

Councillor called an “absolute disgrace” for asking that prayers not take place in official meetings

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A local councillor has been called an "absolute disgrace" by a Conservative councillor for suggesting that it was "inappropriate" to hold prayers in council meetings.

David Boothroyd, a Labour councillor and a non-believer, objected after the new Lord Mayor of Westminster asked a chaplain to lead the council in prayers.

After the prayers had taken place, Mr Boothroyd raised a point of order and said, "It is entirely inappropriate to insert into a council meeting about the governance of the city a religious ceremony which may not have meaning for everyone here."

"It is as wrong to have a religious observance that everyone has to participate in, regardless of faith, as it is to stop people with religious faith from praying if they want to. It is an imposition on us."

In response to the imposition of prayers on the meeting, he went on, "In my case I want to make a solemn affirmation that I do solely, sincerely and solemnly declare that there is no rational basis for belief in gods."

In response to councillor Boothroyd's point of order, the head of democratic services at the council cited the power of the Local Government (Religious etc Observances) Act. "In recent legislation it is expressly allowed to have religious ceremony in council meetings," the official responded.

Conservative councillor [Lindsey Hall said](#), "I thought Councillor Boothroyd's outburst tonight was an absolute disgrace. The Lord Mayor has always had a chaplain."

National Secular Society spokesperson, Stephen Evans, commented on the case saying: "This just goes to show the unnecessary division and resentment that can be caused by imposing prayer in secular settings. The supporters of the Local Government (Religious etc Observances) Act called it a 'modest measure' to restore power to local authorities, in fact it essentially allows councils to publicly identify with a particular religious belief and impose its rituals on councillors whilst they carry out their civic duties for wish they were elected."

The National Secular Society campaigned against the Act earlier this year, [warning](#) when the then-bill passed through the Commons that it would effectively impose "acts of religious worship on public servants", or else cause them to excuse themselves from meetings while prayers were said.

In the past month Whitchurch Town Council [decided to abolish](#) their practice of holding prayers at the start of meetings, while a council in Northern Ireland [suffered a bitter split](#) over whether to hold religious observances or not. In April 2015, the Canadian Supreme Court [ruled unanimously](#) against a town in Quebec which held prayers during council meetings.

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