

8 February 2023

# PRESS RELEASE

## Former councillor disqualified for 3 years

**Former Councillor Jolene Bunting has been disqualified from holding the office of councillor for 3 years following an Adjudication Hearing held today (8 February).**

At the Hearing, assistant Commissioner Mr Ian Gordon found that Ms Bunting wrongly claimed she had been fined by Belfast City Council for a 'stunt' involving the then Deputy Leader of Britain First being filmed in ceremonial robes and sitting in the Lord Mayor's chair.

Mr Gordon also found that she had altered her Council payslip to make it appear as though a deduction of over £500 was for the fictional fine, when in fact it related to deductions for her use of a council mobile phone.

The complainant on the case, who had agreed to pay Ms Bunting's 'fine' in full, made two payments on separate dates amounting to £115 before realising that there was no fine.

An investigation report was sent to the assistant Commissioner to consider what action, if any, should be taken against Ms Bunting.

After hearing all the evidence, the assistant Commissioner was satisfied that the payslip sent by Ms Bunting as 'proof' of her fine had been amended by her so that the words '*members phone repayment*' next to the amount of £545.38p could not be seen.

He found that her actions had breached the Local Government Code of Conduct and that her conduct had brought her and her position as councillor into disrepute.

Having considered the sanctions available and taking account of the need to uphold confidence in the standards regime, he believed that disqualification for a period of 3 years was a necessary and proportionate sanction.

### Notes:

The Respondent may appeal to the High Court against this decision in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The Acting Commissioner's full written decision will be made available shortly on the Commissioner's website at:

<https://nipso.org.uk/nlgcs/hearings-and-adjudication-decisions/>

**ENDS**

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