

08 July 2009

Gosport councillor disqualified for two years

The former deputy leader of Gosport Borough Council was disqualified from office for two years on Monday (6 July) following a Standards for England investigation.

The Adjudication Panel for England, an independent judicial tribunal, agreed with Standards for England's ethical standards officer that Councillor Peter Chegwyn had breached the Code of Conduct by failing to declare interests in matters relating to a live music festival he hoped to stage.

The Adjudication Panel also agreed with the ethical standards officer that Councillor Chegwyn had brought his office and authority into disrepute.

Councillor Chegwyn, in his private capacity as an events organiser, had been liaising extensively with the council in 2008 over his plans to stage a music festival at Stokes Bay. The festival was to be held on council-owned land and would need licences for alcohol sales and live entertainment. Councillor Chegwyn was the sole director of a limited company set up to handle the financial aspects of this festival.

Despite his role as the main event organiser and promoter, Councillor Chegwyn refused to declare an interest, even when prompted, during a council meeting in which a motion was proposed which included reviewing the terms of the arrangements between him and the council.

As well as refusing to declare an interest or leave the meeting, during which advice sought by the council on the legal implications of changing the arrangements was presented, Councillor Chegwyn also breached the Code of Conduct by voting. He cast his vote against the motion to change the terms of his agreement with the council over the fees and licensing for the festival.

The motion was lost by 16 votes to 17. Had the motion been tied, the Mayor - who had voted in favour of it - would have been given the deciding vote.

Dr Robert Chilton, chair of Standards for England, said: "Members must not only act ethically, but also be seen to do so by the general public."

“People have every right to expect high standards from those elected to represent them. Councillor Chegwyn’s two-year disqualification recognises this, and sends a clear message to the electorate that councillors who breach the Code of Conduct can be brought to account.”

Ends.

17 July 2009

Somerset councillor disqualified for two years

The former deputy leader of Somerset County Council was disqualified from office for two years on Wednesday (15 July) following a Standards for England investigation.

The Adjudication Panel for England, an independent judicial tribunal, confirmed the Standards for England ethical standards officer’s view that Councillor Paul Buchanan had breached the Code of Conduct by making a number of written allegations about Alan Jones, Chief Executive of Somerset County Council, which he knew to be spurious or exaggerated.

The Adjudication Panel found Councillor Buchanan made these allegations in an attempt to discredit the chief executive.

The Adjudication Panel confirmed the ethical standards officer’s view that Councillor Buchanan brought his office into disrepute and used his position improperly to disadvantage Alan Jones.

In January 2008 Alan Jones alleged that Councillor Buchanan had made serious and unsubstantiated allegations of misconduct against him to two national organisations of which he is a member, and also to his employer, in an attempt to damage his reputation with his employer, colleagues and peers.

The Adjudication Panel for England found that Councillor Buchanan knowingly exaggerated the facts about certain issues in order to strengthen his serious misconduct allegations against Alan Jones.

The Adjudication Panel also agreed with the ethical standards officer that Councillor Buchanan was reckless as to whether he could substantiate the allegations he was making and found that he gave a series of changing and contradictory explanations as to how he had pursued alleged concerns from officers.

Dr Robert Chilton, chair of Standards for England, said: "When standing and acting in public office as a councillor, Councillor Buchanan willingly took on a responsibility to maintain a high standard of ethical behaviour. Councillor Buchanan's conduct has diminished confidence in his ability to fulfil his role as a councillor, which requires him to act selflessly and with honesty and integrity.

"We welcome the Adjudication Panel's decision to disqualify Councillor Buchanan, and hope this case reassures the general public that local government has a Code of Conduct that sustains good conduct amongst local councillors and deals with breaches of this Code appropriately."

Ends.

27 July 2009

One year ban for councillor

A councillor from Needham Market Town, Suffolk, was disqualified from office for one year on Tuesday 21 July.

Following an investigation by Standards for England, Councillor Ian Mason's case was referred to the Adjudication Panel for England (APE) for determination.

The APE, an independent judicial tribunal, agreed with Standards for England's ethical standards officer that Councillor Ian Mason had breached the Code of Conduct by treating both a councillor and a council officer with disrespect.

In August 2008, six members of the town council alleged that Councillor Mason had called Councillor Josephine Lea and Deputy Clerk Kelaine Spurdens 'proven liars' at a council meeting. It was also alleged that Councillor Mason was given the opportunity to withdraw his remarks, but refused.

Councillor Mason chose to make his remarks at a council meeting on 7 May 2008, where Councillor Lea was being elected as Town Mayor. The ethical standards officer considered that the words used by Councillor Mason were both rude and offensive and were expressions of personal anger. His comment questioned the integrity, honesty and credibility of Councillor Lea and demeaned an important occasion for the council.

The ethical standards officer also noted that Councillor Mason's breach of the Code came after he was suspended for a three months in November 2006 by Mid Suffolk District Council's standards committee, for similar conduct related to failing to treat Councillor Lea with respect.

Dr Robert Chilton, chair of Standards for England , said: "While it is only right that members are entitled to challenge their fellow councillors and officers about their work, they have a duty to respect other people. In failing to do this, Councillor Mason has undermined confidence in his office and the council as a whole, and the one year disqualification reflects this."

Ends.

For media enquiries, contact the press office on 0161 817 5400 or email press.enquiries@standardsboard.gov.uk.

Notes for editors

1. Standards for England is the new operating name for the Standards Board for England . Visit our website to find out more:
www.standardsforengland.gov.uk.
2. Standards for England and the Adjudication Panel for England are independent from each other. Standards for England does not determine sanctions to be imposed on members who have breached the Code of Conduct.

Ethical standards officers employed by Standards for England investigate potential breaches of the Code of Conduct on Standards for England 's behalf. At the end of an investigation, the ethical standards officer can refer the case to the Adjudication Panel if the potential breach is sufficiently serious to warrant some form of sanction. The Adjudication Panel for England is an independent judicial tribunal. The Lord Chancellor appoints its members following consultation with the Secretary of State for Local Government.