



20 November 2019

MEDIA RELEASE

WEST LOTHIAN COUNCILLOR SUSPENDED FOR SHARING AN ANTISEMITIC ARTICLE ONLINE

A West Lothian Councillor, Frank Anderson, was sanctioned for disrespectful conduct by the Standards Commission at a public Hearing held in Livingston on 20 November 2019, and was suspended from all meetings of the council for 3 months. The case arose from complaints made about Cllr Anderson's actions in sharing, on Twitter and Facebook, and subsequently defending in a national newspaper, an antisemitic article from a third-party blog.

The Panel heard that it was not in dispute that, on 28 October 2018, Cllr Anderson shared, on Twitter and Facebook, an article from a third-party blog, 'Grouse Beater', that was critical of a member of the GMB Union, and in particular, her activities as the organiser of a two-day equal pay strike in Glasgow. The Panel found that the article inferred that the individual, as a person playing a prominent role in trade union activity, represented a stereotype of 'the Jew' as referred to by Hitler. The Panel noted that while the article did not specifically refer to the individual as being Jewish, that information was in the public domain as she sits on the Labour Party's National Executive, had been involved in its policy on antisemitism and was at the time the prospective UK Parliamentary candidate for Livingston. The Panel was satisfied that the article was antisemitic. The Panel noted that the article's author had been suspended by the SNP after writing it and was subsequently expelled from the party.

The Panel noted that Cllr Anderson's position was that while he had not read the article properly at the time and had not realised the individual concerned was Jewish, he now accepted it could be perceived as antisemitic. The Panel noted, however, that the Respondent had initially defended the article in comments published in the 'The National' on 30 October 2018, where he was quoted as stating that he did not accept it was antisemitic. The Panel noted that Respondent had subsequently sent the individual concerned an email, on the same day, in which he had apologised for sharing it. An apology from him was also published in the media the same day.

The Panel found that by sharing the article, Cllr Anderson was, in essence, endorsing its contents or, at the very least, could have been perceived as doing so. The Panel considered that the article contained comments that were antisemitic and that it also amounted to a personal attack on the individual named in it. The Panel was satisfied that, by sharing and subsequently defending an article that was antisemitic and offensive, Cllr Anderson caused the individual concerned a great deal of distress and breached the Councillors' Code of Conduct by failing to behave in a respectful manner towards her. The Panel suspended Cllr Anderson for a period for three months.

Mr Paul Walker, Standards Commission Member and Chair of the Hearing Panel, said:

“Councillors have a duty under the Code to treat others with courtesy and respect and cannot, therefore, indulge in offensive personal abuse. While the Panel was pleased to note that Cllr Anderson apologised to the individual concerned, it nevertheless considered that his conduct, in sharing and subsequently defending an offensive and antisemitic article, went well beyond that which is acceptable”.

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

In determining whether the article was antisemitic, the Panel referred to the International Holocaust Memorial Alliance’s definitions and illustrations.

All councillors have a personal responsibility to adhere to the provisions outlined in the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, which is based on nine key principles, including, integrity, honesty and respect.

The Standards Commission for Scotland 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.

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