



15 May 2019

MEDIA RELEASE

DUNDEE COUNCILLOR SANCTIONED FOR DISRESPECTFUL BEHAVIOUR

A Dundee Councillor, Gregor Murray, was sanctioned for disrespectful conduct by the Standards Commission at a public Hearing held in Dundee on 15 May 2019, and was suspended from all meetings of Dundee City Council for 2 months. The case arose from complaints made about emails and posts on Twitter, made whilst Councillor Murray was the Council's Equal Opportunities Spokesperson.

The Hearing Panel heard that it was not in dispute that, in postings on Twitter, Councillor Murray referred to a member of the public as a 'TERF' (being an acronym for Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist).

The Panel further heard that Councillor Murray accepted that they¹ had used inappropriate and derogatory language in a later tweet referring to an allegation that lesbians were blocking the London Pride March.

The Panel considered that while the term 'TERF' was apt to be controversial and could be seen as one of abuse, it could also be used or perceived as simply a descriptor. The Panel was of the view, however, that it was evident from Councillor Murray's description, over an extended period of time, of 'TERFS' as being 'scum' and 'hateful and vile', that Councillor Murray intended it to be one of abuse. The Panel further considered that Councillor Murray's use of it in the context of their reply to the effect that it was deserved, when the complainer had indicated that the use of the term was an expression of abuse, demonstrated that Councillor Murray was aware that the term could reasonably be taken to be offensive. The Panel was further satisfied that Councillor Murray had directed the term at the complainer as an individual and that it was about her as a person, rather than simply being a descriptor of her alleged views.

Ms Ashleigh Dunn, Chair of the Hearing Panel, said: "Councillors have a duty under the Code to treat members of the public with courtesy and respect and cannot, therefore, indulge in offensive personal abuse. While politicians have an enhanced right of freedom of expression, they cannot, simply indulge in offensive behaviour. In this case, the Panel's opinion was that Councillor Murray's conduct, in referring to a member of the public in an offensive manner and in making a highly inappropriate comment online, went well beyond that which is acceptable."

The Panel was therefore satisfied that Councillor Murray failed to observe the rules of good conduct by behaving in a disrespectful manner towards a member of the public. The Panel further determined that Councillor Murray's use of a derogatory word in a public forum,

¹ Councillor Murray is non-binary so the pronouns they/them are used when referring to the Councillor.

such as in a tweet, was highly offensive and inappropriate, regardless of whether it had been directed at any individual or identifiable group of individuals.

The Panel accepted that Councillor Murray, as Scotland's only openly trans elected representative, had suffered from unwarranted bullying and abuse, and that they were determined to stand up for the trans community.

The Panel nevertheless concluded that Councillor Murray failed to observe the rules of good conduct by behaving in a respectful manner towards members of the public, in breach of the Code. The Panel suspended Councillor Murray for a period of two months.

A full written decision in respect of the Hearing will be issued and published on the Standards Commission's website within 14 days.

The Councillors' Code of Conduct is based on nine key principles, which include integrity, honesty and transparency.

The Standards Commission works independently of Government and political parties. It promotes and enforces Codes of Conduct for councillors, as well as individuals appointed to a wide range of national and regional public bodies across Scotland such as the Accounts Commission, the Scottish Qualification Authority, Sport Scotland, Scottish Water and the Scottish Police Authority and many other organisations, including NHS Boards and further education colleges.

Further information on the work of the SCS can be found at <http://www.standardscommissionscotland.org.uk/>

ENDS

Issued by the Standards Commission for Scotland. For further information please contact the Standards Commission on 0131 348 6666 or enquiries@standardscommission.org.uk