

"I don't know why anyone would be gathering intelligence on us personally. If there was anything going on ICAC would be all over it." – Cr Hope Brett-Bowen.

## THE BIG ISSUE

# 'I sleep with a spanner under my pillow' says councillor

By Natalie O'Brien

COUNCILLOR Hope Brett-Bowen has become so concerned about her personal security in the past few months that she now sleeps with a spanner under her pillow.

Strathfield's only female councillor has spoken out about her safety fears as investigations widen into a campaign of intimidation, dirty tricks and espionage being waged against some Strathfield councillors.

"I feel quite afraid. I don't like being at home by myself," Cr Brett-Bowen told the Scene. "I don't know why anyone would be gathering intelligence on us personally. If there was something going on – ICAC (The Independent Commission Against Corruption) would be all over it."

It was revealed in the Scene last month that police are investigating the discovery of listening devices and hidden cameras in the homes of two councillors, including Cr Paul Barron. Cr Brett-Bowen said so far no bugging devices or cameras had been found at her home.

But it is now believed there may be other councillors whose homes or internet lines have been tampered with.

The council has called in the services of security analyst Luke Athens, director of the International Intelligence Agency, to "sweep" the homes of councillors who suspect they may also have been bugged.

Athens said the device that he found so far was "piggybacking" on an internet line and telephone line and had been installed by someone with professional training or "espionage" experience.

"In Australia we don't have these type of training facilities," he said. "I had to go overseas to do my training so this is someone



*"I feel quite afraid. I don't like being at home by myself,"*  
Cr Brett-Bowen

who has trained overseas or with a policing or some sort of spy background."

Athens said the device "cloned" the information from the internet line which allowed it to be recorded and decoded and also allowed an interception of all telephone calls.

"It is a very smart way to do it," he said, "and it was done in a very professional way."

In other developments, evidence has been uncovered that another, unnamed councillor has been the victim of a recent covert break-in and may also have surveillance type equipment hidden in their home.

A check of the councillor's home revealed that tiles had been removed from a rear section of the roof and the intruder had cut through roofing insulation to gain entry to the home.

Athens said a sweep of the house indicated that there are suspicious frequencies in the house indicating that there may be bugging devices hidden in the home.

"It is still under investigation and the next step is start removing things in the house (like walls and ceilings) to check."

A former ICAC officer told the Scene it is unlikely the devices had been placed there by the authorities. He said the authorities could do the interceptions remotely without the target ever knowing they were being bugged.

But the Scene can reveal that it is not the first time that Strathfield councillors have been bugged.

Councillor Bill Carney has said that during his time as Mayor of Strathfield in 2005 and 2006 he had been bugged but never found out who was behind the operation. After the discovery of the listening devices, council had done "periodic sweeps of the mayoral office" looking for listening devices.

Earlier this year Cr Carney said he suspected his email line had been bugged although he has not opted to have his home checked for bugs. "We had a problem, with the email, that was unexplained," said Cr Carney. "Then it went away. I just wonder who would want to spy on councillors."

Police have been asked to investigate the bugging incidents as well as a string of strange events including the vandalising of personal property belonging to Strathfield councillors.

The trouble appears to have escalated after numerous pamphlets revealed all the home addresses and telephone numbers of Strathfield Councillors.

Cr Brett-Bowen said her scooter had been damaged while parked in the street in front of her house. She said her scooter is easily recognizable.

"It is not a nice feeling when someone is trying to intimidate you. You have to worry about it because other councillors have kids," she says.

"I don't expect accolades, but we don't want our privacy invaded for no reason. I want these people to appear in front of a judge."

Cr Carney also had the window broken on his car which was parked in his street. But he said he did not know if it was just a coincidence or not.

Councillor Paul Barron, who found a bugging device attached to his internet, said maybe someone was trying to compromise him. He hoped the involvement of the police and a specialist analyst would act as a deterrent. "People are going to think twice about it," he said.

Cr Barron said he didn't know why anyone would want to bug him. "Maybe it is because I am an independent and I don't tow any party line," he said. "But they won't scare me off."

Cr Brett-Bowen, Carney and Barron are adamant scare campaigns will not influence them in the decisions they make relating to the council. "I will follow my heart," said Cr Brett-Bowen. "This is not going to influence me."

## WHY THESE INVASIONS SHAME US ALL

### TheSceneSays

IF STRATHFIELD residents are called upon to vote in a replacement for Danny Lim, the councillor who quit his post in July, one question which some may wish to ask is: Why would anyone want to stand?

A Scene story last month described how the homes of two Strathfield councillors had been invaded and bugged. One found a monitor on his computer which had been fixed to his broadband connection under his house.

Since then, further investigations have revealed that another councillor had the tiles

removed from the roof of a house in what appears to be a break and enter.

In a separate break-in several council documents were tampered with by an intruder.

Residents have every right to wonder: What on earth is going on?

The Scene today reveals Strathfield's only female councillor, Hope Brett-Bowen, sleeps with a spanner under her pillow, she is so worried about her safety. Hers is a story which should shame us all.

Our elected representatives are paid just a few thousand dollars to take care of everything – from the integrity of our planning process on

developments worth billions, to the emptying of our bins and the parking of our cars.

Once, being a councillor was a respected position of community trust and service. Today, it sounds a little like military duty.

Police are investigating what is behind these extraordinary attacks on the lives of Strathfield's elected representatives. They come at a time when the council is under pressure from the State Government to open up the planning process and speed development to help ease Sydney's growing population.

There is a wider question for the whole community from these extraordinary events: is this really

the face of community service we should expect in 2010? Is this what our elected representatives should go through in return for ensuring our wants and needs?

The real price of these assaults on our democratic process will be paid by all of us. Worthy and well qualified people, who might have considered serving on council, will now think twice if their lives and those of their loved ones could be violated. Those presently serving may well be asking whether it is worth the risk.

Another story we carry today underscores the importance of attracting professionals to our council: the Town Square

development is a vital initiative which will invigorate Strathfield for decades to come. It involves managing a project worth tens of millions of dollars.

We need the very best professionals to oversee work of this magnitude. We won't get such people if we cannot ensure their safety and privacy.

Cr Hope Brett-Bowen and Cr Paul Barron have both been victims of what appears a crude campaign of intimidation. Both are adamant no scare campaign is going to influence them.

Their bravery is to be commended. But it should not be taken for granted. Their safety and the sanctity of their homes in Strathfield must be assured.

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