

# STANDARDS UPDATE

December 2025



## Joint Webinars with the Improvement Service

The Improvement Service and Standards Commission are hosting two webinars for elected members on the following provisions in the Councillors' Code of Conduct:

[Distinguishing between strategic and operational matters](#)

on 15 January 2026 from 10:00 – 11:30

[Gifts and Hospitality](#) on 29 January 2026 from 10:00 – 11:30

Elected members can register for the events by clicking on the links above.



## Blog: Does the Councillors' Code Prevent Effective Scrutiny by Councillors?

The Standards Commission has recently published a [blog](#) that asks this question. The blog notes that the vast majority of complaints alleging breaches of the Code by councillors are made by members of the public, with only a very small percentage being made by council officers. While it may be the case that officers occasionally provide councillors with advice to help ensure they do not breach the Code, the Standards Commission has seen no evidence that it is being 'weaponised' to restrict effective scrutiny.



## Standards Officers' Workshop

A date for your diaries - the Standards Commission will be holding its annual Standards Officers' Workshop online on Tuesday 17 March 2026. All Standards Officers are welcome to attend. We hope to hear about your experiences with board members in terms of their understanding of, and compliance with, their Code of Conduct and to discuss any trends and hot topics. A programme will be circulated in due course but please email [enquiries@standardscommission.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@standardscommission.org.uk) if you have any particular questions or topics you would like included.



## Advice Note for Independent Councillors

The Standards Commission has produced an [Advice Note for Independent Councillors](#). This aims to provide guidance to independent (non-political party affiliated) councillors on their responsibilities under, and how to seek assistance with, any aspect of the ethical standards framework.

While the guidance in this Advice Note is relevant to all councillors, it has been developed specifically with independent members in mind. This is because they are unlikely to have access to the advice and peer support normally available to those representing a political party.



### Training on the Councillors' Code for the Scottish Conservative Councillors Association

The Standards Commission was pleased to have been invited by the Scottish Conservative Councillors Association to provide training for its members on the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

The training, which took place online on 18 November 2025, provoked a lot of discussion among attendees, and the Standards Commission hopes that they found the training as useful and informative as it did.

If any other political parties are interested in organising a similar training session, please get in touch – we would be delighted to assist.



### Monitoring Officers' Workshop

Thanks to all who attended, and participated at, the Standards Commission's annual workshop for Council Monitoring Officers on 27 October 2025. As ever, we found the discussions interesting and helpful, both in terms of our work to promote understanding of, and adherence to, the Codes of Conduct, and in respect of identifying potential improvements to our adjudicatory processes.



### Office Closure

Our office will be closed from 12 noon on Wednesday, 24 December 2025 and will re-open on Monday, 5 January 2026. We wish everyone a peaceful festive break, and all the best for the new year.

## Cases Overview

The decision on a referral involving an Inverclyde Councillor was pending at our last briefing - the Standards Commission decided to take no action.

### Since the last briefing in September 2025:

<b>Cases Referred to SCS by ESC</b> Elected members of Stirling, Clackmannanshire, Angus (two cases), North Ayrshire, Glasgow City (four cases), Dumfries and Galloway, South Ayrshire, Scottish Borders, West Dunbartonshire, Falkirk, Fife (two cases), City of Edinburgh, Highland* (two cases) and Renfrewshire Councils. Board members of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority (two cases). * Decision pending on one Highland case	22
<b>SCS directed ESC to carry out Further Investigation</b>	0
<b>Hearings scheduled</b> Dumfries and Galloway, Glasgow City and City of Edinburgh councillors. Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority member.	4
<b>Hearings held</b> Argyll and Bute (two cases), Highland, Glasgow City councillors	4
<b>No Action</b> Written decisions in respect of these cases can be found on the <a href="#">Cases</a> page of our website.	17

### Argyll and Bute Council - LA/AB/4081 – No Breach

At a Hearing held online on 7 October 2025, an Argyll & Bute Councillor was found, on the face of it, to have breached the provision in the Councillors' Code that requires elected members to treat others with courtesy and respect, in respect of a social media post. The Standards Commission's Hearing Panel found, however, that a restriction on the Respondent'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.

