

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Standards Committee held at Blackdown House, Honiton on 13 August 2019

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.28 am

1 Public speaking

Councillor Paul Hayward asked whether the Ledbury Standards case decision was going to have any effect on this council's Standards Committee's work and workload. The Monitoring Officer replied that a Code of Conduct complaints procedure was in place and presently did not see this decision having any impact. However, each case would be considered on its merits in consideration of the circumstances relevant at the time.

2 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Standards Committee held on 16 April 2019 were confirmed and signed as a true record.

3 Declarations of interest

Councillor DBS checks.

Councillor Ian Hall, Personal, DCC Councillor for Axminster who through this role had been DBS checked.

Councillor DBS checks.

Councillor Phil Twiss, Personal, DCC Councillor who sits on their Standards Committee and who through this role had been DBS checked.

Recruitment procedures for co-opting to the Standards Committee

Councillor Pauline Stott left the meeting during the discussion on this item as it had arisen as a consequence of her appointment by Council at 24th July 2019.

Forward Plan.

Councillor Paul Hayward, Personal, Assists Town and Parish councillors with their register of interest forms.

4 Annual report 2018/19

The Monitoring Officer presented the report which reviewed the 2018-19 year in the life of the Committee and outlined the work done. There was discussion concerning the cost of dealing with Town and Parish councils' code of conduct complaints. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that Town and Parish councils were the largest impact on resources and Code of Conduct training had been offered, although this had been poorly attended. The difficulty of engaging Town and Parish councillors on the issue of standards was discussed with reference to the debate by the Standards Committee in relation to this particular issue at one of its previous meetings. All of this workload was specifically down to the behaviour of all councillors across the district but there were certain councils that generated more work than others, although on the whole this was cyclical in nature

depending on whether there were any particularly contentious local issues that caused complaints to arise.

RESOLVED that the review of 2018-19 year be noted.

5 **Code complaint 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 2019.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

6 **Councillor DBS checks**

Members received a verbal update from the Monitoring Officer on uptake of Councillors undertaking voluntary basic DBS checks following the resolution of Cabinet on 6 September 2017. Councillor Ian Hall led discussions and said that although this was agreed by most members at the time, there had not been much take-up. He suggested that perhaps this should be refocused as the council was now into a new civic term. He wished that this issue was audited to ascertain any possible risks with councillors not being DBS checked.

Further discussions included the following:

- The public perception was that councillors were DBS checked
- A basic DBS check should be mandatory
- The fee should be paid for through councillors' allowances
- Safeguarding training was more important to councillors than these checks
- Emergency and first aid should be given whether a person was DBS checked or not
- All councillors including Town and Parish confirm that they are not disqualified to serve due to any criminal convictions, when they sign their nomination papers
- As the suggestion is for voluntary DBS checks this would not create any data protection issues
- Decision needs careful thought, how helpful is this really to have a list on a website just because it's popular
- A blanket approach may not be necessary but could be relevant in the right situation where checks were needed.

RESOLUTION that Cabinet are asked whether they wish to reconsider their previous recommendation for district councillors to only have voluntary DBS checks.

7 **Recruitment procedure for co-opting to the Standards Committee**

The report considered the process of recruiting co-optee members to the Committee. Through a discussion it was decided to have additional committee members involved in the recruitment process to ensure as wider a member involvement as possible.

RESOLVED that the process should be as it is currently but that the interview panel should comprise a maximum of 5 and minimum of 2 Standards Committee members with the Monitoring Officer. The panel shall be open to all committee members and shall comprise 3 district councillors and 1 of each of the independent and parish / town council

representatives. If either or both of the independent and parish / town council representatives positions are unable to be filled then their position may be filled by a district council member from the committee.

8 **Forward Plan**

The Committee noted the contents of the Forward Plan. Discussions included the need for more detail to be added to register of interests concerning land ownership in order to give more open and transparent information.

Members wished to add the following items to the Forward Plan for consideration at a future meeting:

- Experiences of Standards training from town/parish councils
- Gifts & Hospitality Register for Councillors with annual report to January committee
- Gifts & Hospitality Register for senior officers with annual report to January committee

Attendance List

Councillors present:

S Hughes (Chairman)
J Bailey
K McLauchlan
P Twiss

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

P Arnott
S Bond
A Dent
I Hall
P Hayward
A Willan

Officers in attendance:

Amanda Coombes, Democratic Services Officer
Henry Gordon Lennox, Strategic Lead Governance and Licensing

Councillor apologies:

D Manley

Chairman

Date: