

Woman branded 'potentially violent' by council after complaining about damaged flowerbed | Mail Online

By [Andy Dolan](#)

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Jane Clift: Libel victory after a four-year legal battle

Jane Clift saw it as her public duty to report a drunk she saw trampling flowers in a park.

But her efforts led to a surreal nightmare in which she was branded potentially violent and put on a council blacklist with thugs and sex attackers.

Her details were circulated to an extraordinary range of public and private bodies, including doctors, dentists, opticians, libraries, contraceptive clinics, schools and nurseries. Their staff were advised not to see her alone.

The 43-year-old former care worker was forced to withdraw an application to become a foster parent and, eventually, to leave the town where she had lived for ten years.

Now, after a bitter four-year legal battle with Slough Council, the stain on her character has finally been removed.

The High Court ordered the council to pay her \pounds 12,000 in libel damages after a case which has cost taxpayers an estimated \pounds 500,000 in legal fees.

Mrs Clift said last night: 'I hope this means others will never have to go through the hell I have suffered.'

Her ordeal began in August 2005 when she called the police after the drunk threat-All it takes is one council bufened her in Slough's Sheffield Road Rest Gardens. The man had fled by the time police arrived, but they advised her to contact the council, which was running a campaign to persuade local people to report anti-social behaviour.

foon to take a dislike to you and he or she can put you on this register. There was no right of appeal. The only way I could overturn it is was to embark on this massive legal battle.'

Mrs Clift added: 'What is terrifying is that there is almost no proof required and no hearing to determine the truth of the allegation. It could happen to anybody who gets into even the most minor disagreement with their council.'



Potentially violent: Jane Clift was blacklisted after complaining when an abusive drunk damaged this flowerbed. She said she had no idea such a register even existed before her name was added to it.

The entry expired after 18 months but by then she had been forced to leave Slough.

Mrs Clift, who now lives in Birmingham, said: 'I am not and never have been violent' - as the jury have found.

THE BLACK LIST

The council alert on Jane Clift was sent to:

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| ■ GPs and dentists | ■ Town Centre Business Initiative – 50 of Slough's largest companies. |
| ■ Opticians | ■ Contraception clinics |
| ■ NHS Trust | ■ Stop smoking clinics |
| ■ Fire, police and ambulance services | ■ Alcohol counselling services |
| ■ Schools | ■ Electoral registrars |
| ■ Nurseries and playgroups | ■ Council education and children's services |
| ■ Libraries | |
| ■ Citizens Advice Bureau | |
| ■ Dustbin men | |
| ■ Connections (career advice) | |

'It has taken me four years to clear my name and I hope Slough and other councils never again misuse their registers.' Simon Davies, from the human rights watchdog Privacy International, said: 'This just shows the megalomania of these local authorities. This poor woman was subjected to a Kafkaesque ordeal because of an incorrect allegation made by one official.'

'It is the sort of behaviour that we would have condemned if it came from China or Russia. Our councils seem to be out of control.'

During the eight-day hearing the court was told Mrs Clift had told another council worker that, as far as she was concerned, Miss Rashid could 'drop down dead'.

She followed up with a letter in which she wrote: 'I felt so filled with anger that I am certain I would have physically attacked her if she had been anywhere near me. I truly am not of that nature and so, surely, this should act as a wake-up call to the borough as to the capacity she has for offending people.'

But her counsel, Hugh Tomlinson, said the letter was misinterpreted and the decision to put her on the register had been 'completely ridiculous'.

Her name was added to the blacklist because she was 'a thorn in their side' and the council thought the move would mean no-one would take her seriously.

Mr Justice Tugendhat ordered Slough to pay the legal costs of the case, estimated at between £450,000 to

£500,000.

Mrs Clift brought the action under a 'no win no fee' arrangement with her legal team.

A council spokesman said later: 'The jury found that what we recorded about Mrs Clift was not true, but they were not prepared to find that we acted in bad faith.

'We will reflect carefully on how we need to respond.'