The Panel heard it was not in dispute that in September 2024, the Respondent shared, on his Facebook page, a post published by a group called by 'Glasgow Friends of Israel' (GFI), along with a quote taken from it that stated he had landed in trouble as a result of being an outspoken and unashamed supporter of Israel. The Panel noted that the GFI post, shared by the Respondent, referred to a member of the public as a "nasty Israel hater" who "has ties and a strong affiliation to proscribed terrorist organisations".

The Panel agreed that it was apparent the Respondent posted the quote from, and link to, the GFI post in order to draw attention to it and promote its contents (which were supportive of him). In the circumstances, the Panel agreed the Respondent's post would be reasonably regarded as endorsing the GFI post in its entirety, even if that had not been his intention. The Panel noted that while the GFI post did not name the member of the public it mentioned, it referred to the individual as having complained about the Respondent during a council meeting. The Panel noted that council meetings are held in public and, further, that there had been press coverage of the complaint the individual made. The Panel concluded, therefore, the individual was readily identifiable.

The Panel was satisfied that it was objectively disrespectful to endorse a post where a readily identifiable member of the public was accused of having ties and a strong affiliation to terrorist organisations, when there was no evidence the individual in question had been investigated, charged or convicted with any related offence. The Panel therefore concluded the Respondent had, on the face of it, breached the respect and courtesy provisions in the Code in respect of the post.

The Panel accepted nevertheless that, as a politician posting about a matter of public concern, the Respondent was entitled to enhanced protection in respect of his right to freedom of expression. The Panel acknowledged that while the Respondent shared the post containing the statement about the individual in question, he had neither authored it himself nor specifically named them. The Panel further noted that the Respondent had edited his post to remove the link to the GFI post, when advised the matter was being investigated.

Having taken into account the context and factors outlined above, the Panel determined, on balance, 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.

The Panel further found that, in a second social media post, the Respondent expressed a general view on Islam. While the Panel made it clear it did not endorse or agree with the view expressed, it nevertheless accepted the Respondent was entitled to hold it. The Panel acknowledged many people would find the Respondent's statement inaccurate, inflammatory and offensive, but noted it was a very general view about a supposed fundamental belief at the core of a religion, rather than being a statement about any specific individual or individuals (even if they belonged to, or followed, that religion). In the circumstances, the Panel did not consider the Respondent's conduct in respect of the other post would meet the threshold for amounting either to disrespect or a failure to foster good relations in terms of the Code.

### **Argyll and Bute Council - LA/AB/4147 – Breach**

At a Hearing held online on 23 October 2025, an Argyll & Bute Councillor was suspended for one month after she was found to have been disrespectful towards a relatively junior council officer and to have criticised their performance and capability in a social media post.

The Panel found that it was not in dispute that when a member of the public posted a comment on Facebook saying “our beautiful flower beds! What is happening to our town?”, the Respondent replied, stating “nothing has been done since Joe retired in November. It is absolutely shocking. That’s what happens when someone who has no experience gets the job and doesn’t have a clue.” The Panel further noted it was not in dispute that ‘Joe’ was the Respondent’s husband.

The Panel noted that the Respondent’s position was that she had not intended her comments to be disrespectful and that they were directed towards the Council rather than any individual. The Panel noted, however, that she referred, in her post, to the person who replaced the retired postholder as having “no experience” or “clue”. The Panel was satisfied that, given this, it would be reasonable for anyone viewing the post to consider it was directed at the individual postholder who was now in the role, rather than the Council itself.

The Panel noted that the Respondent did not name the individual postholder. The Panel considered, however, that the officer in question was readily identifiable. This was because:

- there was evidence members of the public had been able to identify him;
- the officer’s wife’s colleague took a screenshot of the post indicating council officers were also able to identify him); and
- only five Council officers were responsible for the work referenced, with only one based in Bute. Therefore, it would be apparent which one had replaced ‘Joe’.

The Panel was of the view that by saying the individual had no experience or clue, the Respondent was inferring they should not have got the job. The Panel considered this was inherently disrespectful to the officer in question. The Panel was further of the view that the Respondent implied, in the post, that the officer was responsible for the “absolutely shocking” state of the flowerbeds and the alleged failure to do anything about this. The Panel was therefore satisfied that it would be reasonable for anyone reading the post to perceive it as amounting to public criticism of both the individual officer’s performance and capability. The Panel concluded, therefore, that the Respondent had breached the provisions in the Code that require councillors to be respectful and to refrain from criticising their performance, conduct or capability in public. The Panel found a restriction on the Respondent’s right to freedom of expression could be justified.

