



Agenda for Standards Committee Thursday, 17th July, 2025, 10.00 am

Members of Standards Committee

Councillors: E Rylance (Chair), J Bailey, I Chubb, T Dumper, S Hughes, J Loudoun, J Whibley

Parish Representatives: P Stott and S Sexton

Independent Persons: D Kuh and P Coulter

Independent Representatives: R Wood, M Goscomb and K Bryant

Venue: Blackdown House, Honiton

Contact: Debbie Meakin;

01395 517540; email: dmeakin@eastdevon.gov.uk

(or group number 01395 517546)

Wednesday, 9 July 2025

East Devon District Council
Blackdown House
Border Road
Heathpark Industrial Estate
Honiton
EX14 1EJ

DX 48808 HONITON

Tel: 01404 515616

www.eastdevon.gov.uk

- 1 Minutes of the previous meeting (Pages 3 - 7)

To agree the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16th January 2025.

- 2 Apologies

- 3 Declarations of interest

Guidance is available online to Councillors and co-opted members on making [declarations of interest](#)

- 4 Public speaking

Information on [public speaking](#) is available online

- 5 Matters of urgency

Information on [matters of urgency](#) is available online

- 6 Confidential/exempt item(s)

To agree any items to be dealt with after the public (including the Press) have been excluded. There are no items which officers recommend should be dealt with in this way.

- 7 **Gifts and Hospitality Protocol for Members update** (Pages 8 - 15)

- 8 **Review of Member Code of Conduct** (Pages 16 - 18)

- 9 **Draft Annual Report to Council** (Pages 19 - 22)
- 10 **Code of conduct complaints update** (Pages 23 - 31)
- 11 **Standards update** (Pages 32 - 38)
- 12 **Standards Committee Work Programme** (Pages 39 - 41)

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[Decision making and equalities](#)

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EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Standards Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 16 January 2025

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 12.46 pm

27 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting of the 11 April 2024 were agreed subject to:

- Inclusion of attendance of the Independent Persons, Representatives and Town and Parish Representatives;
- Clarification on the resolutions for minute 24 on the Member/Officer protocol that results in resolution 1 reading as:
 - To note the comments raised by the Standards Committee on the Member/Officer protocol to the Constitution Working Group to review the document before they make their recommendations to Council.

28 Declarations of interest

Minute 35

Councillors Jess Bailey; Iain Chubb; Stuart Hughes; Other Registerable Interest: Member of Devon County Council.

29 Public speaking

There were no members of the public registered to speak.

30 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

31 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential or exempt items.

32 Resolving Complaints before they escalate

The Monitoring Officer gave the committee the presentation recently put to a meeting of DALC.

The presentation covered:

- Importance of ethical standards in public life;
- Role of the Monitoring Officer in addressing complaints;
- The limitations of the Monitoring Officer role;
- How District Councillors and Town/Parish Councils can help.

The Chair suggested that the presentation be included in the regular newsletter sent to Town and Parish Councils.

Discussion included:

- Merits of mediation becoming a mandatory requirement as with many civil cases and discussion around willingness of participants to undertake;
- Enforcing the undertaking of mandatory training on the code of conduct was difficult and relies upon a formal complaint being submitted;
- The suggestion that “swearing office” should be required and the fact that this was not part of the standard template when taking up office after election, although it was something that East Devon District Council included.

The committee noted the presentation.

33 **Government Consultation on Changes to the Standards Regime**

The report outlined the suggested response, on behalf of the Council, to the recent government consultation titled “Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England”. The consultation sought to obtain views on reforms aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and fairness of the standards system.

The aspects for reform included:

- Reintroduction of suspension powers;
- Disqualification for repeat offenders;
- Right of appeal;
- National appeals body;
- Mandatory minimum code of conduct;
- Interim suspension powers;
- Empowering victims.

The report included the suggested response from the Monitoring Officer, subject to discussion with the committee.

Debate included:

- Mixed response to the need for national appeals body; some views expressed a support for such a body to exist as a clear separation from the local authority, others that another body may add to confusion and mislead expectation on what they could action, as well having the risk of being bureaucratic;
- Interim suspension powers needed clear criteria and appropriate safeguards, but would be required if there was an immediate danger to others; the suggestion was made to add in any free text box available in the consultation that such criteria and safeguards would be required. The overall aim was for improvement in behaviour after a suspension and not to view it as a punishment. Any action that would involve police action, such as assault, should be an immediate suspension to protect the public;
- Concern that the issue of potential suspension may discourage volunteers to stand at town and parish level;
- Defining that any withheld allowances would be paid if there was no finding of a breach of the Code of Conduct;
- That allegations should not be published as no findings of fact, but outcomes of investigations and hearings should be, as they are now;
- Mixed view on the inclusion of voting right of independent persons and representatives, and the role of Vice Chair. Some felt a voting right would be beneficial for balance. Detail on procedure would need careful planning in scenarios whereby only a small number of elected councillors were present, or if an independent Vice Chair had to act as Chair;

- The six month limit suggested in some questions should be a limit, not a target.

The discussion and suggestions to be considered by the Monitoring Officer, and would be incorporated into the final response to the consultation.

RESOLVED that delegated authority be given to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards Committee, to reframe the consultation response in light of discussion and submit before the February deadline.

34 **Code of Conduct Complaint Update**

The report set out an update on Code of Conduct complaints received and progress made for the period of September 2024 to January 2025.

This included the conclusion of two historic complaints, and capturing enquiries that had been made which did not lead to a formal complaint for member's consideration. The Monitoring Officer advised the committee that this did not capture all enquiries made ad hoc in person to her or her Deputy.

The report showed a positive move in resolving complaints and a small refinement to the report template was suggested, namely adjusting the text size to make it easier to read, and the addition of a column that listed if the complaint related to a Member or Other.

The committee noted the update.

35 **Applications for dispensations**

The committee had previously met informally, prior to an Extraordinary Council Meeting on 9 January 2025, to discuss dispensations for Members that also held County Council seats, or were employed by another District or County Council in Devon, to enable them to take part in matters relating to devolution and/or local government reorganisation. Whilst the Monitoring Officer, with emergency powers to do so, had granted the dispensations on 9 January 2025, the report was presented to formally ratify these with the Committee.

