

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Standards Committee held at Knowle, Sidmouth on Tuesday, 23 January 2018

Attendance list at the end of the document

The meeting started at 10.00am and ended at 11.20am

- *14 Public speaking
There were no questions asked.
- *15 Minutes
The minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 17 October 2017, were confirmed and signed as a true record, subject to reference in minute *11 to debate on field numbers.
- *16 Declarations of interest
There were none.
- *17 Councillor Gifts and Hospitality
The Committee considered the report of the Monitoring Officer, which considered the Council's approach to Councillor Gifts and Hospitality and declarations in that regard. The Committee at its meeting on 17 October 2017 (minute *13 refers) had requested a report be brought before it for consideration.

Discussion included the following points:

- Reference to the Guidance on Gifts and Hospitality produced by Somerset County Council, which were considered to be very helpful;
- The Constitution would need to be altered to reflect changes to the way gifts and Hospitality were declared;
- Possible suggestion of a zero limit for Gifts and Hospitality. There were concerns raised over the practicality of the implementation of this limit;
- Councillors could also declare any gift or hospitality received under £25 and this could be considered to be good practice;
- It was also noted that members could decline any hospitality if it was felt that it would be inappropriate, irrespective of value;
- The issue was does declaring a gift or hospitality received make decision making by Councillors better?
- Importance of transparency for Councillors as a reassurance for the public.
- The new online Register of Gifts and Hospitality would be viewable by the public;
- It was discussed whether there should be regular training on Member's responsibility in relation to Gifts and Hospitality. It was noted that the compulsory training requirement, should be adopted in May, would cover this;
- The Monitoring Officer noted that he would prepare guidance, like that for Somerset County Council that would appear on a discrete section of the website in relation to Members, Gifts and Hospitality and this is where the online register would be found.

The Chairman thanked the Monitoring Officer for his report.

RESOLVED:

1. that the content of the report be noted;
2. that the Member's Code of Conduct and Register of Interests be amended in accordance with the details set out in the report as part of the changes to the constitution to be presented to annual Council.
3. that the Monitoring Officer review the approach to the online Register of Gifts and Hospitality with a view to finding a workable solution.

*18 Code Complaints update

The Committee considered and noted the report of the Monitoring Officer, which provided an update for the Committee on new Code related cases received since 1 May 2017. A member raised concerns over the behaviour of some Councillors at Town Council meetings and whether these meetings being audio recorded would improve the behaviour and reduce the number of Code of Conduct complaints. It was agreed that recording would act as a way of improving conduct. It was noted that some Town Councils did already audio record their meetings. The Monitoring Officer noted that he could write to the town's and Parishes and recommend that meetings were recorded but this was as far as it could be taken.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

*19 Forward Plan

Committee members were asked to advise of any items for the Forward Plan. Members discussed the issue of starring/non-starring of minutes, an issue which had been raised by Cllr Megan Armstrong following the last Council meeting. It was considered that this could be a confusing issue as to what could or could not be debated by members.

The Monitoring Officer reported that the use of 'starred items' was a local convention and was an approach which was used to help Members distinguish between resolved matters (which were not open to change) and recommendations (which were), it was noted that their use was not part of the formal procedures. Confusion in particular had arisen where one part of an unstarred minute was a resolution and therefore not available to change and another a recommendation and able to change. There was some concern that the general public also may not understand this system.

It was suggested that the Monitoring Officer prepare a briefing note for Members to explain the starring/non-starring of items in the Council minute book.

RESOLVED: that the, Monitoring Officer be requested to produce a briefing note for Members on the issue of starring/non-starring of items in the Council minute book and some of the procedures regarding decision making more generally.

Attendance list

Present:

Councillors:

Andrew Moulding (Chairman)

Graham Godbeer

Douglas Hull
Stuart Hughes

Co-opted non-voting members:

Martin Goscomb, Co-opted Independent member
Jessica Bailey, Co-opted Parish/Town Council member
Tim Swarbrick, Co-opted Independent member
Frances Newth, Co-opted Parish/Town Council member

Also present:

Alison Willan, Independent Person
Councillor Megan Armstrong

Councillors:

Susie Bond – substitute Committee member

Officers:

Henry Gordon Lennox, Monitoring Officer and Strategic Lead – Governance & Licensing
Chris Lane, Democratic Services Officer

Apologies:

Alan Dent – substitute Committee member
Dawn Manley

Chairman Date