In determining the sanction to be imposed, the Panel noted it had found the Respondent’s comments were personal in nature and amounted to an unwarranted, egregious and offensive personal attack on the officer. The Panel considered that it would have been entirely possible for the Respondent to express dissatisfaction with the Council’s performance without undermining and demeaning the officer in public. The Panel nevertheless acknowledged, in mitigation, that the conduct in question was essentially limited to the one social media post that had been removed quickly and, as such, was limited in duration. In the circumstances and context, the Panel concluded, on balance, that a full suspension of one month was the appropriate sanction.

### **Highland Council - LA/H/4028 – Breach**

At a Hearing held online on 4 November 2025, a Highland Councillor was suspended from attending full Council meetings for two months for failing to declare a non-financial interest in relation to a grant application made by a community interest company for funds from the Council’s Community Regeneration Fund. 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 the Respondent 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 the Respondent's failure to declare an interest. The Panel nevertheless considered that, having applied the objective test as required by the Code, the Respondent 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.

The Panel agreed, therefore, that the Respondent should have declared an interest, withdrawn from the meeting 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 agreed that the Respondent should have been aware that the objective test was one of perception and should have considered how members of the public might reasonably view his connection to the director of the applicant company. 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 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.

#### **Glasgow City Council - LA/G/4203 – No breach**

The complaint concerned an allegation that the Respondent had behaved disrespectfully towards a fellow councillor during a podcast interview broadcast in October 2024. At the Hearing, the Standards Commission's Panel heard that it was not in dispute that, during the podcast, the Respondent recounted a story her child had apparently told her about alleged incidents involving black children attacking white children and indicated that she had resolved to ask a question about the issue at a Council meeting.

The Panel noted it was evident from the recording of the podcast interview, that the Respondent then narrated that another councillor, being the then Business Manager of the Labour Group, had advised her that the Group did not want her to ask the question as it was not sufficiently politically correct. The Respondent alleged that after she had said the matter required to be addressed, the then Business Manager asked her whether she could "change the white to black", [as in, to refer to black children being the subject of the alleged attacks, rather than white]. The Panel noted that the Respondent then recounted that she had stated, in response, that doing so would change the context of the question.

Having heard evidence from both the Respondent and the former Business Manager, the Panel was satisfied the then Business Manager had suggested the Respondent re-frame her proposed question. The Panel was satisfied that the Respondent understood the then Business Manager had made general comments to the effect she then recounted during the podcast, even if he did not use the exact words she attributed to him. The Panel was therefore satisfied that what the Respondent had narrated was her genuine interpretation of what had been said. The Panel therefore proceeded to consider whether the Respondent's conduct, in recounting the comments on a public podcast, in the manner she had, would meet the threshold for amounting to a breach of the respect and courtesy provision in the Code.

The Panel acknowledged that by the time of the podcast, the Respondent was no longer a member of the Labour group and that it was accepted there was some ill-will between her and

some of her former colleagues, including the then Business Manager. The Panel nevertheless accepted the Respondent's position that, in making her comments and recounting her conversation with the then Business Manager, she was motivated by a desire to highlight an issue she considered had not been addressed, rather than by a desire to make him look bad or cause him reputational damage.

The Panel accepted that the then Business Manager may have had an expectation that the Respondent would not repeat, in public, what appeared to have been a private conversation between them. It agreed, nevertheless, that recounting that the then Business Manager had asked her to re-frame the question, out of concern that the party group might not appear to be politically correct, could not be characterised reasonably as being a serious, personal attack on him as an individual. In support of this, the Panel noted that the then Business Manager did not appear to have serious concerns in this regard and had not made a complaint himself. It further noted that while the Respondent had referred to his job title in recounting her experience, she had not named the then Business Manager in the podcast.

In the circumstances, the Panel did not consider that the Respondent's conduct, in making the comments in the specific circumstances, would meet the threshold for disrespect in terms of the Code, and concluded the Code had not been breached.

***Details of the outcome of cases, including full written decisions and information about scheduled Hearings, can be found in the [Cases](#) section of our website.***

For further information on the support we can offer councillors and members of devolved public bodies, please either speak to your Monitoring Officer or Standards Officer or look out for information on our website. Alternatively, please contact us:

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