Those Members of Standards Committee that also held a seat on Devon County Council ("dual-hatters") left the meeting for this item.

In response to a question, the committee were advised that the dispensation would be kept under review as more about local government reorganisation was known, so that if required those sat on Town or Parish Councils may also be considered.

Noted and supported:

1. **the granting of dispensations to the dual-hatted County and District Council Members, outlined in the report, to enable them to discuss and vote on any such matter relating to devolution or local government reorganisation in Devon. Such dispensations to take effect from 9 January 2025;**
2. **the granting of dispensations to District Council Members who are employed by, or a spouse/partner of an employee of another District or County Council in Devon, to enable them to discuss and vote on any such**

matter relating to devolution or local government reorganisation in Devon. Such dispensations to take effect from 9 January 2025;

- 3. that the dispensations were approved on the basis that granting the dispensations is in the interests of persons living in the authority's area;**
- 4. that the dispensations were granted until the next District Council elections;**
- 5. Following consultation with the Chair as required by the constitution, the Committee supported the Monitoring Officer having made the decision in accordance with the urgency powers set out in the officer Scheme of Delegation.**

36 Standards Committee - Independent Members of the Committee and Independent Person appointments

The report set out options for the independent and town/parish representative roles that would expire in May 2025. Delegated authority was sought to undertake recruitment in time to fill those roles for the next civic term.

The Chair invited comment from the Independent Persons, Independent Representatives, and Town and Parish Representatives present. Those comments included:

- Good practice to refresh membership to retain independence;
- Consider, in light of the devolution agenda, it was in the Council's best interests to use resource to recruit and suggested an extension for at least a year until more on the devolution agenda was known.

The Chair made clear the value of the contributions made by the Independent Persons, Independent Representatives, and Town and Parish Representatives present during their time on the committee, and expressed her gratitude and appreciation for their service.

The Independent Persons, Independent Representatives, and Town and Parish Representatives left the meeting for the debate on this item.

Discussion by the committee included:

- High value placed on the current membership and their contributions;
- Ability to extend further their tenure, in light of limited life of the District Council;
- Support for undertaking a recruitment exercise to refresh and keep to good practice;
- Invitation to apply could be made to the existing position holders.

A proposal, as set out in the report, was made, seconded and voted on.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the recruitment process be approved and the timescale for recruitment noted;**
- 2. Delegated authority be given to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee to agree the recruitment documentation;**
- 3. That an interview panel of 3 members from the committee, to include the Chair or Vice Chair, be approved.**

Councillor Jess Bailey voted against the proposal and asked for her vote to be recorded in the minutes.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

E Rylance (Chair)
J Bailey
I Chubb
T Dumper
S Hughes
J Loudoun

Independent Persons

D Kuh
P Coulter

Independent Representatives

R Wood
M Goscomb
K Bryant

Town and Parish Representatives

P Stott
S Sexton

Officers in attendance:

Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer
Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance (Monitoring Officer)

Chair

Date:

Report to: Standards Committee

Date of Meeting 17 July 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A



Members Gift and Hospitality Protocol

Report summary:

The only guidance available to Members on the declaring of Gifts and Hospitality is included in the Member Code of Conduct. This guidance is limited in its application and therefore the opportunity has been taken to write a separate Protocol, to form part of the Constitution, which gives more detailed guidance to councillors (including co-opted members) on the appropriateness of accepting gifts and hospitality and the factors they should take into account when making a decision. Appendix A includes a draft Protocol for the Committee's consideration. This takes into account comments by the councillors and co-opted representatives of the Committee who were in attendance at the inquorate meeting on 10 April 2025.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That the Committee consider the attached Gifts and Hospitality Protocol at Appendix A and recommend any changes to the Constitutional Working Group before the Protocol is submitted to Full Council for approval.

Reason for recommendation:

It is important that Councillors have clear and detailed guidance on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality. The Protocol at Appendix A will ensure that guidance is available and forms part of the Constitution.

Officer: [Click here to enter report writer, including contact e-mail address and direct dial number.](#)

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☐ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☒ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☐ Communications and Democracy
- ☐ Economy
- ☐ Finance and Assets
- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Medium Risk; The proposals in this report will ensure that Members have clear and detailed guidance on the acceptance of gifts and hospitality. This will reduce the risk of gifts and hospitality being accepted where not appropriate and will therefore reduce the potential for reputational risk to this Council.

Links to background information None

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ A supported and engaged community
 - ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
 - ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services
-

Report in full

1. At present the main guidance on the acceptance of Gifts and Hospitality by Councillors is included in the adopted Member Code of Conduct.
2. As well as having the Code of Conduct, many authorities have separate guidance for councillors and co-opted members which goes into more detail on the matters that they should consider when offered gifts and/or hospitality.
3. In the circumstances, the opportunity has been taken to prepare a draft Protocol which will provide more detailed guidance to councillors and co-opted members in these circumstances. The guidance covers the following areas:-
 - a. The scope of the Protocol i.e. its application to all councillors of East Devon District Council including co-opted members.
 - b. The fact that it does not apply to gifts from friends and family, including a definition of gifts and hospitality.
 - c. The types of gifts and hospitality that need to be declared
 - d. Sets out what constitutes acceptable and prohibited gifts and hospitality.
 - e. The general considerations that Members should have regard to when deciding whether or not to accept gifts or hospitality.
 - f. The wording that can be used to respectfully decline gifts or hospitality.
 - g. The procedure for declaring gifts and hospitality.
 - h. Guidance as to whether gifts and hospitality below the £50 threshold should be declared in any event.
 - i. Reminds members that this Committee will oversee the Gifts and Hospitality register every six months.
 - j. That the Protocol will be reviewed every five years.

