



16 December 2020

MEDIA RELEASE

FIFE COUNCILLOR SUSPENDED FOR DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

A Fife Councillor, Andy Heer, was suspended by the Standards Commission at a Hearing held online on 16 December 2020, from attending all meetings of Fife Council, and all meetings of any other body on which he is a representative or nominee of the council, for January and February 2021. A Hearing Panel of the Standards Commission found that Councillor Heer, who was a Council appointee to the Board of Fife Resource Solutions (FRS) disclosed, firstly, on a Fife Conservative press release and later, on Facebook, information concerning the re-opening of recycling centres following the first lockdown that had been discussed in the papers for, and at, a special meeting of the FRS Board on 20 May 2020. This was despite knowing the information was to remain confidential until such a time as the Council had agreed to the proposals, that full arrangements for their implementation had been put in place, and for communications to be managed accordingly.

Professor Kevin Dunion, Chair of the Hearing Panel, said: “The requirement for councillors to abide by the rules of conduct of any partner organisations they are appointed to is an important requirement of the Code. This includes acting in good faith and refraining from disclosing confidential information.

“The Panel noted that a failure to do so can damage the reputation and integrity of a Council and the partner organisation and, further, can impede discussions and decision-making at meetings. The Panel agreed that, in this case, it was legitimate for FRS to have decided that the information about the re-opening of the recycling centres was to be kept confidential until such a time as it had been able to obtain the Council’s approval and ensure that officers were in a position to manage internal and external communications effectively.”

The Panel heard evidence that it was important for arrangements to be put in place including a booking system for the public so that traffic could be managed safely, staff could be notified of the re-opening of the sites and given appropriate Covid safety training, and decisions could be made and implemented about what items could and could not be disposed of, in conjunction with proposed bulky uplift arrangements.

The Panel found that Cllr Heer, in disclosing the information before these arrangements were made, and contrary to the decision made at the meeting, had failed to act in the best interests of FRS, as required by the Councillors’ Code of Conduct.

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

Notes:

The Councillors' Code of Conduct is based on nine key principles, which include integrity, honesty and transparency. Paragraph 3.19 of the Code provides that councillors appointed to partner organisations, such as FRS, are bound by the rules of conduct of such organisations.

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 SCS can be found at <http://www.standardscommissionscotland.org.uk/>

ENDS

Issued by the Standards Commission for Scotland. For further information please contact the Standards Commission on 07790 389999 or enquiries@standardscommission.org.uk