



4 November 2025

MEDIA RELEASE

HIGHLAND COUNCILLOR SUSPENDED FOR A BREACH OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

At a Hearing held online on 4 November 2025, Highland Councillor, Michael Baird, was found to have breached the Councillors' Code of Conduct. The Standards Commission suspended his entitlement to attend full Council meetings for two months. This was for failing to declare an interest at a meeting of the Sutherland County Committee on 23 January 2024.

Suzanne Vestri, Standards Commission Convener and Chair of the Hearing Panel, said: "The Panel found that Cllr Baird failed to declare a non-financial interest in relation to a grant application by made by a community interest company for funds from the Council's Community Regeneration Fund and, instead, took part in the discussion and decision-making. This was despite him having a friendship and a client / legal representative relationship with the company's sole director, and despite him having written a letter supporting the development of her property, that had been included in the papers submitted in support of the application".

The Panel acknowledged that Cllr Baird did not vote in favour of the application at the meeting. It further accepted there was no evidence of any benefit to the community interest company or its director from Cllr Baird's failure to declare an interest. The Panel nevertheless considered that, having applied the objective test as required by the Code, Cllr Baird should have reached the view that his connection to the director of the applicant company would reasonably be regarded as being so significant to the application to be considered, as to be likely to affect his potential discussion and decision-making at the meeting.

In support of this conclusion, the Panel noted it was evident from the fact that the Chair of the Committee had questioned, at the meeting, whether the Respondent should declare an interest, that he, the Chair, had such a perception. Indeed, the Panel noted that the Respondent appeared to have advised during the investigation process that he would have declared an interest had he been aware before the meeting that the letter was included in the paperwork submitted in support of the application.

The Panel agreed, therefore, that Cllr Baird should have declared an interest, withdrawn from the meetings and taken no part in the discussion and decision-making on the specific matter in question. The Panel found that his failure to do so amounted to a breach of the Code.

In reaching its decision on sanction, the Hearing Panel noted that Cllr Baird had co-operated with the investigative and Hearing processes. The Panel also noted the Respondent's commitment to his constituency and constituents.

The Panel agreed, nevertheless, that Cllr Baird should have been aware that the objective test was one of perception and that he should have considered how members of the public might reasonably view his connection to the director of the applicant company and whether this was likely to influence his discussion and decision-making at the meeting. The Panel agreed this was particularly the case given he was reminded, at the meeting, about the need to declare any interest.

In the circumstances, the Panel agreed that it was necessary to impose a suspension in order to reflect the nature of the breach, to promote adherence to the Code and to maintain and improve the public's confidence that councillors will comply with the Codes and will be held accountable if they fail to do so. The Panel determined that a suspension of two months was appropriate and proportionate in the circumstances.

Ms Vestri noted: "The Panel emphasised that the requirement for councillors to declare interests is a fundamental requirement of the Code as it gives the public confidence that decisions are being made in the public interest, and not the personal interest of any councillor or their friends, family or close associates. A failure to comply with the Code's requirements in this regard can erode confidence in the Council and leave its decisions open to legal challenge."

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.