4. The Constitutional Working Group (the “CWG”) was set up by Full Council to oversee a review of the Council’s constitution. The proposal is that this Protocol will be added to the Council’s Constitution. The CWG have already considered the draft Protocol and requested changes which have been duly incorporated.
 5. As the Protocol is directly related to Member behaviour and gifts and hospitality is overseen by this Committee, it was felt appropriate to also seek the views of this Committee before the Protocol goes back to the CWG and then to Full Council for adoption.
 6. The Committee are invited to consider the draft Protocol attached at Appendix A and recommend its adoption to the CWG and Full Council with or without amendments. Full training will be provided to members on the Protocol in the autumn of 2025.
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Financial implications:

There are no financial implications to be added to this report.

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report.

East Devon District Council
Councillors' Gifts and Hospitality Protocol

1. Introduction

1.1 This protocol outlines the principles and procedures for the acceptance and registration of gifts and hospitality by councillors of East Devon District Council. It aims to ensure transparency, maintain public trust, and prevent any conflicts of interest.

1.2 The public are entitled to demand of councillors, conduct of a high standard. Public confidence in their integrity would be shaken were there the least suspicion that they could in any way be influenced by improper motives. It is a serious criminal offence for councillors to receive or give any gift, loan, fee, reward or advantage for doing or not doing anything or showing favour or disfavour to any person in an official capacity. If an allegation is made in such circumstances, it will be for the councillor to show that they have not in any way been influenced by improper motives. For this reason, it is important for the council to set clear guidance for all councillors.

1.3 This protocol is intended to assist councillors in making a decision as to whether a gift or hospitality can be accepted. Councillors are reminded that a breach of this guidance may result in a complaint against them to the Monitoring Officer.

2. Scope

2.1 This protocol applies to all councillors of East Devon District Council including co-opted members. It should be read in conjunction with the Members' Code of Conduct.

2.2 It only applies to your role as a councillor. You do not need to register gifts and hospitality which are not related to your role, such as Christmas gifts from your friends and family. However, you should apply common sense when you consider how receipt of a gift might be interpreted. For example, if you are the chair of the planning committee and a birthday present arrives from a family friend who is also an applicant just before a planning application is due to be considered, then you need to think about how this would be interpreted by a reasonable member of the public.

2.3 Hospitality does not need to be registered where it is provided or reimbursed by the authority or where it is clearly ancillary to the business being conducted, such as an overnight stay for an external training event. Therefore, hospitality at a civic reception arranged by the council would not need to be registered. However, the hospitality should be registered if it is provided by a person or body other than the authority and is over and above what could reasonably be viewed as ancillary to the business conducted. You might meet dignitaries or business contacts in Council offices. **However, if such meetings take place in other venues, such as at cultural or sporting events, this should be registered as hospitality.**

2.4 Gifts that are clearly made to the Council, for example, a commemorative goblet which is kept on display in the Council's offices, do not need to be registered in the register of gifts and hospitality. However, such gifts should be recorded by the Council for audit purposes.

3. General Principles

- **Integrity and Honesty:** Councillors must act with integrity and honesty, avoiding any actions that could be perceived as improper.
- **Transparency:** All offers of gifts and hospitality, whether accepted or refused, with an estimated value of at least £50 or a number of gifts or hospitality from the same donor which individually are below the estimated threshold but which cumulatively result in an estimated value of at least £50 in any **financial** year, must be declared appropriately and recorded to maintain transparency.
- **Accountability:** Councillors are accountable for their actions and decisions regarding the acceptance of gifts and hospitality.

4. Definitions

- **Gift:** Any item or service received without payment or at a discount not available to the general public.
- **Hospitality:** Any form of entertainment, meals, or accommodation provided free of charge or at a reduced rate.

5. Acceptable Gifts and Hospitality

5.1 Gifts and hospitality up to an estimated value of £50 may be accepted without declaration. However, you should always consider whether it is appropriate to accept it and the presumption should always be not to accept significant gifts or hospitality.

5.2 All other offers of gifts or hospitality of an estimated value of £50 or over must be declared and recorded.

6. Prohibited Gifts and Hospitality

6.1 Gifts or hospitality that could be perceived as an attempt to influence decision-making or secure preferential treatment must not be accepted.

6.2 Frequent or lavish gifts and hospitality from the same source must be avoided.

6.3 Gifts or hospitality, irrespective of estimated value, which could give rise to real or substantive personal gain or a reasonable suspicion of influence on your part to show favour from persons seeking to acquire, develop or do business with the Council or from

persons who may apply to the Council for any permission (e.g. planning permission), licence or other significant advantage.

7. General Considerations: Gifts

7.1 In general, gifts should be refused.

7.2 A gift must not be accepted if it is offered by a person or organisation which has, or is seeking business with, the Council or one who has an interest in a Council decision. Simply accepting gifts or hospitality and then registering it does not mean that it becomes reasonable in such circumstances.

7.3 In normal circumstances, only minor gifts of token value, should be accepted.

8. General Considerations: Hospitality

8.1 The same principles which apply to gifts apply to the offer and acceptance of hospitality. Generally, offers of hospitality should be declined.

8.2 It must not be accepted when the offer of hospitality is made by any person or organisation seeking business or requiring a decision from the Council, or where purchasing decisions may be potentially compromised.

8.3 Exceptions to this general rule are few, but it may be in order to accept offers of hospitality if there is a genuine need to impart information or to represent the Council's wider interest in the community.

8.4 For example, if you have been invited as a ward councillor to a local festival along with other members of the community then it may be entirely appropriate to accept the hospitality. However, you should always exercise particular caution if the organisers are involved in ongoing negotiations with the Council on a particular matter.

8.5 It may also be necessary to participate in a working lunch in order to foster a good working relationship with other organisations. These are examples, therefore, where the acceptance of modest forms of hospitality is acceptable.

8.6 As with gifts, accepting an expensive meal from somebody who is negotiating for a contract with the Council, for example, is not 'made right' by being recorded on a public register.

8.7 The following should be considered when deciding whether or not to accept offers of hospitality:

(a) whether the nature of the hospitality is appropriate.

(b) whether the scale of the hospitality is appropriate to the circumstance.

(c) whether the hospitality is modest and can be considered as part of a normal councillor role to foster good relations.

(d) whether the hospitality is offered by a person or organisation who is tendering or about to tender for Council business or submitting an application to the Council e.g. an application for planning permission or a licence.

