

Lord Provost censured by Standards Commission

The Lord Provost Frank Ross was censured for breach of the councillors' code of conduct at a hearing convened in Edinburgh this morning by the Standards Commission for Scotland.



Lord Provost of the City of Edinburgh The Rt
Hon Frank Ross

Councillor Ross made a written declaration admitting the breach of the code although he did not appear at the hearing. He was not suspended, but received a 'severe and formal reprimand'.

The matter centred around the declaration of interests which all politicians, from councillors to members of parliament have to make. As the principal shareholder in a hotel company until 20 April 2017, this ought to have been declared on the register and it was not.

The Commission stated earlier : "The Hearing Panel noted that Councillor Ross accepted he should have registered his shareholding. His position was that he had completed a handwritten document declaring this interest and had placed it in the Council's internal mail system. The Hearing Panel noted, however, that the Council had no record of this. The Hearing Panel further noted that the Respondent accepted he had not checked to confirm whether his Register of Interests had been updated to record the interest."

The Panel Chair, Professor Kevin Dunion, in delivering the Hearing Panel's decision said : "The Hearing Panel was concerned that the points made by the Respondent in mitigation failed to recognise that the requirement under the Code to

register a shareholding did not distinguish between an active and dormant company.

“The Respondent’s submission also failed to recognise that the Code required an interest to be registered regardless of whether or not the company or any assets it owned was located in the Council area.

“We wish to emphasise that the obligation to register a shareholding is an absolute requirement and integral part of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct . The registration of interests should not be seen by councillors as merely a tick box exercise as it is fundamental part of the ethical standards framework . It provides the opportunity for openness and transparency in a councillor’s role and affords members of the public the opportunity to consider whether a councillor’s interests may or may not influence their discussion and decision – making .”

Lothian Tory MSP Miles Briggs who raised the complaint with the Standards Commission said: “This censure is a very serious reprimand for Frank Ross, and I very much share the Commission’s surprise and concern that Councillor Ross wrongly assumed he did not have to register shares in a dormant company when this is a very clear obligation under the Councillors’ Code of Conduct.

“This censure is highly embarrassing for the city’s Lord Provost and for the SNP in Edinburgh and nationally.

“Many Edinburgh residents will also feel that SNP bosses in the city should themselves consider whether they should look at taking their own disciplinary action against Frank Ross given the seriousness of this matter.”

Council Leader, and Leader of the council’s SNP group, Cllr Adam McVey told The Edinburgh Reporter : “The judgement isn’t a surprise considering Frank accepted there had been a technical breach right at the start of this process.

“Frank is doing a fantastic job representing the people of Corstorphine and representing Edinburgh as Lord Provost and I know he will continue to serve the city with distinction.”

Earlier this year two Conservative councillors were cleared of a complaint against them.

The panel found that Councillors Cameron Rose and Jeremy Balfour had been ‘discourteous and disrespectful’ by naming council officials during a committee meeting in a manner which inferred criticism. But the panel found that the two councillors had legitimate grounds for concern over the matter under discussion, and in the particular circumstances they did not find them to have breached the code of conduct.