

STANDARDS UPDATE

March 2026



Video for NHS Board Secretaries

The Standards Commission has produced a short video for NHS Board Secretaries on the role of a Standards Officer.

The video can be found [here](#) and covers:

- the NHS context;
- the purpose of the role and why it is important; and
- the tasks NHS Board Standards Officers are expected to undertake, in terms of the ethical standards framework.



Webinars with the Improvement Service

The Standards Commission conducted two webinars for elected members, in conjunction with the Improvement Service in January on distinguishing between strategic and operational matters and gifts and hospitality.

Links to recordings of these webinars can be found on the [Improvement Service's website](#).



Card for Councillors on Health and Social Care Integration Joint Boards

The Standards Commission has produced a card for councillors who have been appointed or nominated by their Council to a Health and Social Care Integration Joint Board (IJB). The Card is intended to assist them in managing their constituents' expectations in terms of what they can and cannot do, when acting as a member of the IJB. For example, it notes that councillors can inform the IJB about the Council's policies and priorities. However, when acting as a member of an IJB and attending its meetings, they have a duty to act in the best interests of the IJB.

The card can be found on the [Standards Commission's website](#).



Standards Officers' Workshop

The Standards Commission held its annual workshop with public body Standards Officers on 17 March 2026. The Standards Commission was delighted with the attendance and engagement. Discussion topics included:

- Any trends and issues that have arisen in respect of board members understanding of, and compliance with, their Codes of Conduct;
- Managing inherent conflicts of interest that arise from the composition of some public body boards;
- How the Standards Commission can assist with the training and induction of board members on their Codes of Conduct; and
- How public body Chairs have a role in ensuring there is a positive culture, which enables constructive and effective scrutiny of performance by board members.

As always, the Standards Commission found the workshop interesting and useful, and wishes to extend its thanks to all those who attended and participated in the discussions. We hope Attendees found it as helpful as we did.



Blog - Councillors Standing for Election

With the election for the Scottish Parliament fast approaching, the Standards Commission has published a blog to remind any councillors who are standing for election as an MSP that they must still comply with the Councillors' Code of Conduct while they remain in post. The blog highlights some key provisions in the Code that may be relevant. The blog can be found on the [Standards Commission's website](#).

Cases Overview

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

Since the last briefing in December 2025:

Cases Referred to SCS by ESC Elected members of East Renfrewshire (two cases), Falkirk (three cases), Glasgow City, Perth and Kinross (two cases), Fife, Argyll and Bute, North Lanarkshire, Aberdeenshire, Stirling and Scottish Borders Councils. Board member of Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority.	15
SCS directed ESC to carry out Further Investigation	0
Hearings scheduled Stirling councillor. Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority member.	2
Hearings held Dumfries and Galloway and City of Edinburgh councillors. Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority member.	3
No Action Written decisions in respect of these cases can be found on the Cases page of our website.	13

Dumfries and Galloway Council - LA/DG/4041 - Breach

At a Hearing held in Dumfries on 3 February 2026, a Standards Commission Hearing Panel suspended, for three months, an elected member of Dumfries and Galloway Council after he was found to have behaved in an aggressive and intimidating manner towards other councillors and council officers. The Panel further found that the Respondent'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 ESC during his investigation, from various witnesses, the Panel concluded, on the balance of probabilities, that the Respondent 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 the Respondent 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, the Respondent 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 the Respondent 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 the Respondent 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.

In determining the sanction to be imposed, the Panel agreed that the Respondent 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 the Respondent'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 the Respondent 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.

Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority - NPA/LLT/4184 - Breach

At a Hearing held in Balloch on 10 February 2026, the Standards Commission suspended, for six months, a board member of Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, after he was found to have breached several provisions in the Park Authority Board Members' Code of Conduct.

The Panel found that in a number of emails sent in August and September 2024, the Respondent was discourteous and disrespectful towards the Park Authority's Convener, other board members and its Chief Executive. The Panel further found that as the Respondent's emails were threatening, both in tone and content, towards the Convener and Chief Executive, his conduct in sending them also amounted to bullying.

The Panel found that, in the August emails, the Respondent was discourteous and disrespectful towards the Park Authority's Convener, other board members and its Chief Executive by making a number of serious accusations about them and the Park Authority's decision-making in relation to a major planning application. As examples, the Panel noted the member accused the Convener of "undemocratic and unlawful" acts, of bullying him, of criminal activity, and of going "way beyond her authority". He accused the Chief Executive of exceeding his powers, "having produced a masterpiece in half-truths, evasions, fallacies and obfuscation" and of "misconduct in public office".

The Panel found the tone of all the Respondent's emails to be aggressive and discourteous, and entirely inappropriate for a member of a board of a public body. The Panel was particularly disappointed to note that in one email, the Respondent stated that the Convener should "have a frank conversation" with her husband about her best interests and should get herself a lawyer. Given the Convener's husband was neither a member, nor an employee, of the Park Authority and, indeed, had no ostensible connection to the matter, the Panel considered the Respondent's conduct in doing so to be condescending, spurious and entirely discourteous. The Panel was satisfied it was unlikely the Respondent would have made any such mention of a spouse, had the Convener not been female.

