

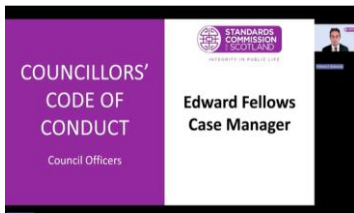
STANDARDS UPDATE

June 2026



Guidance on the Model Code of Conduct

The Standards Commission has reviewed and updated its Guidance on the Model Code of Conduct for Members of Devolved Public Bodies in light of some queries received and feedback provided at recent training events. The revised version can be found [here](#).



Video for Council Officers on Councillors' Code of Conduct

The Standards Commission has produced a video for council officers on the main provisions of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. The video aims to promote and enhance their understanding of what is expected, in terms of the Code, so that they can help elected members comply with its provisions. The video can be found on the [Standard Presentations and Training page](#).

Ethical Standards Commissioner

Update from the Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC)

The ESC's office has been preparing their annual report and accounts for the 2025/2026 financial year. In summary, relative to the standards team handling complaints, it has been a very busy year presenting a unique set of challenges. Complaint and case numbers have risen very significantly compared to previous years with a 70% increase in cases in comparison with 2024/25 and with complaints becoming more complex and multi-faceted. There have also been changes within the team's complement with two vacancies arising amongst investigators. However, following successful internal promotion and external recruitment for new supporting officers, the team is now back to a full complement with further plans for internal promotion. Complaint handling times at admissibility (stage 1) have remained within KPIs throughout the year and were significantly improved in comparison with the prior year. Time taken for investigation (stage 2) was roughly comparable with the prior year so further improvements into time taken at stage 2 will be a focus for the current financial year. Last year also saw a drop in the comparative number of complaints made by officers, down from 4.8% to 1.6%. The 2025/26 annual report and accounts will be published in October. Their office is also producing a range of new more accessible videos for the public on its work, the first of which covers complaints:



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZcFot00JSg>



Improvement Service/Open University online course for prospective councillors

The Improvement Service has developed a [short course](#) in partnership with the Open University for people who are considering standing to become a councillor.

Elected Members are asked to share and promote this free resource to anyone who might be interested in standing for elected office in Scottish Local Government.

Cases Overview

Since the last briefing in March 2026:

<p>Cases Referred to SCS by ESC Elected members of Argyll and Bute (two cases), North Ayrshire, Aberdeen City, East Lothian (two cases), Dumfries and Galloway, Aberdeenshire, Highland (two cases), Glasgow City, East Renfrewshire, Fife, South Lanarkshire, Midlothian (two cases), East Ayrshire and North Lanarkshire Councils. Former Board member of Cairngorms National Park Authority.</p>	19
<p>SCS directed ESC to carry out Further Investigation East Lothian councillor</p>	1*
<p>Hearings scheduled Dumfries and Galloway, Aberdeenshire, East Renfrewshire and East Ayrshire councillors</p>	4
<p>Hearings held Stirling and Aberdeenshire councillors</p>	2
<p>No Action Written decisions in respect of these cases can be found on the Cases page of our website. * The Standards Commission directed the ESC to carry out further investigation into a case involving an East Lothian councillor. On receipt of the report, the Standards Commission decided to take no action.</p>	15*

Stirling Council - LA/S/4312 – No Breach

At a Hearing held in Stirling on 27 May 2026, an elected member of Stirling Council was found by the Standards Commission, on the face of it, to have breached the provision in the Councillors' Code of Conduct that requires elected members to treat others with courtesy and respect. The 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, a formal finding of breach could not be made.

The Panel found that, during consideration of an agenda item that concerned a report prepared by a consultancy firm on a local museum's operating model and finances, the Respondent made several comments about its then Chair and trustees that publicly questioned their competence and integrity. The Panel agreed that while the Respondent was entitled to raise questions and concerns about the museum's finances and how it was being governed (particularly as the Council was its primary funder), his comments had gone beyond this and amounted to a personal attack on the then Chair and other trustees. The Panel found, therefore, that the Respondent had been disrespectful and discourteous towards the officer, the then Chair and trustees, in breach of the Code.

The Panel accepted nevertheless that, as a politician commenting on a matter of public concern, being a museum that was funded to a significant extent by the Council, the

Respondent was entitled to enhanced protection in respect of his right to freedom of expression. The Panel was satisfied, in this case, that the Respondent's comments were made in good faith and the fact that a report had been produced, meant there was a sufficient evidential basis for his concerns about how the museum was being governed, regardless of whether these had any merit or not.

The Panel accepted the trustees were members of the public acting in a voluntary capacity and, as such, would not expect to be subjected to offensive and public criticism of them as individuals. The Panel agreed, nevertheless, that as trustees, they were responsible for governing the museum, ensuring it was run effectively and that it made best use of its resources (including any council funding). The Panel agreed that as such, it would be reasonable for them to expect their actions and decisions as a collective to be scrutinised robustly. The Panel agreed that in light of this and, in the circumstances (including that the comments were spontaneous in nature), that while inappropriate, the Respondent's remarks and conduct were not so sufficiently offensive, personally abusive or egregious to justify, as proportionate, a restriction on his enhanced right to freedom of expression. As such, the Panel was unable to make a formal finding of a breach of the Code.

The Panel emphasised nonetheless that the Standards Commission and, indeed the public, expect councillors, to lead by example and be courteous and respectful at all times. The Panel noted a failure to do so can have a detrimental impact on the standards of public debate and can erode public confidence in both elected members and the local authorities they represent.

Aberdeenshire Council – LA/As/4458 – Breach

At a Hearing held in Aberdeen on 24 June 2026, an elected member of Aberdeenshire Council was censured by the Standards Commission after he was found to have breached the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

Having considered carefully the evidence led at the Hearing and provided to the Ethical Standards Commissioner during his investigation, from various witnesses, the Hearing Panel found the Respondent was disrespectful towards a senior employee of a local port authority following an event at its headquarters in October 2025. The Panel concluded, on the balance of probabilities, that during a discussion with the employee, when leaving the event, the Respondent made a number of accusations about the Port Authority and, in doing so, shouted and behaved in an angry, argumentative and antagonistic manner.

The Panel acknowledged that the interaction had been initiated by the employee, who had approached the Respondent about previous public criticisms he had made about the way the port authority operated and its governance arrangements. While the Panel recognised that the Respondent's reaction was spontaneous in nature, it considered there was no reason why he could not have responded calmly and courteously.

The Panel was satisfied that, instead, the Respondent shouted and behaved in a manner that was aggressive and entirely inappropriate for a professional context. 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 antagonistic. The Panel noted, in support of this conclusion, that witnesses to the interaction (being another councillor and other port authority employees) confirmed, in evidence, that was the case. While the Panel accepted it may not have been the Respondent's intention, it found he had been disrespectful and discourteous in breach of the Code. The Panel further determined that the Respondent's conduct was sufficiently egregious and excessive as to justify, as proportionate, a restriction on his enhanced right to freedom of expression.

The Panel agreed that, as an experienced councillor who was attending the event as a representative of the Council, the Respondent should have been able to engage with others

without being disrespectful or conducting himself in a manner that could be perceived reasonably as being aggressive. The Panel was concerned that the Respondent had not demonstrated any insight or understanding, either at the time or at the Hearing, into how his conduct could be perceived and the impact it both could and, indeed, did have on others.

The Panel nevertheless noted, in mitigation, that the Respondent's conduct was spontaneous (and a reaction to being challenged unexpectedly), limited in duration to the one short interaction and not personal in nature. In the circumstances and context, the Panel concluded, on balance, that a censure was an appropriate sanction.

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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