

The Standards Commission decision in the Sid Perrie case generated by AI or written beforehand?

Description

Last Wednesday, 18th February, the Standards Commission published ([see here](#)) their decision to suspend Sid Perrie from the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) Board for six months for sending six emails questioning the Flamingo Land Planning process.

The decision document is almost 24 pages long and, from my memory, appears to be word for word what Morag Ferguson, the panel chair, took around 15 minutes to read out at Sid Perrie's hearing. The exception are the final three pages, under the heading "reasons for the sanction", which were not read out at the hearing and appear to have been added afterwards.

As I explained in my post the day after ([see here](#)), the hearing took about two hours, from 9.30-11-30, the panel then adjourned till 1pm to consider their decision but were about 10 minutes late in reconvening. A cursory look at the written decision confirms my impression on the day there is no way the Panel could have produced over 20.5 pages of decision documentation in around 1 hour 40 minutes. It appears therefore that most of the decision must either have been written beforehand or possibly produced by AI on the day.

After the Hearing I submitted a Freedom of Information Request for the introductory script Morag Ferguson had read out at the start and for the notes I witnessed being taken at the session by Edward Fellows, the Case Manager (and a touch typist). Staff at the Standards Commission, to their credit, supplied these almost by return.

The script, entitled "Chair's Opening Remarks" and dated 4th February ([see here](#)), also covers what Morag Ferguson said at the end of the hearing and some interesting additional notes on how to shut down challenges by people represented at a hearing. (Sid Perrie wasn't as he was off sick). Morag Ferguson managed to avoid reading out "Sitting directly to the right of the Panel is Lorna Johnston, Executive Director of the Standards Commission". Ms Johnston did not turn up to the hearing but otherwise appears to have followed the script almost to the word. The script raises the question of how far the panel which adjudicates cases is actually independent and able to think for themselves or simply carries out the instructions of staff? If the latter, there are strong parallels with most of the LLTNPA Board who see their primary role as carrying out the instructions of their CEO, Gordon Watson.

The notes of the hearing ([see here](#)) bear little resemblance to what was read out afterwards or the written decision. For example, the standard phraseology used at the start of many paragraphs in the decision "The ESC [Ethical Standards Commissioner]'s representative noted/argued/contended/advised/suggested" is not found in the notes. This is important because it shows the notes taken at the meeting were not used to create, whether by AI or otherwise, the "verbal decision" which was later read out by Morag Ferguson.

It appears therefore that paragraph of the decision, which often start with the claim, "The Panel noted that the Respondent must have been written beforehand. After three months of fruitless attempts to try and represent Sid Perrie's interests to the Standards Commission while he was off sick, Alannah Maurer and I had come to the view that the whole process was a farce and the length of the written decision supports our view that most of the decision in Sid Perrie's case was taken in advance. That would also explain the decision by the panel to refuse our adjournment request on medical grounds, having made up their minds they saw no point in Sid attending.

This is not to claim that the panel did not add or amend whatever draft decision had been prepared beforehand. I was struck at the hearing by a view expressed by panel member Malcolm Bell. This is recorded at the bottom of page 13, paragraph 9, of the Written Decision:

The Panel was particularly disappointed to note that in an email sent on 28 August 2024, the Respondent stated that the Convener should have a frank conversation with her husband about her best interests and should get herself a lawyer. Given the Convener's husband was neither a member nor an employee of the Park Authority and, indeed, had no ostensible connection to the matter, the Panel considered the Respondent's conduct in doing so to be condescending, spurious and entirely discourteous. The Panel was satisfied it was unlikely the Respondent would have made any such mention of a spouse, had the Convener not been female.

The ESC had provided no facts to satisfy the panel that it was unlikely the Respondent would have made any such mention of a spouse, had the Convener not been female and therefore had no basis for claiming this. In fact, Sid told me before he went off sick, that he was concerned about how Heather Reid was being controlled by Gordon Watson. He was therefore trying to get her to get advice from people outside the LLTNPA, hence why he said she should have a frank conversation with her husband about her best interests and get legal advice. The finding therefore says far more about the prejudices of the Panel than it says about Sid Perrie but Malcolm Bell, Suzanne Vestri and Morag Ferguson did not hesitate to use those views to enhance the draft decision which has been prepared beforehand.

How bad is the Standards Commission?

It would be interesting to know if any other tribunal in Scotland or the wider UK produces decisions running to 20 pages in a hour and forty minutes? And who at the Standards Commission is actually writing out these decisions? Is it the panel members, who are supposed to decide these cases, or is it staff? (I am submitting further information requests to try and establish this).

The implications go much wider than the Sid Perrie case. How many other board members or councillors who have been subject to complaints under the Code of Conduct for Public Life have been effectively found guilty or not guilty before any hearing has taken place? Who has been responsible for developing this flawed system of administrative justice? And why has the Scottish Parliament, which oversees the work of the Standards Commission, tolerated this?

On Thursday the Standards Commission is hearing ([see here](#)) the case of Councillor Fiona Higgins, which received significant coverage in the media at the end of last year, at 11am in Glasgow City Chambers, 82 George Square. Cllr Higgins is a teacher (like Sid Perrie once was) who tried to

challenge Glasgow City Council staff on proposed cuts to the education budget. Also like Sid, in his attempts to question the process behind the Flamingo Land planning application, she was prevented by her "Convener" from raising issues of public interest at a public meeting. She was told "there are other places you can ask the question" ([see here](#)) which is exactly what the Standards Commission thought Sid should have done without having any of the evidence of his multiple attempts to do so. Then, when Cllr Higgins resorted to going public "more public than Sid's six emails" she was subject to a complaint under the Code of Conduct.

I will be going along to listen and observe tomorrow. I understand Cllr Higgins will have legal representation and it will be interesting to see if that makes any difference to how the panel behaves.

Postscript

I wrote this before before I was aware of Robin McAlpine's blog last week on the corruption at the Standards Commission and Fiona Higgins case ([see here](#)). Its essential reading for anyone concerned about how democracy is being destroyed in Scotland.

default watermark

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. flamingo land
2. Governance
3. LLTNPA
4. planning

Date Created

February 23, 2026

Author

nickkempe