



5 August 2025

MEDIA RELEASE

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCILLOR SUSPENDED FOR BREACH OF CODE OF CONDUCT

At a Hearing held in Aberdeen on 5 August 2025, the Standards Commission suspended, for four months, an elected member of Aberdeen Council, Councillor Mrs Jennifer Stewart. This was after she was found to have breached the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

Malcolm Bell, Standards Commission Member and Chair of the Hearing Panel, said:

"The Panel found that, at various Council meetings between 14 December 2022 and 11 October 2023, Cllr Mrs Stewart was disrespectful towards the Lord Provost of the Council. The Panel further found that Cllr Mrs Stewart's conduct amounted to harassment and, in respect of one comment, to a personal attack on the Lord Provost based on his age."

The Panel found that at the meetings in question, Cllr Mrs Stewart made various personal remarks about the Lord Provost. The Panel found that these remarks either directly accused the Lord Provost of being, or inferred clearly that he was: sexist, a misogynist who hated women, displaying religious intolerance, engaging in intimidatory behaviour and of treating Cllr Mrs Stewart differently, due to her sex.

The Panel noted that, regardless of whether Cllr Mrs Stewart considered them to have merit, the accusations were of a particularly serious nature. Given this and the fact they were made in public, the Panel considered they had the potential to cause irrevocable harm to the Complainer's reputation and that of the Council.

In addition, the Panel found Cllr Mrs Stewart stated, at a meeting in April 2023, that she was not prepared to put up with the alleged behaviour she had experienced from the Lord Provost at previous meetings. Cllr Mrs Stewart had stated this included "sexual harassment as I see it". The Panel noted that the everyday meaning of sexual harassment was any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature that creates a hostile or offensive environment. The Panel was of the view that it would have been reasonable for members of the public observing the webcast of the meeting to:

- give the phrase its everyday meaning; and
- understand Cllr Mrs Stewart was accusing the Complainer of having engaged in unwanted sexual behaviour towards her. This was because the remark was made in the context of her listing other concerns about the Complainer's alleged behaviour towards her.

The Panel noted Cllr Mrs Stewart had not provided any evidence whatsoever, either at the time or subsequently, to support such an accusation and, indeed, appeared to accept at the Hearing that he had not done so.

The Panel found, therefore, that Cllr Mrs Stewart's conduct in making the personal remarks and accusations of such a nature at public meetings was objectively disrespectful and, on the face of it, amounted to a breach of the requirement in the Code for councillors to treat their colleagues with courtesy and respect.

The Panel noted that, at a meeting in October 2023, the Lord Provost paused for a short period before inviting Cllr Mrs Stewart to speak. The Panel noted that Cllr Mrs Stewart then asked whether it was perhaps the Lord Provost's age that had "caused the delay". The Panel considered it would be reasonable for any members of the public or press observing to conclude Cllr Mrs Stewart was suggesting the Lord Provost's performance in his role as Chair was affected adversely by his age. The Panel noted there was no upper age limit for being a councillor or Provost, and considered the remark amounted to personal attack on the Lord Provost, based on his age. The Panel concluded, therefore, that Cllr Mrs Stewart had breached the provision in the Code that requires councillors to seek to foster good relations between different people.

The Panel noted that harassment is any unwelcome behaviour or conduct that makes someone feel offended or humiliated, and that it can occur as an isolated incident or as a course of persistent behaviour. The Panel was of the view that Cllr Mrs Stewart's remarks about the Lord Provost's age, and the accusations that he was a misogynist and had sexually harassed her, were inappropriate and offensive. The Panel agreed that these amounted to repeated personal, public attacks that were both intended to, and would have caused, the Lord Provost to feel offended and humiliated. The Panel was satisfied, therefore, that Cllr Mrs Stewart also harassed the Lord Provost, in breach of the provision the Code that prohibits such behaviour.

The Panel further found that, during a number of the meetings in question, Cllr Mrs Stewart talked over the Lord Provost and refused to move on or sit down when he directed her to do so. As such, the Panel concluded that Cllr Mrs Stewart failed to respect and comply with his rulings, as Chair, in breach of the Code.

The Panel agreed Cllr Mrs Stewart's accusations, as outlined above, were also entirely shocking, offensive and gratuitous. The Panel agreed they were potentially damaging both to the Lord Provost and to the public's confidence in the Council as a whole. As such, the Panel concluded that, in the circumstances, a restriction on Cllr Mrs Stewart's right to freedom of expression, that a finding of breach and imposition of a sanction would entail, was justified.

In determining the sanction to be imposed, the Panel agreed that there was nothing to prevent Cllr Mrs Stewart from raising her concerns about the Lord Provost's alleged conduct with him or council officers in private, or by making a complaint to the Ethical Standards Commissioner. The Panel noted that Cllr Mrs Stewart had indeed made such a complaint, and that the Commissioner had not found any breach of the Code by the Lord Provost. The Panel was further of the view that Cllr Mrs Stewart could have also raised concerns about the way the meetings were being conducted, without disrupting them and directing personal comments and abuse towards the Lord Provost. It found, just as importantly, the Cllr Mrs Stewart had disrupted meetings over an extended period. As such, the Panel considered the breaches of the Code were serious in nature.

The Panel noted, in mitigation, there had not been any previous findings of a contravention of the Code by Cllr Mrs Stewart. It noted her extensive contribution to public life and the character references submitted on her behalf. The Panel was concerned, however, that she had not apologised or shown any insight into:

- the potential impact of her conduct on the Lord Provost;
- how disruptive her conduct was (and whether it unnecessarily prolonged council meetings and impacted on the time others had to discuss items on the agenda);
- the tone and focus of the discussions at the meetings in question (and how this might affect public confidence in the Council itself); and
- the need for a minimum standard of public debate in general.

In the circumstances, the Panel concluded that a four-month suspension was an appropriate sanction.

Mr Bell stated: *“the requirements for elected members to treat others with respect and to refrain from any conduct that could amount to bullying or harassment are key requirements of the Councillors’ Code. The Panel noted that a failure to comply with the Code’s provisions in these regards can adversely affect the rights and reputations of others. It also has a detrimental effect on the standards of public debate, which in turn erodes public confidence in politicians and the democratic institutions they represent.”*

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