



3 February 2026

MEDIA RELEASE

DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY COUNCILLOR SUSPENDED FOR BREACH OF CODE OF CONDUCT

At a Hearing held in Dumfries on 3 February 2026, the Standards Commission suspended, for three months, an elected member of Dumfries and Galloway Council, Councillor John Denerley. This was after he 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 before a full Council meeting on 14 December 2023, Cllr Denerley behaved in an aggressive and intimidating manner towards other councillors and council officers, in breach of the requirements in the Code for councillors to behave with courtesy and respect towards others, when acting in that capacity. The Panel further found that Cllr Denerley's conduct towards the then Council Leader amounted to harassment, albeit it accepted that had not been his intent."*

Having considered carefully the evidence led at the Hearing and provided to the Ethical Standards Commissioner during his investigation, from various witnesses, the Panel concluded, on the balance of probabilities, that Cllr Denerley had:

- Behaved in an aggressive and intimidating manner towards the then Council Leader during a party group meeting, held immediately before the Council meeting, by standing over her, in her personal space, and by physically pushing past her in an angry manner that resulted in her losing her balance and falling against a table.
- Pushed through a doorway before the then Council Leader and two other elected members in an angry manner.
- Threw his papers and possessions on a table upon entering the Council Chamber, and pointed and shook his fist at the Council's Monitoring Officer.
- After leaving the Chamber and going into a shared kitchen, had opened and closed cupboard doors in a noisy manner (that was sufficiently loud to be heard in the Chamber), during which time a mug or cup was broken.

The Panel agreed it would have been understandable for Cllr Denerley to have felt frustrated because, as a result of a misunderstanding as to whether he had given apologies for that day, interpretation services were not available and he was unable to participate in the party group meeting, with interpreters for the Council meeting itself only being available online. The Panel further acknowledged that, as a BSL user, Cllr Denerley communicated in an expressive way, that some of his gestures could be misconstrued to an extent, and that he may not have been aware of how noisy he had been in the kitchen. It also accepted that he had not intended to break the cup or mug.

The Panel was satisfied, however, that Cllr Denerley had lost his temper and behaved in a manner that was entirely inappropriate for a workplace. The Panel was of the view that it would be reasonable for those who were subjected to, or witnessed, his conduct to have perceived it as being aggressive and intimidating. The Panel noted, in support of this conclusion, that both the then

Council Leader and the Monitoring Officer had confirmed in evidence that was the case. It further noted that Cllr Denerley had accepted a police warning in respect of his behaviour on the day. The Panel considered it was unlikely he would have accepted such a warning had he not lost his temper and had he felt he had behaved appropriately.

The Panel considered that politicians and senior officers are accustomed to working in a political environment. As such, they may be used to some acrimony and even be expected to have some tolerance towards displays of anger or frustration. The Panel was nevertheless of the view that everyone has a right to work in a safe and respectful environment, free from bullying or harassment.

The Panel agreed that in behaving in the manner as found, Cllr Denerley had been disrespectful and discourteous towards the then Council Leader, Monitoring Officer and other officers and councillors present. The Panel determined, as such, Cllr Denerley had failed to comply with the requirement in the Code for councillors to behave with courtesy and respect at all times and to work with officers in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.

The Panel acknowledged the complaint before it only concerned Cllr Denerley's conduct on one day. The Panel noted, nevertheless, that his conduct had left both the then Council Leader and the Monitoring Officer feeling intimidated, uncomfortable and frightened. Given the Panel found Cllr Denerley had made unwelcome physical contact with the then Council Leader and had been visibly angry both at the time and during the course of the events that followed, the Panel considered this was an understandable reaction. Even accepting this may not have been Cllr Denerley's intention, the Panel further considered that he should have realised his actions would likely have such an impact and, indeed, should have observed they did so. The Panel therefore agreed, on balance, that it would meet the threshold for amounting to a breach of the harassment provision of the Code.

In determining the sanction to be imposed, the Panel agreed that, as an experienced member, Cllr Denerley should have been able to raise concerns about the provision of interpretation services without being disrespectful or engaging in any conduct that could be perceived reasonably as being threatening or intimidating. The Panel was concerned that while this may not have been Cllr Denerley's intent, he had not demonstrated any insight or understanding either at the time or at the Hearing, into how his conduct could be perceived reasonably, and the serious impact it both could and, indeed, did have on others; or of the importance of building and maintaining good relations with officers.

The Panel nevertheless noted, in mitigation, that the conduct in question was limited in duration and was the result of frustration at the misunderstanding that had led to interpreters not being present. The Panel acknowledged and sympathised with the communication challenges the Respondent faced. The Panel further noted that Cllr Denerley had co-operated fully with the investigative and Hearing processes and had not been the subject of any previous finding of a contravention of the Code. In the circumstances and context, the Panel concluded, on balance, that a full suspension of three months was the appropriate sanction.

Mr Bell stated: *"The requirements for elected members to treat everyone with whom they come into contact in their capacity as elected members with respect, and to refrain from any conduct that could amount to bullying or harassment, are key provisions of the Councillors' Code. The Panel noted that a failure to comply with the Code's provisions in this regard can have a detrimental impact on working relationships that enable a Council to function effectively. It can also erode public confidence in the role of a councillor and the local authority itself."*

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.