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MEDIA RELEASE

COUNCILLOR SANCTIONED AFTER FAILING TO REGISTER INTEREST

A LOCAL councillor who failed to register her interests as a member of an influential steering group has been sanctioned by Scotland's ethics watchdog at a public hearing.

Cllr Anne Allan, who has been a member of Aberdeenshire Council for 15 years, failed to register her non-financial membership of the Rediscover Peterhead Business Improvement District (BID) Steering group. The Steering Group was established to progress a BID proposal for Peterhead.

In order to encourage inclusive growth and greater public-private partnership working at a local level, funding is available for business groups and local bodies, working in partnership with their local authority, to develop proposals for BIDs across Scotland.

The funding is intended to support the development of town and city neighbourhoods, tourism and visitor areas, rural areas, business and industrial parks, food and drink and single business sector BIDs such as textile or whisky.

BIDs are developed, managed and paid for by the business sector by means of a compulsory levy.

Businesses within the proposed BID area must vote in favour, in a public ballot, of this before the BID can be established. Each business liable to contribute to the BID is able to vote on whether or not the BID goes ahead.

The Scottish Government and Aberdeenshire Council had approved funding in respect of the Peterhead by the time a ballot for the Peterhead BID took place in 2017.

The complaint against Cllr Allan stated that she was member of the Steering Group during 2016 and 2017, covering the period prior to, during and after the Peterhead BID ballot. It stated that her membership of the group and support of a 'yes' vote had been prominent in the published ballot material.

The BID process was a matter of public interest due to the use of public funds and the public ballot of the business community and, as such, Cllr Allan should have declared her membership of the Steering Group.

The Standards Commission for Scotland (SCS) decided to formally censure Cllr Allan at a public hearing held in Aberdeen on Tuesday, August 28.

In its decision, the Hearing Panel stated that there had been a clear breach of the Councillor's Code of Conduct and that members of the public might 'reasonably have considered that her interest in the organisation could influence her actions'.

Mr Paul Walker, Chair of the Hearing Panel, said: “It is the personal responsibility of councillors to be aware of, and comply with, the provisions in the Code.

“The Code clearly states that councillors may have significant non-financial interests but these must be registered and completely transparent.

“To ensure confidence in the system, members of the public must have no doubt about whether a councillor’s interests influences their discussion and decision-making.

“In this case, Cllr Allan was negligent in that regard and failed to ensure she held herself to the high ethical standards expected of councillors.”

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

The Code of Conduct is based on nine key principles, which include integrity, honesty and respect.

The SCS works independently of Government and political parties. It promotes and enforces Codes of Conduct for councillors across Scotland, as well as individuals appointed to a wide range of national and regional public bodies such as the Accounts Commission, the Scottish Qualification Authority, Sport Scotland, Scottish Water and the Scottish Police Authority and many other organisations, including NHS Boards and further education colleges.

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

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Issued on behalf of the Standards Commission for Scotland by Holyrood PR. Further information from Fraser Clarke or Catriona Conway-Mortimer on 0131 561 2238 or info@holyroodpr.co.uk