(e) whether it is more appropriate to bear the expense oneself.

8.8 If offers of hospitality are declined, those persons or organisations making the offer may be courteously informed of the procedures and standards operating within the Council with, if appropriate, the following or similar statement:

“Thank you for your kind offer of [insert details of gifts or hospitality]. Unfortunately, the Council has a clearly defined policy on receiving gifts and hospitality and I am therefore unable to accept.”

9. Declaration and Registration

9.1 All offers of gifts and hospitality over the financial threshold in paragraph 5 must be declared within 28 **calendar** days of receipt.

9.2 Councillors must register offers (whether accepted or refused) with the Monitoring Officer (via Democratic Services) using the online form provided.

9.3 Councillors must also disclose the existence of any gift or hospitality at a Council meeting where the gift or hospitality received is relevant to the matter of business being discussed, irrespective of whether it has been registered with the Monitoring Officer.

10. Procedure for Declaring *Offers* of Gifts and Hospitality

10.1 Complete the Declaration Form: Councillors must complete the relevant online declaration form, providing details of the gift or hospitality offered, its **estimated** value, the circumstances of the offer and whether it was accepted. If you do not know the value, please estimate how much you think it is worth.

10.2 Submit the Form: Submit the completed form to the Monitoring Officer via Democratic Services using the online form.

10.3 Record Keeping: The Monitoring Officer will maintain a register of all declared gifts and hospitality.

11. What about gifts or hospitality that fall below the threshold in the code?

11.1 Councillors should consider whether a gift or hospitality **offered** below the estimated value of £50 threshold should also be declared, for example:-

- You should always notify the Monitoring Officer of any gift or hospitality offered to you if it could be perceived as something given to you because of your position,

especially where the gift or hospitality is from somebody who has put in an application to the Council (or is about to) even where that hospitality falls below the limit set. While that would not be a matter for the public register, it allows the Council to be aware of any patterns.

- Also, an accumulation of small gifts **or hospitality offered or that** you receive from the same source over a year that add up to a sum over the threshold should be registered in the interests of transparency and to ensure compliance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

12. Review and Monitoring

12.1 The register of gifts and hospitality will be reviewed every six months by the Standards Committee to ensure compliance with this protocol. The name of the councillor receiving the gift and details of the donor shall be disclosed.

12.2 Any breaches of this protocol may result in a complaint to the Monitoring Officer.

13. Training and Awareness

13.1 Regular training sessions will be provided to councillors to ensure understanding and compliance with this protocol.

13.2 This protocol will be included in the induction program for councillors.

14. Open Register

14.1 The Register of Gifts and Hospitality is a public register and details of offers declared will be published on the Council's website to ensure openness and transparency.

15. Review of Protocol

15.1 This protocol will be reviewed every five years to ensure it remains fit for purpose and compliant with any changes in legislation or best practice. Date for review to be added.

Report to: Standards Committee

Date of Meeting 17 July 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A



REVIEW OF MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT

Report summary:

The Standards Committee is responsible for monitoring the Councillor Code of Conduct and for making recommendations to Full Council on any changes to the code. This report considers the Code and whether any changes are required for Members review. Paragraph 1.10 of this report takes into account feedback at the inquorate meeting in April 2025.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That the Committee is asked to note the review of the Code of Conduct and recommend no changes at the current time.

Reason for recommendation:

It is important that the Committee conducts regular reviews of the Code and ensures that it remains up to-date and fit for purpose.

Officer: Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance melanie.wellman@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Assets and Economy
- ☒ Communications and Democracy
- ☒ Council, Corporate and External Engagement
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- ☐ Environment - Nature and Climate
- ☐ Environment - Operational
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Medium Risk; Ensuring that we have a robust Code of Conduct in place, reduces reputational risk for this Council.

Links to background information n/a

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ A supported and engaged community
 - ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
 - ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services
-

Report in full

1.1 The Committee on Standards in Public Life conducted a review of Local Government Ethical Standards in 2018 and the subsequent report was published in January 2019. One of the recommendations of the report was that a new national code of conduct for members was to be created by the LGA for all local Authorities to use as a basis for their own code. The Local Government Association provides this Model Member Code of Conduct as part of its work on supporting the sector to continue to aspire to high standards of leadership and performance.

1.2 All councils are required to have a local Member Code of Conduct. The Local Government Association Model Member Code of Conduct was developed in consultation with the sector and was offered as a template for councils to adopt in whole and/or with local amendments. The LGA undertake an annual review of the Code to ensure it continues to be fit-for-purpose, particularly with respect to advances in technology, social media and any relevant changes in legislation.

1.3 The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to assist councillors in modelling the behaviour that is expected of them, to provide a personal check and balance, and to set out the type of conduct against which appropriate action may be taken.

1.4 It is also to protect councillors, the public, fellow councillors, council officers and the reputation of local government. It sets out the conduct expected of all members and a minimum set of obligations relating to conduct.

1.5 The overarching aim is to create and maintain public confidence in the role of member and local government.

1.6 The Code of Conduct applies to a councillor when they are acting or claiming or giving the impression that they are acting in their capacity as a member or representative of the council. It also applies to all forms of member communication and interaction, including written, verbal, non-verbal, electronic and via social media,

1.7 The local Government Association approved the Model Code on 3rd December 2020 and it was updated on 19 January and 17 May 2021. Since then no changes have been made to the Model Code. This Council adopted the Code in May 2022 with some minor variations to suit local circumstances. The following is a link to that Code: [part-5_1-member-code-of-conduct.pdf](#).

1.8 As the Code has not been changed by the Local Government Association since May 2021 and to ensure that we remain in line with the Model Code, it is proposed that we do not make any changes at this time. The benefits of adopting changes recommended by the Local Government Association is that they will consult on the changes and also that we remain consistent with the Model Code and therefore many other local authorities. This provides clarity and consistency for the public and indeed for Council members. It should also be noted that the Constitutional Working Group have also considered whether there should be any changes to the Code of Conduct at this time and concluded that there should not be.

