



6 June 2023

MEDIA RELEASE

FORMER DUNDEE CITY COUNCILLOR FOUND TO HAVE BREACHED COUNCILLORS' CODE

A former Dundee City Councillor, Gregor Murray, was found by the Standards Commission to have breached the Councillors' Code of Conduct at a Hearing on 6 June 2023, at which they¹ were found to have behaved disrespectfully towards two members of the public in respect of comments and posts they had made on Twitter in March and April 2022, and towards a council officer in emails.

Paul Walker, Standards Commission Convener and Chair of the Hearing Panel, said: "In this case, the Panel considered former Cllr Murray's tweets, that were directed towards two members of the public, to be entirely offensive and gratuitous."

"In addition, the Panel considered that former Cllr Murray's conduct, towards a council officer, was entirely inappropriate and unacceptable. The Panel accepted that former Cllr Murray was entitled to advise the officer that they no longer wished to have contact with him. The Panel agreed, however, that they could have done so in a respectful manner, without referring to the officer's assumed personal characteristics."

At the Hearing, held in Dundee on 6 June 2023, the Standards Commission's Hearing Panel heard that it was not in dispute that former Cllr Murray posted a comment on Twitter, in response to a tweet posted by the complainer (a member of the public), that stated: "with absolutely no respect whatsoever, get to fuck, TERF". The Panel heard that there was also no dispute that former Cllr Murray referred to another member of the public as a "cunt" in a comment posted on Twitter on 27 March 2022.

The Panel heard that, having been advised in an email from a senior council officer that complaints about their Twitter posts had been made, the Respondent replied by stating that the council officer should "Go and tell someone who gives a fuck", adding "for the avoidance of doubt, this does not include myself"; and "If I ever wanted to hear from more extremely overpaid, over privileged, cishet white men in politics, who actively work to exclude marginalised communities, I have absolutely no shortage to choose from."

The Panel noted that the Councillors' Code of Conduct requires councillors to treat their colleagues, council officers and members of the public with courtesy and respect.

¹ Former Councillor Murray is non-binary and uses the pronouns they/them.

In respect of the tweets, the Panel accepted that it was former Cllr Murray's belief that both members of the public had expressed what they considered to be transphobic views. The Panel considered, however, that even if this was a genuinely held belief, it did not mean that former Cllr Murray was entitled to direct profanities and derogatory terms towards them in a public forum. The Panel considered that the use of such terms in public about members of the public, by someone who was then in a position of authority and responsibility, was disrespectful. The Panel noted that even if the Respondent had felt compelled to comment, they could have expressed their views and opinions, without resorting to profanities and personal abuse.

The Panel further found that former Cllr Murray had been disrespectful to the council officer in their emails. The Panel agreed that not only did the officer have every right to contact former Cllr Murray to advise them that complaints about them had been received, it was also fair and courteous for him to have done so. The Panel was satisfied that the officer's emails were entirely professional and respectful, both in tone and content, and considered that former Cllr Murray's replies were entirely inappropriate and disrespectful.

As such, the Panel concluded that former Cllr Murray had contravened the requirement under the Code for councillors to treat everyone (including members of the public and council employees) with courtesy and respect.

The Panel noted that it was not in dispute that former Cllr Murray had made reference in their response to their assumptions about the officer's personal characteristics, including his race, gender identity and sexual orientation. The Panel was satisfied that former Cllr Murray was indicating that their refusal to engage was based, at least in part, on their assumptions about these characteristics. The Panel concluded, therefore, that former Cllr Murray had also, on the face of it, contravened the provision in the Code that states that councillors must not discriminate unlawfully on the basis of the various protected characteristics, under the Equality Act 2010, which include race, sex and sexual orientation.

The Panel noted that former Cllr Murray had been found, on the face of it, to have breached the respect provisions of the Code at two previous Hearings and that, despite this, they had engaged in similar and entirely unacceptable conduct. The Panel further noted that former Cllr Murray had failed to show any remorse or to demonstrate any understanding or insight into the impact of their conduct on others. The Panel concluded, as such, that a lengthy suspension would be the appropriate sanction. The Panel noted, however, that it could not impose a suspension as former Cllr Murray was no longer a councillor. The Panel therefore had no choice but to censure former Cllr Murray.

Mr Walker, stated: "The Standards Commission considers that councillors should be able to express their views and opinions without resorting to profanities and personal abuse."

A full written decision of the Hearing will be issued and published on the Standards Commission's website within 7 days.

ENDS

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.