

AROUND THE COUNCILS

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Private eye on case

By BRENDEN HILLS

Strathfield

THE Strathfield spying scandal has widened with the council hiring a private investigator to search four councillors' homes, including its mayor's, for hidden surveillance equipment.

Parramatta-based investigation company International Intelligence Agency was brought in after the homes of Mayor Tony Maroun and Councillor Paul Barron were broken into and listening devices secretly installed.

After a scooter belonging to Councillor Hope Brett-Bowen was trashed outside her apartment, security "sweeps" were also conducted at her home and

that of an unnamed councillor.

The searches have included checking for listening devices that may have been hidden in furniture or light fittings and the attaching of "piggybacking devices" to telephones or internet connections.

Councillor Barron said telephone and internet tracking devices were found in his South Strathfield home in April following a break-in.

"It was a pretty crude-looking device wrapped in black tape, about the size of a matchbox, attached to the back of the computer," he said.

"They obviously had an agenda, whether it's political or whatever, because they didn't steal any valuables, they just installed the device and rifled through my council papers."

A suspicious device was also understood to have been found in the home of Mayor Maroun.

The Sunday Telegraph understands tiles were removed from a section of his roof, with the intruder cutting through insulation to gain entry.

Councillor Maroun declined to comment, saying only that it was "a police matter".

Councillor Brett-Bowen said she had kept a spanner with her overnight for protection after her scooter was trashed, but

that no bugging devices had been found at her home.

"It's pretty scary," she said. "We're councillors and we don't get paid that much... so when you've got to deal with listening devices and break-ins, it makes you wonder."

A council spokesman said the council would consider its next move when the security firm presented its findings on the four homes.

International Intelligence Agency security analyst and director Luke Athens said the devices found in Councillor Barron's house "intercepted", "cloned" and "recorded" information from telephone calls and the internet.



Bugs found: Paul Barron and security analyst Luke Athens

Port Stephens

COUNCILLORS at Port Stephens are at breaking point with one another, making personal attacks during meetings and refusing to eat together.

Mayor Bruce MacKenzie said last Tuesday's meeting was the nastiest he had ever been involved with.

"I don't want to sit at the same table as them," Cr MacKenzie said of his fellow councillors.

"If I did, I'd probably choke on my food."

More than 20 complaints about councillors have been made under the code of conduct.

Parramatta

DEVELOPMENTS rejected by the council but approved by the State