



7 July 2026

MEDIA RELEASE

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILLOR CENSURED FOR BREACH OF COUNCILLORS' CODE

Following a Hearing held online on 7 July 2026, East Renfrewshire Councillor Colm Merrick was found by the Standards Commission to have breached the provision in the Councillors' Code of Conduct that requires councillors to register certain interests. The Hearing Panel censured Cllr Merrick.

Mrs Helen Donaldson, Standards Commission Member and Chair of the Hearing Panel, said: *"the obligation for councillors to register certain interests is a fundamental requirement of the Code. A failure to ensure a register is kept up to date, as required, removes the opportunity for openness and transparency in a councillor's role and denies members of the public the opportunity to consider whether the councillor's interests may be likely to influence their discussion and decision-making."*

The Panel found, and noted that it was not in dispute, that Cllr Merrick failed to record his part-time employment by the office of an MP on his Register of Interests between August 2022 and October 2025, despite receiving remuneration for such work.

The Panel noted that paragraph 4.4 of the Code requires councillors to register any work for which they receive remuneration by virtue of being employed. Paragraph 4.2 requires them to record any registrable interests within a month. In this case, the Panel noted it was not in dispute and indeed found that Cllr Merrick did not register the employment for over three years. It concluded, therefore, that he had breached paragraph 4.4 of the Code.

The Panel was concerned that Cllr Merrick did not register the paid role with the MP over a prolonged period of time, despite it being his personal responsibility to ensure his Register of Interests was accurate and up to date, and despite receiving reminders from Council officers about the need to keep it updated.

The Panel further noted that Cllr Merrick accepted he did not record an unpaid internship with an MSP between July and October 2025. The Panel noted the Code obliges councillors to apply an objective test to determine if any non-financial interests they have require to be registered. In terms of that test, registrable non-financial interests are those which members of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, might reasonably think could influence a councillor's actions, speeches, votes or decision-making in their council.

In this case, the Panel was of the view that the relevant facts for the purpose of the application of the objective test were:

- The MSP had represented a constituency outwith Cllr Merrick's Council area.
- The MSP had not been a Minister or Cabinet Secretary at the time.
- The MSP represented the same political party as Cllr Merrick.
- The limited duration of the internship (approximately three months).

The Panel did not consider that members of the public, with knowledge of these relevant facts, would reasonably consider the internship was sufficiently significant as to be likely to influence Cllr Merrick's discussion and decision-making at council. This was because:

- It was unlikely there would be any cross over between the MSPs constituency work and Cllr Merrick's work as a councillor. The Panel was unable to think of any examples where this could clearly have been the case.
- The MSP did not have a portfolio that encompassed the Council's remit.
- A shared political outlook between Cllr Merrick and the MSP, as representatives of the same party, would be reasonably expected and it was unlikely, therefore, that Cllr Merrick would be unduly influenced by any views the MSP might hold. This was especially given the short duration of the internship.

The Panel concluded, therefore, that the internship was not sufficiently significant as to amount to a non-financial interest that required to be registered in terms of paragraph 4.22 of the Code. In making this decision, the Panel noted Cllr Merrick would have been required to declare the internship at meetings, had it met the objective test in respect of any specific matter being considered by the Council. The Panel noted that there was no evidence or suggestion he had failed to do so.

The Panel noted, in mitigation, that Cllr Merrick had apologised for his failure to register the employment with the MP within the required timescales. The Panel had no reason to doubt his failure to comply with the Code was the result of a misunderstanding of the Code's requirements and was, therefore, unintentional. The Panel was further satisfied that he had not attempted to conceal the interest and that there had been no personal gain. In the circumstances, the Panel concluded that a censure was an appropriate sanction.

A full written decision will be published on the Standards Commission's website within seven working days.

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.