

Labor whip pushes government to suspend Newcastle councillor Allan Robinson over homophobic slurs

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Cr Allan Robinson is in hot water over his comments in 2019.

State Labor is pressing the Office of Local Government to suspend Newcastle councillor Allan Robinson for three months, the maximum allowable under the law.

Mark Buttigieg, the Opposition whip in the Legislative Council, questioned Local Government Minister Shelley Hancock in budget estimates on Thursday about her department's response to Cr Robinson's homophobic slurs in and out of the council chamber in 2019.

The NSW Anti-Discrimination Board ordered Cr Robinson to apologise publicly last year for a series of comments he made in 2019 in relation to deputy lord mayor Declan Clausen.

Cr Robinson used a homophobic epithet in the council chamber and made other offensive comments in subsequent media interviews.

The council voted in November last year to delay a proposed censure of Cr Robinson while it sought further opinion from the OLG under the serious misconduct provisions of the Local Government Act. The motion said the council did not consider a censure to be sufficient "remedial action".

Cr Robinson referred to Cr Clausen as a "p--f" in an interview with the *Newcastle Herald* while being asked about his use of a homophobic slur in the chamber.

"I have no problems with p--fs. I have one work for me and I'm very good friends with three p--fs who I'm proud to say they are my friends," he said in an email.

In a subsequent interview with *The Guardian* website, Cr Robinson denied the comments were offensive.

"Why should it be offensive?" he said. "If you're a f---ing p--f, you're a p--f."

Minutes from the November council meeting show an independent investigator found Cr Robinson had made derogatory comments about another councillor in an email to a resident that constituted "verbal abuse and harassment or bullying".

Mr Buttigieg asked Ms Hancock whether she would expect the OLG to ban Cr Robinson for three months.

Ms Hancock said she had "absolute abhorrence" for Cr Robinson's comments but would not pre-empt an OLG investigation.

She said the Newcastle community would be concerned if the council or OLG did not take action to ensure the behaviour was not repeated.

"We expect higher standards of our elected representatives, absolutely," she said.

"We have elections in September."

Ms Hancock said she hoped to "lift the standards of behaviour in the chambers" by increasing the ratio of female councillors across NSW from 31 per cent.

She and OLG deputy secretary of local government, planning and policy Tim Hurst were not aware if the Robinson matter had been referred to the OLG.