



4 April 2019

MEDIA RELEASE

COUNCILLOR SANCTIONED FOR DISRESPECTFUL BEHAVIOUR

A South Lanarkshire Labour councillor was sanctioned for disrespectful conduct by the Standards Commission at a public Hearing held in Hamilton on 4 April 2019.

The Hearing Panel heard that, on 27 June 2018, while attending a meeting of South Lanarkshire's Executive Committee, Councillor Gerry Convery said the words "seig heil" as the SNP Leader of the Administration, who was the Chair of the meeting, concluded a debate. The debate was on setting the level of the school uniform clothing grant.

The Panel heard that Councillor Convery had said the words when the Chair of the meeting had, fairly abruptly, closed the debate on an amendment Councillor Convery supported to increase the grant beyond that proposed by the SNP Administration. The Panel noted it was accepted that the debate on the item was politically charged and that the Chair had not been supportive of the amendment.

The Panel was satisfied that the words "seig heil" are synonymous with the former fascist Nazi regime in Germany and are directly associated with obedience to an oppressive dictatorship. The Panel considered Councillor Convery's use of them could only be taken as an unacceptable way of protesting about how the Chair had conducted the meeting in respect of the item under consideration. The Panel determined that the comment amounted to a personal and political attack on the Chair in respect of the way he had conducted himself and the business of the meeting. The Panel was therefore satisfied that Councillor Convery had failed to observe the rules of good conduct by behaving in a disrespectful manner towards the Chair and, as such, was in breach of paragraphs 3.1 and 3.2 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

Mr Mike McCormick, Chair of the Hearing Panel, said: "Councillors have a duty under the Code to treat the Chair, colleagues, Council employees and members of the public with courtesy and respect and cannot, therefore, indulge in offensive personal attacks, no matter how frustrated they may be.

While politicians have a right of freedom of expression, they cannot, simply indulge in abusive behaviour. In this case, the Panel's opinion was that Councillor Convery's conduct, in directing words, that are widely associated with an oppressive dictatorship, to the Chair, amounted to a personal and politically offensive attack on him, which was beyond that which is acceptable."

"The Panel was nevertheless of the view that the Councillor Convery's conduct did not warrant a more severe sanction. This was because there was no evidence or suggestion it had formed part of a course of conduct or that the making of the comment had been pre-

meditated. The Panel also accepted that Councillor Convery had immediately retracted the comment and had subsequently apologised. The Panel was satisfied that Councillor Convery fully recognised that his comment was entirely inappropriate.”

A full written decision in respect of the Hearing will be issued and published on the Standards Commission’s website within 14 days.

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

The Standards Commission works independently of Government and political parties. It promotes and enforces Codes of Conduct for councillors, as well as individuals appointed to a wide range of national and regional public bodies across Scotland 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 Standards Commission can be found at <http://www.standardscommissionscotland.org.uk/>

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Issued by the Standards Commission for Scotland. For further information please contact the Standards Commission on 0131 348 6666 or enquiries@standardscommission.org.uk