would investigate.

A spokesperson confirmed yesterday that he would, but stressed that no inference about the alleged breach of the MPs' code of conduct should be drawn from this.

The complaint centres on Labour's claim that the Bermondsey MP did not properly declare a donation made by a local business to his constituency party. However, the Commissioner for Parliamentary Standards does not have significant power to reprimand or punish MPs. There are three possible outcomes to his investigation: the complaint can be thrown out if there is insufficient evidence to substantiate it; if Mr Hughes accepts there has been a breach and "has made suitable recompense" the Commissioner may decide to resolve it by correcting his declaration of interests – known as rectification; or the Commissioner will set out his findings in a memorandum to the Committee on Standards and Privileges, which will publish his memorandum and its own conclusions.

Investigation into donation declaration

Leader: Olympic ticket did not have to be declared

EXCLUSIVE

By Oliver Pugh

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AN INVESTIGATION into the leader of the council has been triggered after he chose not to declare the gift of an Olympic opening ceremony ticket to his partner by the developers of the Elephant and Castle regeneration.

Lend Lease gave Cllr Peter John one £1,600 ticket, which he declared, and another to his partner, which he did not.

"It wasn't disclosed because it didn't need to be disclosed," Cllr John said. "Under our disclosure rules it was not a declarable gift."

"I took advice on it at the time from a very senior officer and that was the advice I was given," he said.

There is no suggestion that Lend Lease expected anything in return for the tickets.

His decision prompted the complaint to the council's Standards Committee and a ruling is expected in the coming



Cllr Peter John

days.

The Labour leader said he would have declared the other ticket if it had also been given to him, rather than being given directly to his partner.

"Yes I got to see the Olympic opening ceremony [but] it was a business event,"

Cllr John said.

"I met and spoke with every member of the Lend Lease board – it's very rare for them to get together. In terms of our ongoing relationship with Lend Lease it was very important that I did meet with the global board."

Cllr John said his connections with the Lend Lease had helped him negotiate a better deal at the Elephant and Castle regeneration.

"It is important as long as it doesn't have some effect of meaning that I'm compromised or I accept what they say without question – and I haven't been," he said.

The website also lists a number of other gifts from a variety of developers and organisations.

Cllr Anood Al-Samerai, Southwark Lib Dem leader, said she was shocked that Cllr John had not declared his partner's ticket to the opening ceremony.

"Obviously his partner wouldn't have been given the ticket by Lend Lease," she said. "He is just embarrassed at how much he has to declare from Lend Lease."

"It's certainly something people on the door step in East Walworth have been concerned with and how friendly he has been with them."

The *News* contacted Lend Lease on press day, but the company declined to comment.

Developers drop Heygate rent price

By Oliver Pugh

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ELEPHANT AND CASTLE: Developers have succumbed to a determined local campaign and agreed to drop the rents for the first new 'affordable' homes that will be built on the site of the old Heygate Estate in Walworth.

Residents and Lib Dem politicians had argued that the proposal to charge 65 per cent of market rate – around £800 a month – for the eighteen one and two bed flats would be too expensive for local residents.

Cllr Peter John, the Labour leader of the council, told the *News* on Tuesday that this price would now be slashed to 50 per cent of the market rate, though residents have lobbied for an even lower rate.

The concession came amid increasingly desperate attempts by both the Lib Dems and Labour to score points with the local electorate ahead of the East Walworth by-election today. Cllr John said that he had approached the council's partners for the Elephant and Castle regeneration, Lend Lease, to raise his concerns. He said: "That's the sort of thing you can do if you have a good relationship [with developers]."

Lib Dem MP Simon Hughes, who has pushed for a better deal on the prices, said: "That's progress. It shows that our campaign is getting through, but there's a long way to go."

WALWORTH

Polls open in by-election this morning

By Oliver Pugh

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POLLS OPENED in a bitterly contested council by-election this morning, a vote that some have claimed will uncover the public view of the Elephant and Castle regeneration.

Insiders in all three of the main political parties agree that Southwark Labour, who are in control of the council, are likely to hold the seat in East Walworth.

But campaigning has been typically tough in the run up to the ballot, with both of the main parties calling for support from the deputy leaders of their respective parties, Harriet Harman MP and Simon Hughes MP.

Mr Hughes in particular has been particularly vocal about the council's handling of the regeneration of the Heygate Estate, which he has criticised for 'pricing out' locals.

Though they are fighting a national trend of diminishing support, his party believes that their campaign has won them foot in the door.

"The ward isn't just the Elephant, but certainly the campaign we've been running is about a verdict on Southwark council's housing policy," said Lib Dem leader Cllr

Anood Al-Samerai.

And although the seat became vacant when Labour councillor and chief whip Helen Morrissey died of cancer in October, a Lib Dem did hold a seat there until 2010.

"Labour are realising they are not doing enough," said Cllr Al-Samerai. "Labour's leaflet this weekend said the Lib Dems can win here. We see this as a chance to force them to change their housing policy."

However, speaking to the *News* Cllr John appeared to admit that he was not even entertaining a Lib Dem win. "I think a Labour win would be an endorsement of what we're doing and other than just in housing and the regeneration of the Heygate Estate," Cllr John said. "It's about free school meals, doubling recycling, and our commitment to making every home warm, safe and dry." He added: "I think the Lib Dems have run another ludicrous and misleading campaign, trying to frighten people and painting a negative picture of this administration and Southwark.

"We're the only ones with a positive vision."

Polling stations open at 7am and close at 10pm.

December 1st-23rd

Christmas dinner

at Bermondsey's first Carvery
12 - 4PM (excluding Saturday)

3 Course Meal
Adults £19.95 • OAPs £15.95 • Children £13.95

Includes 3 course Roast Dinner
Prawn cocktail or soup
Turkey or Roast beef with all the trimmings
Xmas Pudding and brandy or apple pie served with ice cream or custard

Xmas parties welcome. Booking Essential
020 7237 7210
Book early to avoid disappointment

The Old Bank

Bar & Carvery
289 SOUTHWARK PARK ROAD



New bridge put into place

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