The Panel also found that by challenging the decision by the Park Authority to proceed to make a determination on the planning application, both publicly and in the disparaging manner in which he had, the Respondent breached the requirement in the Code to abide by the principle of collective responsibility. In addition, the Panel found that, in an email sent in August 2024 the Respondent disclosed to a number of external recipients, the personal or private email addresses of other board members, none of which were readily available publicly. The Panel found that, in doing so, he breached the requirement in the Code that requires Board Members to refrain from disclosing confidential information.

In determining the sanction to be imposed, the Panel acknowledged that the Respondent was entitled to raise concerns he may have had about the Park Authority's decision-making. It considered, however, that he could have done so in a respectful manner, either at a board meeting or in private with the Convener and Chief Executive, without breaching the Code.

The Panel considered the breaches of the Code were serious in nature. While it noted, in mitigation, there had not been any previous findings of a contravention of the Code by the Respondent, it was concerned he had not demonstrated any insight whatsoever into the potential impact of his conduct on others, either on a personal level, or in terms of how it made them feel when working for, or engaging with the Park Authority. Indeed, the Panel noted that Respondent appeared to be concerned only with his own views.

The Panel further noted the Respondent had not proffered any apology. It was dismayed to note that, instead, the Respondent (through those representing him) had repeated his accusations during the ESC's investigation and, further, following the referral to the Standards Commission, had attempted to publicly undermine the Hearing process. In the circumstances, the Panel concluded that a six-month suspension was an appropriate sanction.

The Respondent has lodged an appeal against both the decisions on breach and sanction. The Standards Commission is defending this.

City of Edinburgh Council - LA/E/4130 - Breach

At a Hearing held in Edinburgh on 11 March 2026, the Standards Commission censured two City of Edinburgh councillors (Respondent 1 and Respondent 2), after they were found to have breached the Code. This was for failing to declare interests when matters concerning a Quiet Route in their area were being considered at meetings of the Council's Transport and Environment Committee and at a workshop.

The Panel found that, at the time of a committee meeting in June 2023 and a workshop for elected members in August 2023, Respondent 1 lived on the road parallel to the road that was the subject of the 'Quiet Route'. It further found that Respondent 2 lived on the road itself (albeit at a part that was not included as part of proposed redesigned route) at the time of both the meeting and workshop, and a later meeting of the Committee in March 2024. As such, the Panel was satisfied a connection existed between both Respondents and the Quiet Route that was the subject of the items being considered at the meetings and workshop.

The Panel noted that the Code requires councillors to declare any connection to a matter being considered if the objective test is met.

The Panel was satisfied, in this case, that the relevant facts, in respect of the objective test were:

- That the location of the properties owned by the two Respondents were so close to the Quiet Route that any change to the ways in which traffic was being directed under it, and the consequent impacts (for example in respect of traffic volume, parking and pedestrian and cycle routes) were likely to affect where they lived and, potentially their enjoyment of their properties.
- That councillors present at the meetings and workshop were being asked to consider matters concerning how the future of the Quiet Route would be planned or determined.

The Panel considered that, having applied the objective test both Respondents should have reached the view that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, as outlined above, would reasonably regard their connections as being so significant that they would be considered as being likely to influence their discussion or decision-making. This was because it was evident any decision or potential decision resulting from consideration of these matters would likely have a direct impact on the road in question and any nearby streets.

In determining the sanction to be imposed, the Panel noted 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 associates. A failure to comply with the Code's requirements in this regard can erode confidence in elected members. It can also erode public confidence in the Council, damage its reputation and, potentially, leave its decisions open to legal challenge.

The Panel noted, in mitigation, the Respondents had, at different points, made transparency statements, and there was no evidence that they attempted to conceal where they lived. The Panel accepted Respondent 1 had, in good faith, sought to meet the requirements of the Code. The Panel accepted Respondent 2's evidence and submissions that she had sought to carry out her duties to the best of her ability.

Having considered carefully the nature and seriousness of the breach, as well as the aggravating and mitigating factors identified and outlined above, the Panel considered a censure, being the Panel's severe and public disapproval of the Respondents' failure to comply with the Code, was the appropriate sanction in the circumstances. This was because the Panel was satisfied, in this case, that given the nature of the matters being considered at the meetings and workshop in question, the Respondents' participation was unlikely to and, indeed, did not have any substantial impact on the nature and extent of the Quiet Route. Given

it had also found no evidence that either Respondent attempted to conceal where they lived or their connection to the matter, the Panel was further satisfied they had not been attempting to seek an advantage for themselves.

Interim Suspension

As noted in the September Standards Update, the Standards Commission imposed an interim suspension on a Dumfries and Galloway Councillor in August 2025. The interim suspension was renewed in November 2025 and February 2026.

Having received new and material information from the Respondent and an update from the ESC in March 2026, the Standards Commission determined that the interim suspension should be discontinued as of 24 March 2026. This was because the Standards Commission was satisfied that it was no longer in the public interest and proportionate for an interim suspension to be in place. In particular, the Standards Commission noted the ESC had ingathered the information he considered necessary for the investigation and, as such, it was unlikely the ESC's investigation would be prejudiced if the interim suspension was discontinued.

The Panel nevertheless reminded the Respondent that he is not to contact any potential witnesses or discuss the ongoing case with Council officers and of his continuing obligation to comply with the of the Code.

The Standards Commission's decision and Interim Suspension Policy can be found [here](#).

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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