

# **Councillor cleared of bias over stance on short term lets**

**A complaint that a Leith Councillor's social media comments on holiday lets were not compatible with his committee role was dismissed.**

Councillor Chas Booth (Greens) was reported amid concerns about the "compatibility" of his public calls for controls on holiday lets and his work on the planning sub-committee which rules on some short term let (STL) applications.

His activity on social media "against STLs operating in Edinburgh and public criticisms of committee decisions in favour of STLs appear to contravene parts of the Scottish Government's Code of Conduct for Councillors," trade body the Association of Scottish Self Caterers (ASSC) said in a letter to the council last June.

However after looking into the complaint the Ethical Standards Commissioner (ESC) concluded it did "not meet the eligibility criteria for being admissible for investigation".

Cllr Booth called it "completely vexatious and without merit".

Comments he had made online flagged up by ASSC included him encouraging residents to "report potential breaches of planning regulations" by STLs and saying claims that the council's new rules amounted to a "de facto ban" were "simply

a bare-faced lie”.

The ESC said: “The Commissioner does not consider that the comments made by the Respondent on his social media could be considered disrespectful or showing bias... the Respondent quotes statistics and gives his point of view on STLs but states nothing that, on its face, could amount to a breach of the Code.”

It added: “[Councillor Booth] was directing his comments about lying towards a claim made by the STL industry, as an entity, rather than being personal in nature.

“Having carefully considered the matters being complained of, the Commissioner is of the view that the Respondent’s actions either individually or taken together would not, on the face of it, constitute a contravention of any provision within the Code.”

The decision means the matter will not be passed to the Standards Commission for further investigation.

Commenting, Cllr Booth said: “I am delighted the Ethical Standards Commissioner has dismissed this complaint against me, which was completely vexatious and without merit.

“If industry lobby groups think they can silence elected councillors who have the temerity to ask questions about the impact of that industry on the city and its constituents, they are very wrong.

“I have always taken my responsibilities on planning committee extremely seriously. I deal fairly with every application on its own individual merits, and judge it against the council’s planning policy and other material planning considerations, as I am required to do. I will not be diverted from that fair and reasonable approach by the personal attacks of corporate lobbyists.”

*by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter*



Cllr Chas Booth