

15 February 2024

PRESS RELEASE

Former councillor Luke Poots disqualified for 4 years

Former councillor Luke Poots (Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council) has been disqualified from holding the office of councillor for 4 years following an Adjudication Hearing held today (15 February).

The sanction was imposed after Assistant Commissioner for Standards Ian Gordon ruled that former councillor Poots had breached the Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors by failing to declare a conflict of interest while sitting on the Council's Planning Committee between 2015 and 2019.

Assistant Commissioner Gordon also made reference to a planning application submitted originally in the maiden name of former councillor Poots' mother, and the lack of clarity in the original application that the former councillor was a joint owner of the land.

Between February 2016 and February 2018 there were 35 occasions when the former councillor was present that his father, Mr Edwin Poots MLA, spoke at the Planning Committee either in favour of or against a planning application.

On more than half of those occasions, the former councillor did not declare any conflict of interest. He also remained in the Planning Committee and participated in the decision-making process in relation to all 35 applications.

Assistant Commissioner Gordon found that the former councillor had received legal advice that his father speaking on specific planning applications at meetings when he was participating in the Committee could give the appearance of bias. He referred to the councillor's Code of Conduct, which states that if there are conflicts of interest councillors should make a declaration and withdraw from the meeting.

He considered that in not doing so members of the public could conclude that former councillor Poots had not acted fairly.

Assistant Commissioner Gordon highlighted it was the former councillor's personal responsibility to comply with the Code, finding that he was in breach of paragraphs 4.3, 6.3 and 6.4, which related to declaration of significant non-pecuniary interest and decision making.

He also found that he had breached paragraph 4.2 of the Code, which states that councillors must not bring their position of councillor, or the council, into disrepute.

Referring to the fact there were multiple breaches of the Code over a long period of time, and the former councillor's non-cooperation with the process, the Assistant Commissioner concluded that a disqualification of 4 years was an appropriate sanction.

Notes:

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

<https://www.nipso.org.uk/nlgcs/hearings>

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

ENDS

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