



17 July 2025

MEDIA RELEASE

ANGUS COUNCILLOR CRITICISED FOR BEING DISRESPECTFUL BUT CLEARED OF BREACH OF CODE OF CONDUCT

At a Hearing held online on 17 July 2025, Angus Councillor Brian Boyd was found by the Standards Commission, on the face of it, to have breached the provision in the Councillors' Code of Conduct that requires elected members to treat others with courtesy and respect, during a Council meeting on 20 June 2024 that he was chairing in his (then) role as Provost. The Standards Commission's Hearing Panel found, however, that a restriction on Cllr Boyd's right to freedom of expression could not be justified in the specific circumstances of the case and, therefore, that a formal finding of breach could not be made.

Ms Suzanne Vestri, Standards Commission Convener and Chair of the Hearing Panel, said: *"Having watched a webcast of the meeting, the Panel found that, when another councillor attempted to speak about an agenda item, Cllr Boyd stood, repeated her name twice and read excerpts from the Council's Standing Orders. These included that deference should be paid to the chair's authority, at all times; that when the chair speaks other elected members must sit down; and that the chair should be heard without interruption. Cllr Boyd concluded his intervention by asking whether he had made himself clear."*

The Panel acknowledged that Cllr Boyd, as chair of the meeting, had a crucial role in ensuring it was conducted in compliance with the Council's Standing Orders and that questions and discussions remained focussed and relevant.

The Panel agreed, however, that in deciding to read, to the other councillor, the provisions in the Standing Orders, Cllr Boyd clearly implied she had failed to conduct herself in a manner that accorded with them. This was because the Panel noted a Chair would normally only be expected to refer to the Standing Orders if there had been a single serious contravention or repeated contraventions of them by a meeting participant. The Panel noted there was no evidence, in the webcast recording of the meeting, of any such a contravention by the other councillor.

The Panel further agreed that the way in which Cllr Boyd had intervened; namely by repeating the other councillor's name, standing up, and talking loudly (in such pointed and critical manner), would lead anyone present or observing the meeting to reasonably conclude he was reprimanding her. Given it had found there was no reason for such an admonishment of that kind, and given its public nature, the Panel agreed that the manner of Cllr Boyd's interruption was inappropriate and disproportionate, and would have been confusing and upsetting for the other councillor and others present.

The Panel considered that in, essentially, reprimanding her so publicly in circumstances where such action was not warranted, Cllr Boyd was disrespectful and discourteous towards the other councillor. The Panel therefore determined on balance, that he had contravened the provision in the Code that requires councillors to treat everyone with courtesy and respect.

The Panel accepted nevertheless that, as a politician acting in a political context, Cllr Boyd was entitled to enhanced protection in respect of his right to freedom of expression, under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. In assessing whether a restriction on this right could be justified, the Panel noted that the Courts have found that, in such a context, a degree of the shocking, non-rational and even aggressive, that would not be acceptable outside that context, should be tolerated.

In considering whether Cllr Boyd's conduct was excessive, the Panel agreed that while the manner in which he had interrupted the other councillor was somewhat shocking and non-rational, it noted it would not be entirely unusual for a chair to intervene if they considered a meeting participant was unduly labouring a point, rather than asking a question. The Panel was of the view, therefore, that an intervention by Cllr Boyd may not have been entirely unexpected (albeit the other councillor could not have anticipated he would choose to read excerpts from the Standing Orders in the manner he did).

The Panel further noted the Courts have held that politicians are expected and required to have thicker skins and more tolerance than ordinary citizens. The Panel considered that such tolerance would include adhering to the rulings of a chair, even when these might appear to be unfair.

The Panel further considered that the impact of Cllr Boyd's conduct was somewhat reduced by the fact that when the meeting resumed after a short adjournment he publicly apologised and acknowledged he had over-reacted.

Having taken into account the context and factors outlined above, the Panel determined, on balance, that the Respondent's conduct was not so excessive as to justify, as proportionate, a restriction on his enhanced right to freedom of expression. The Panel concluded, therefore, that a formal finding of a breach of the Code could not be made.

Ms Vestri stated: *"the Standards Commission, and indeed the public, expect elected members (and particularly Chairs and Conveners of local authorities), to lead by example and be courteous and respectful at all times. The Panel noted a failure to do so can have a detrimental impact on the standards of public debate, the efficacy of meetings, and public confidence in elected members and in local authorities."*

A full written decision of the Hearing will be issued and published on the Standards Commission's website within 7 days.

ENDS

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. Complaints about councillors are made to the Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC). The Standards Commission and ESC are separate and independent, each with distinct functions. The ESC is responsible for investigating complaints. Following investigation, the ESC will refer its report to the Standards Commission for Scotland for adjudication. Email: info@ethicalstandards.org.uk, <https://www.ethicalstandards.org.uk/>
Tel: 0300 011 0550
2. 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 including in education, environment, health, culture, transport, and justice. The role of the Standards Commission is to encourage high ethical standards in public life; promote and enforce the Codes of Conduct; issue guidance to councils and devolved public bodies and adjudicate on alleged breaches of the Codes of Conduct, applying sanctions where a breach is found.
3. The [Codes of Conduct](#) outline the standards of conduct expected of councillors and members of devolved public bodies. In local authorities, there is one Code of Conduct, approved by Scottish Parliament, which applies to all 1227 councillors elected to Scotland's 32 Local Authorities.