1.9 Whilst the definitions in the Code of “other registrable interests” and “non registrable interests” do undoubtedly cause confusion for members and the public, it is considered that having a national based model outweighs the disadvantages. With the current backdrop of local government re-organisation, this seems a sensible approach at this stage. It also means that we have a raft of guidance that we can rely upon when advising on the interpretation of the Code of Conduct.

1.10 No changes are therefore recommended to the Code of Conduct adopted by this Council in May 2022. **Whilst no changes are recommended, the opportunity will be taken to add a link in the Code, to the new Protocol on Members Gifts and Hospitality, once adopted by Full Council.**

Financial implications:

There are no significant financial issues arising from this Report.

Legal implications:

The promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct by councillors is an important part of maintaining public confidence in both the council and its members. Failure to do so could have significant reputational implications.

Report to: Standards Committee

Date of Meeting 17 July 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release n/a



Annual Report of the Standards Committee

Report summary:

To review the work of the Standards Committee for the civic term 2024-2025. This report was considered at an inquorate meeting of the Committee on 10 April and has been updated to reflect comments made. Following a discussion with the Chair, it has been agreed to bring this back for formal sign-off by the Committee.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That the Annual Report, outlining the work undertaken by the Standards Committee for the civic term 2024 – 2025, be agreed to be presented to Council with any subsequent additions from the meeting of the committee to be included as delegated to the Monitoring Officer in conjunction with the Chair and Vice Chair.

Reason for recommendation:

To inform Council of the work of the committee during the year.

Officer: Melanie Wellman, Director of Licensing and Governance and Monitoring Officer, email melanie.wellman@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Assets and Economy
- ☒ Communications and Democracy
- ☒ Council, Corporate and External Engagement
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- ☐ Environment - Nature and Climate
- ☐ Environment - Operational
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk;

Links to background information n/a

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ A supported and engaged community
 - ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
 - ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services
-

Report in full

1. The Standards Committee

1.1 The Standards Committee believes that high ethical standards are crucial in the work of any public body and that robust application is important. This summary report shows how the Committee has undertaken these tasks during the last 12 months and how it continues to contribute to and offer direction to shape the governance, culture, and ethos of the organisation.

1.2 The Standards Committee comprises of 7 elected councillors (plus one reserve); Co-opted non-voting members include 2 Independent Persons; 3 Independent Representatives; and 3 (one currently vacant) Town/Parish Representatives.

1.3 Members of the Committee work together to promote the importance of high standards of behaviour and systems of governance to create a climate where complaints or problems are rare. The Chair of the Committee is held automatically by the Chair of the Council recognising the impartiality of that role. The Council has long recognised the added value brought by an independent voice on its Standards Committee, reinforced by the Co-opted Membership.

2. Purpose and Remit of the Committee

2.1 The Committee acts as champion of the Council's ethical standards and is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct. The Constitution makes it clear that any member of the public may complain to the Monitoring Officer about an alleged breach of the Members' Code of Conduct. The Council has in place appropriate arrangements for dealing with complaints against Members and a mechanism to deal with allegations that Members may have breached the Code of Conduct. The Council has appointed 'Independent Persons' in line with the requirements of the Localism Act 2011. More information about the Code of Conduct and the complaints process can be found on the Council's website.

2.2 The remit of the committee includes:

(a) Advising on the discretionary elements of the Local Code of Conduct; including monitoring and updating.

(b) Advising on the implementation of the Local Code of Conduct, including the training of Members in matters of conduct and advice to Members on such issues as the treatment of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and personal interests and more general conduct issues.

(c) To the extent allowed by law, making arrangements for Members to receive dispensations to speak on, or participate in, matters in which they have interests.

(d) Appointing such Sub Committees (including Membership thereof) as appropriate to discharge the functions.

2.3 As part of the Committees role, the training of District, Town and Parish Councillors on the Code of Conduct is an important function. A number of sessions were provided following the last elections in 2023 and further sessions will be offered between September and November this year.

3. Meetings in 2024/25

3.1 The Committee met twice in 2024/25, two meetings were cancelled and there were no Standards Assessment Sub-Committee meetings to assess complaints or Standards Hearings Sub-Committee meetings to hear complaints. It is unfortunate that two meetings were inquorate this year due to insufficient attendance of District Councillor members on the Committee. Whilst those in attendance still met, decisions could not be taken and some reports have had to come back to a subsequent meeting. All Group Leaders have been reminded of the importance of their councillors giving priority to these meetings.

4. Monitoring of complaint caseload

4.1 The committee continued to monitor at each meeting the scale and type of complaints under the Code of Conduct, in order to identify any trend or emerging issues that warranted further action or support. This has included adaption of the reporting mechanism to the committee to provide enough detail on trend without impacting on confidential information and ensure that the Committee is open and transparent.

4.2 In 2024 the Monitoring Officer received nine Code of Conduct complaints. Five of those related to District Councillors and 4 related to Town and Parish Councillors. Three of those complaints alleged lack of courtesy and respect, three alleged use of position and 2 alleged bullying and harassment.

4.3 Following an initial assessment of the complaints and consultation with one of the Independent Persons, informal resolution occurred in two cases and no further action was taken in the remainder. No complaints were referred for investigation.

4.4 In terms of number of complaints, the 9 in 2024 compared with 12 in 2023, 32 in 2022, 27 in 2021 and 36 in 2020. This shows a clear reduction in the number of complaints being made year on year. This is due, in part, to a reduction in the number of complaints coming forward but also is due to the work being carried out by the Monitoring Officer and their team, in trying to resolve issues before they escalate to a formal complaint.

4.5 In terms of the number of complaints being referred for investigation, there were 8 in 2020, 4 in 2021, 5 in 2022 and none in 2023 and 2024. Again, this also shows a reduction in the number of investigations needing to be undertaken.

5. Resolving complaints before they escalate presentation

5.1 A presentation on the potential ways of resolving complaints before they escalate was presented to the Committee by the Monitoring Officer. The same presentation had been shared with DALC at their conference and means of dissemination were discussed.

