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***MEDIA RELEASE***

## **COUNCILLOR SANCTIONED FOR NOT DECLARING 33% STAKE IN COMPANY**

A COUNCILLOR who failed to register his interests in a company that he owns one third of has been sanctioned by Scotland's ethics watchdog at a public Hearing.

Cllr Finlay Cunningham, an independent member of the Western Isles Council, Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar, has been censured by the Standards Commission for Scotland (SCS) for not notifying the council of his 33% stake in a company, JRFC Properties, which he shares with two family members.

A three-strong panel of SCS members formally reprimanded Cllr Cunningham at a public Hearing in Edinburgh on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> July.

The sanction means that Cllr Cunningham's actions represent a breach of the Code of Conduct that all councillors must abide by and that his actions have fallen below the standards expected of those in public life.

The Code clearly sets out that councillors must register any shares they own in a business that are greater than 1% of the issued share capital.

Tricia Stewart, Chair of the Hearing Panel, said: "Councillors must register all financial and other interests within one month of accepting their appointment, and Cllr Cunningham quite simply did not do this.

"We recognise that his failure to register shares was not deliberate, and that he did not intend to deceive the council – indeed neither Cllr Cunningham or his company have gained any benefit from him not declaring his stake.

"However, his behaviour has nonetheless contravened the Code of Conduct and, as councillor, it is his responsibility to make sure that he holds himself to a high ethical standard by ensuring that he is open and transparent about his dealings

"This is essential for those in public life as it affords members of the public the opportunity to consider whether a councillor's interests could influence their discussion and decision-making."

A full written decision of the Cllr Cunningham's Hearing will be issued within 14 days.

In reaching their decision to censure Cllr Cunningham, the Hearing panel noted that he had accepted responsibility, admitted the breach and apologised.

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.

Further information on the role of the SCS can be found at <http://www.standardscommissionscotland.org.uk/>

**ENDS**

**Issued on behalf of the Standards Commission for Scotland by Holyrood PR. Further information from Fraser Clarke or Catriona Conway-Mortimer on 0131 561 2244 or [info@holyroodpr.co.uk](mailto:info@holyroodpr.co.uk)**