



1 September 2026

MEDIA RELEASE

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCILLOR CENSURED FOR DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

At a Hearing held online on 1 September 2026, the Standards Commission censured an elected member of East Ayrshire Council, Councillor James Adams. 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 Cllr Adams had forwarded, without authorisation, a confidential internal council email exchange from his councillor email account to his personal email account. Cllr Adams then shared the email chain with a contributor to a Facebook group."*

The Panel noted that the email chain contained an exchange between Cllr Adams and council officers about the management of fire risk posed by combustible waste. The Panel noted it was not in dispute that, in July 2025, following a major fire in Kilmarnock, Cllr Adams forwarded the email chain from his personal email account to an individual who contributed to the Facebook group.

The Panel noted the emails concerned discussion of the Council's legal obligations, its approach to service delivery, and operational enforcement regarding the waste issue. In addition, a number of the emails were specifically marked as "official" and part of the email chain referred to legal advice that had been provided. While the Panel had concerns that the classification of some of the emails in the chain was somewhat unclear, it agreed that internal correspondence of this nature is inherently confidential. This is because council officers have a right to expect they can correspond with elected members, in order to provide them with updates and advice, without fear that such correspondence will be publicly disclosed without their consent.

The Panel agreed that it was evident from the nature of the information Cllr Adams shared, being an internal exchange, that it was to be treated as confidential. As such, the Panel considered Cllr Adams should have understood it was not to be disclosed in full without express consent.

The Panel accepted Cllr Adams' position was that he disclosed the information to rebut online criticisms that he, as an elected member, had failed to take action in respect of the fire risk posed by combustible waste (as opposed to intending to criticise officers). The Panel was satisfied, therefore, that Cllr Adams disclosed the information, at least in part, for personal or political advantage, in breach of the Code.

The Panel further agreed that regardless of Cllr Adams' reasons, the Council's Use of Communication Systems Policy was entirely clear that forwarding emails from a council email

account to a personal email one was not permitted. The Panel considered that Cllr Adams had a responsibility, as he would in any other job, to ensure he was familiar with such a policy.

The Panel agreed that it was also Cllr Adams' personal responsibility to ensure he was both aware of, and understood, the need to maintain confidentiality and to adhere to the provisions in the Code. The Panel was concerned that Cllr Adams had not taken steps to ensure he was familiar with the Code and the Council's policies, despite having been elected over four years ago and, further, that he had shown only limited insight into the importance of complying with these and the potential consequences of not doing so.

The Panel nevertheless noted, in mitigation, that the conduct in question was limited in duration. The Panel further noted that Cllr Adams now accepted he should not have forwarded the email chain. The Panel also took into account that Cllr Adams had not been the subject of any previous finding of a contravention of the Code and had complied fully with the investigation and Hearing processes. In the circumstances, the Panel concluded, on balance, that a censure, being its public and severe disapproval of Cllr Adams' conduct was the appropriate sanction.

Mr Bell stated: *"The obligation on councillors to refrain from disclosing confidential information is a key requirement of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. A failure to respect confidentiality can damage the reputation and integrity of a Council, and can also impede free and frank discussions and decision-making. The Panel urges Cllr Adams to seek further training on the Code and the Council's policies to ensure he is wholly familiar with their requirements and his obligations in respect of these."*

A full written decision will be published on the Standards Commission's website within 14 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.