6. Response to Government consultation on changes to the Standards regime

6.1 A detailed response was compiled between the Monitoring Officer and the committee in response to the government consultation on changes to the Standards regime which included the following aspects for reform:-

- Reintroduction of suspension powers;
- Disqualification for repeat offenders;
- Right of appeal;
- National Appeals body;
- Mandatory minimum Code of Conduct;
- Interim suspension powers:-
- Empowering victims.

The outcome of the consultation is awaited.

7. Re-appointment of Independent Persons, Independent Representatives and Town/Parish Representatives

7.1 The Independent Representatives, Independent Persons and Town/Parish Representatives play a critical role on the Committee and their input is highly valued by the Committee. With the exception of one Independent Representative and one Parish Representative, these appointments were made in 2021 for a period of four years. It is critical therefore that we have a process in place to ensure that these positions are re-advertised and recruited to, to ensure we maintain this critical input and are compliant with the Localism Act 2011.

7.2 The Committee are therefore in the process of re-advertising the roles. The first recruitment exercise unfortunately resulted in a lack of applications and therefore the roles are being re-advertised with those small number who applied the first time, being put forward for consideration as part of that process. We have revisited the recruitment process so that the vacancies will be more widely advertised, including in local newspaper(s). The existing representatives will remain in their highly valuable roles until either re-appointed or new representatives appointed. Shortlisted applicants will be interviewed by a Sub-Committee of the Standards Committee and appointment of the recommended candidates made by Full Council.

8. Dispensations

8.1 Dispensations were granted to dual-hatted County councillors and to councillors who also work for another local authority in Devon, to allow them to speak and vote on any matter before the Council and / or Committee relating to local government reorganisation in Devon. This ensures that residents are not disenfranchised and those councillors can continue to play a key role in debating what is a matter of key significance for everyone residing in East Devon.

9. Looking Ahead

9.1 Looking ahead, much of the work of the Committee is demand led. However, it will continue to monitor elected councillor's performance at meetings of the Council, Cabinet and Committees (whether remote or in person) and adherence to the Council's ethical governance framework. It will also identify and support provision of regular training and refresher events for elected councillors of the Council (particularly on the importance of the Code of Conduct and high standards of ethics and probity), as well as ensuring that the Committee itself remains updated on best practice in the local authority sector. Following the government consultation, it is hoped that changes will be made, in the near future, that will enhance the Standards regime and enable tougher sanctions to be imposed by Standards Committees in the more serious cases of breaches of the Code of Conduct and which lead to improvements in councillor performance generally.

Financial implications:

There are no financial implications directly arising from this annual report.

Legal implications:

There are no legal implications directly arising from this annual report.



Report to: Standards Committee

Date of Meeting 17 July 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Code of Conduct Complaint Update

Report summary:

To update the Standards Committee in relation to the Code of Conduct complaints received and/or progress made, since the last meeting in April 2025.

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

- (1) That the Standards Committee note the update and provide any feedback.

Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that the Committee are receiving regular updates and have sufficient oversight of Code of Conduct complaints.

Officer: Katie Webb @eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Assets and Economy
- ☒ Communications and Democracy
- ☒ Council, Corporate and External Engagement
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- ☐ Environment - Nature and Climate
- ☐ Environment - Operational
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact Low Impact

The Code of Conduct complaints procedures apply equally to everyone. The process also ensures that anyone with a disability has the ability to make a complaint with the assistance of Council officers where needed

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Medium Risk; Poor member behaviour brings reputational damage. It is essential that there is a robust process in place for monitoring Code of Conduct complaints by the Committee.

Links to background information None

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ A supported and engaged community
 - ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
 - ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services
-

Report in full

1. The Committee receive regular updates on Code of Conduct complaints received by the Council in relation to District, Town and Parish Councillors.
 2. Appendix A provides an update on complaints as well a spreadsheet of enquires relating to code of conduct complaints that we have received. Appendix B sets out performance data against the timescales set out in the procedure as well as providing some helpful information and summaries on trends and patterns with the complaints.
 3. Members are invited to consider the updates and data charts.
-

Financial implications:

There are no financial implications directly arising from this report.

Legal implications:

There are no significant legal implications directly arising from this report

Annex A

Standards Committee Code of Conduct complaints update Period: April 2025 to July 2025

