

NEWS REPORT



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SACK THIS WOMAN NOW!

Tory councillor suspended for financial impropriety...but Johnson and Coleman refuse to remove her from LFEPA

THE LONDON FIRE and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) was engulfed in a fresh scandal last night after its chairman, Councillor Brian Coleman, refused to support the sacking of a shamed Tory party ally who was suspended from office by her home borough for financial impropriety.

Bertha Joseph, a councillor in the borough of Brent, and deputy to Coleman on the fire authority, was found guilty by a standards committee of using £900 of charitable donations to buy ball gowns for herself.

She received the maximum possible sanction of a six-month suspension, and is debarred from carrying out any duties as a Brent councillor for that time.

Despite this, Councillor Coleman has remained fiercely loyal to Joseph and opposes any attempt to have her removed from the fire authority. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the Tory group has, since the defection of another councillor, Betty Evans-Jacas, from Labour to the Tories last year, enjoyed a working majority of just one on the fire authority and would be reluctant to let that advantage slip away, especially at a time when they are attempting to push ahead with proposals to change shift patterns and make cutbacks throughout the service.

Mayor Boris Johnson has also resisted calls for Joseph's sacking. A spokesman for the mayor said last night: "The legal advice clearly shows there is nothing to prevent Bertha Joseph from serving on the board."

But the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has argued that the legalities of the issue are secondary, and Councillor Joseph's continued presence on the authority is inappropriate for ethical reasons. London FBU regional secretary Joe MacVeigh said today: "The LFEPA Tory group, which effectively runs the fire authority, is up to its eyes in sleaze. Within the space of a few months, we have seen the defection of Betty Evans-Jacas, whose own financial background is not exactly squeaky clean, and who apparently



DISGRACED: *Bertha Joseph*

reached some kind of grubby quid pro quo with Brian Coleman, which gave her a more prominent role and increased allowances and him a working majority; we have seen the suspension of another Tory member, Tony Arbour,

for misconduct; we have witnessed the scandal over Brian Coleman's expense claims, as well as his questionable personal relationship with the chief executive of AssetCo, who were recently awarded a £12m contract by LFEPA to provide a strikebreaking workforce; we have discovered that a number of LFEPA Tories are deeply involved with freemasonry; and now a disgraced Tory councillor found guilty of misusing charitable donations is allowed to remain in post and continue to draw thousands of pounds in allowances from London Fire Brigade funds. So much for David Cameron's pledge to clean up politics.

"How can it be that a councillor is deemed not fit to represent constituents in her home borough, but is still considered suitable to represent thousands of Londoners on the fire authority, a position that she only holds by virtue of being a local councillor in the first place? The London fire authority is fast becoming a basket case, with a discredited and derided chairman and a governing group rotten to the core."

The FBU has lodged an official complaint with the authority's head of legal and democratic services. Meanwhile, the leader of the LFEPA Labour group, Navin Shah, said today: "It is time for Councillor Joseph to show some decency and resign from the LFEPA. If Councillor Joseph refuses to shift voluntarily, I urge the Conservative leadership to sack her instantly." He went on: "The mayor has statutory powers to remove a member if the member is found unfit for the position she is appointed for. So far, Boris Johnson's record has been lamentable on this matter. At a time when public confidence in politicians is at an all-time low, is this what the public should expect?"

Members are encouraged to protest directly to Councillor Joseph. This can be done by emailing her at: cllr.bertha.joseph@brent.gov.uk