



5 February 2018

MEDIA RELEASE

COUNCILLOR REPRIMANDED AFTER USING COUNCIL EMAIL FOR PERSONAL GAIN

A COUNCILLOR has been formally reprimanded (censured) after using his Council computer and email to ask for help to distribute party political election leaflets.

Liberal Democrat councillor, Tim Brett, used his Council computer and email to send a request for volunteers to help him hand out the electioneering leaflets around his local constituency.

His actions contravened the Councillors' Code of Conduct, which states that members must not use equipment provided by the council for their own party's political gain.

Cllr Brett appeared before a panel at a public hearing at the Standards Commission for Scotland (SCS) in Glenrothes, Fife, on February 5, where he was censured for his actions.

The sanction means that the SCS determined that Cllr Brett had breached the Code and that his actions had fallen below the standards expected of those in public life, but noted his position that this was a result of an inadvertent mistake, rather than a deliberate attempt to exploit his position.

The allegation was that Cllr Brett had used his council email and computer on April 26, 2017, to send a message to the Chair of a Community Trust to ask for help to deliver party political leaflets around local houses.

The Hearing Panel had before it written evidence and heard submissions.

It noted that Cllr Brett had assisted the Community Trust with a number of issues and the request had been sent in a chain of email correspondence about other issues and had apologised for his action in sending the email.

It decided that he should be censured for his actions and noted that he should have been more careful and not used his council email while looking for help to distribute election literature.

The Hearing Panel was pleased to note the Cllr's Brett's recognition and clear insight into the potential perception of his actions. It emphasised, however, it was Cllr Brett's responsibility to comply with the Code.

Mrs Lindsey Gallanders, Chair of the Hearing Panel, said "While in this case the Hearing Panel acknowledged the councillors' position that his actions were the result of an inadvertent mistake, it's is nevertheless important that we hold him to account by conducting a fair and independent public Hearing".

“While the Hearing Panel are pleased to note Cllr Brett accepts he breached the Code and has apologised for doing so, it nevertheless considers that he should have been aware of the prohibition in the Code in respect of using Council facilities for party political or campaigning activities and should have taken extra care while using his council email account.”

“He should have taken extra care to avoid doing so, particularly given the proximity of the local government and general elections.”

“The Panel was pleased to note that Cllr Brett recognised the need for councillors to be sensitive to how others would view their communications to ensure they avoid any perception that they are seeking to exploit any relationship developed through constituency work for party political purposes”.

“We wish to emphasise that the appropriate use of council resources is an important part of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct as it gives members of the public confidence that public funds are not being used for campaigning purposes”.

“The Code of Conduct is in place to ensure the public can have confidence that the councillors they elect to represent them are holding themselves to a high professional standard”.

The Code of Conduct is based around nine key principles, including, integrity, honesty and respect.

The SCS is an independent public body, responsible for encouraging high standards of behaviour by councillors and those appointed to boards of devolved public bodies.

The public bodies include colleges, National Health Service boards and regional bodies, such as the Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

It also covers national organisations like the Scottish Qualification Authority, Sport Scotland and Scottish Water, among many others.

ENDS

For further information please contact Lorna Johnston, Executive Director of the Standards Commission on 0131 348 6666 or by email to enquiries@standardscommission.org.uk