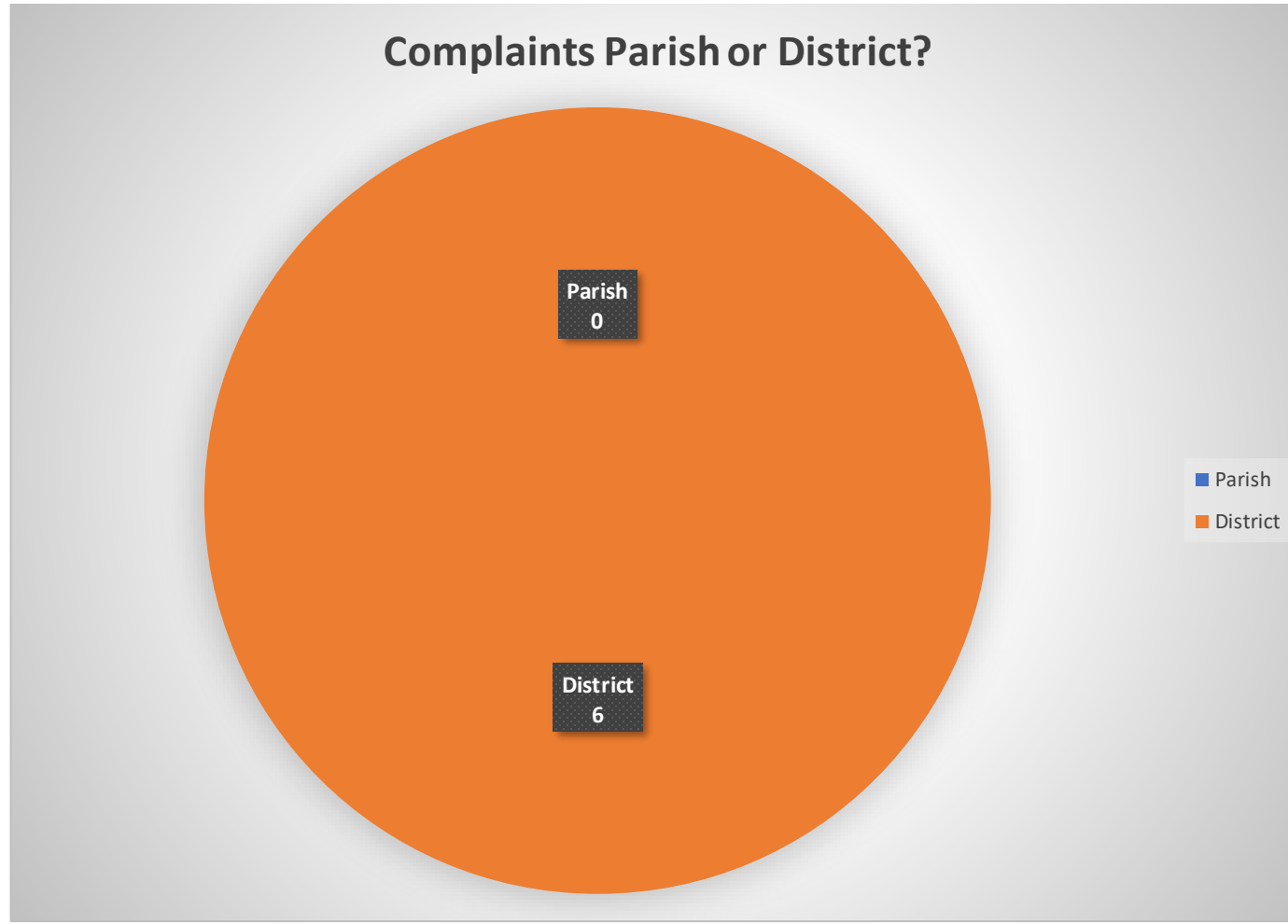
Case Ref	Parish/Town or District?	Complainant Councillor or member of the public?	Summary of Complaint	Area of Code alleged to be Breached	Date of First Contact	Date complaint received	Date of Stage 1 Decision	Rejected at Stage 1	Stage 1 timescale met?	Date of Stage 2 Decision	Stage 2 timescale met	Decision	Reason for delay	Lessons Learnt/ Next Steps
20205 /4	District	Member of the public	Failing to declare an interest	Failure to declare an interest	09/02/2025	24/02/2025	03/03/2025	N	Y				Exploring informal resolution and pre-election period	
2025/5	District	Councillor	Dispute between two councillors during and following a council meeting	Disrespect Bullying Disrepute	18/03/2025	26/03/2025	11/04/2025	N	Y	Due to be issued very shortly	N		Complex linked complaints and pre-election period	
2025/6	District	Councillor	Dispute between two councillors during and following a council meeting	Disrespect Bullying Disrepute	26/03/2025	26/05/2025	11/05/2025	N	Y	Due to be issued very shortly	N		Complex linked complaints and pre-election period	

Code of Conduct Enquiries between April 2025 and July 2025

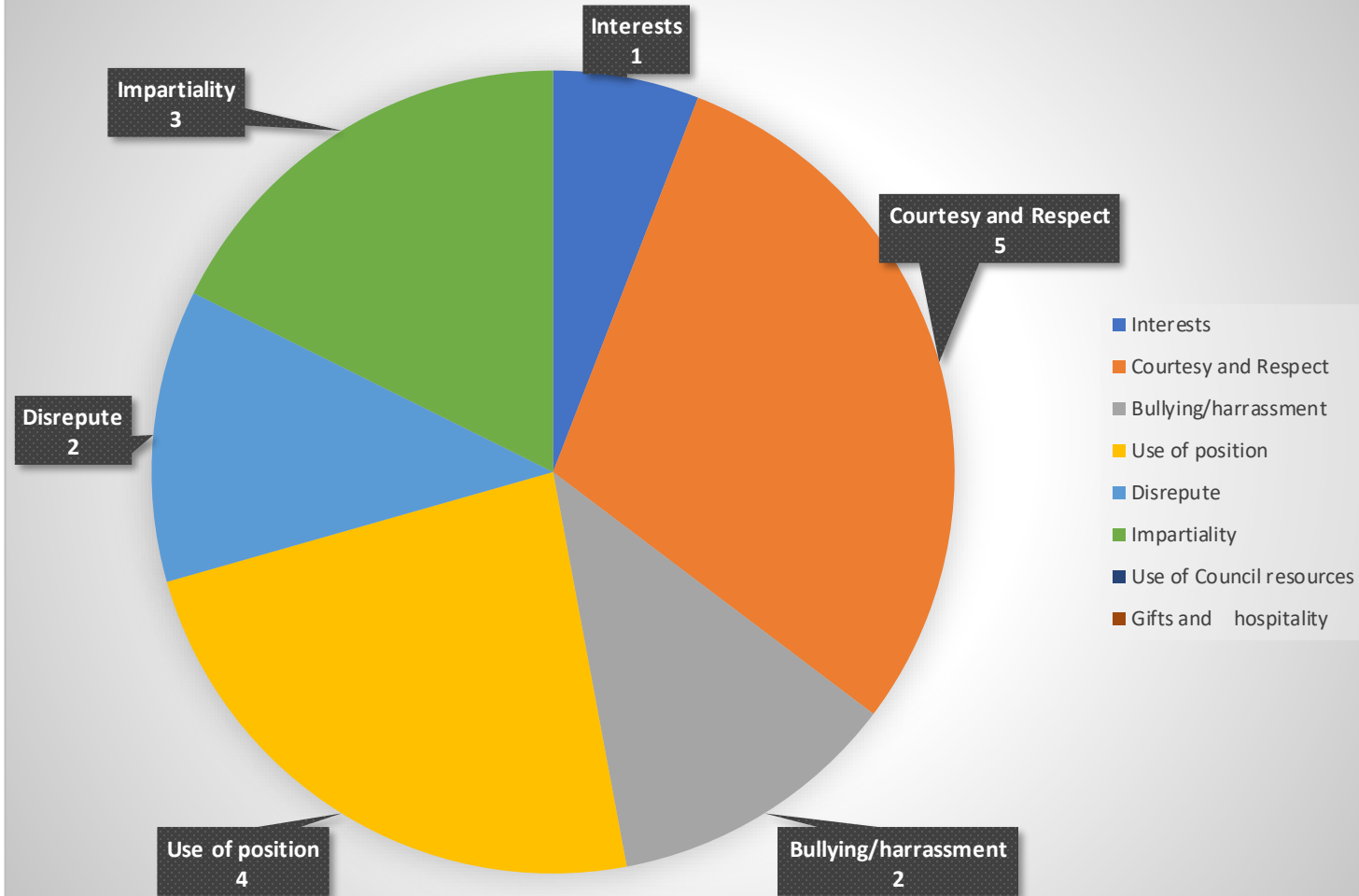
Enquiry Number	Date of Enquiry	Nature of Enquiry	Why enquiry has not progressed to CoC complaint
1	05/03/2025	3 possible code of conduct complaints from one complainant relating to planning issue	Complainant has been provided with the procedure and form after detailed discussion with KW. Complainant has not provided completed complaint documents to date.
2	30/04/2025	Alleged code of conduct complaint following election conduct	Complainant has been supplied with the procedure, code of conduct and complaint form and has been offered a telephone call to discuss but no response has been received. Suspected that the complainant realised that complaint was unlikely to in fact meet the requirements of the complaint procedure.
3	30/04/2025	Alleged code of conduct complaint following election conduct	Complainant has been supplied with the procedure, code of conduct and complaint form and has been offered a telephone call to discuss but no response has been received. Suspected that the complainant realised that complaint was unlikely to in fact meet the requirements of the complaint procedure.
4	13/05/2025	Possible code of conduct complaint against parish councillor	Complaint procedure and form provided to complainant, requested complaint form in word format which was provided and complainant stated complaint would be submitted by end of the week but did not send in. Since spoken to the possible subject councillor who was enquiring about whether a formal complaint was made against him but he said he has resigned due to the incident and allegations and therefore a complaint could not proceed in any event.
5	19/05/2025	Possible councillor complaint from another councillor (Parish)	Complaint info and procedure provided along with explanation of remit of MO, no response. Suspect complainant realised the issue would likely fall outside of the CoC complaint procedure.

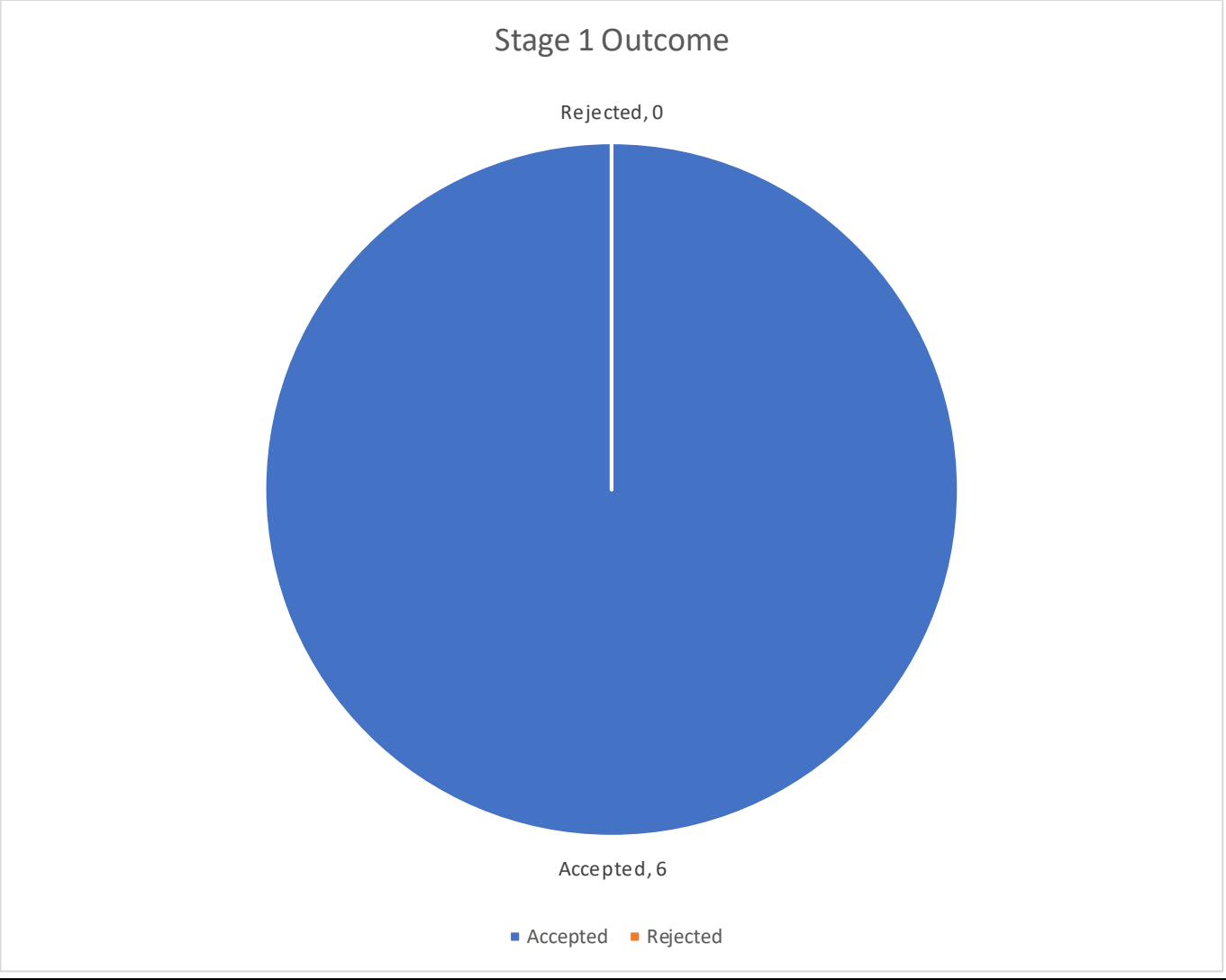
Annex B

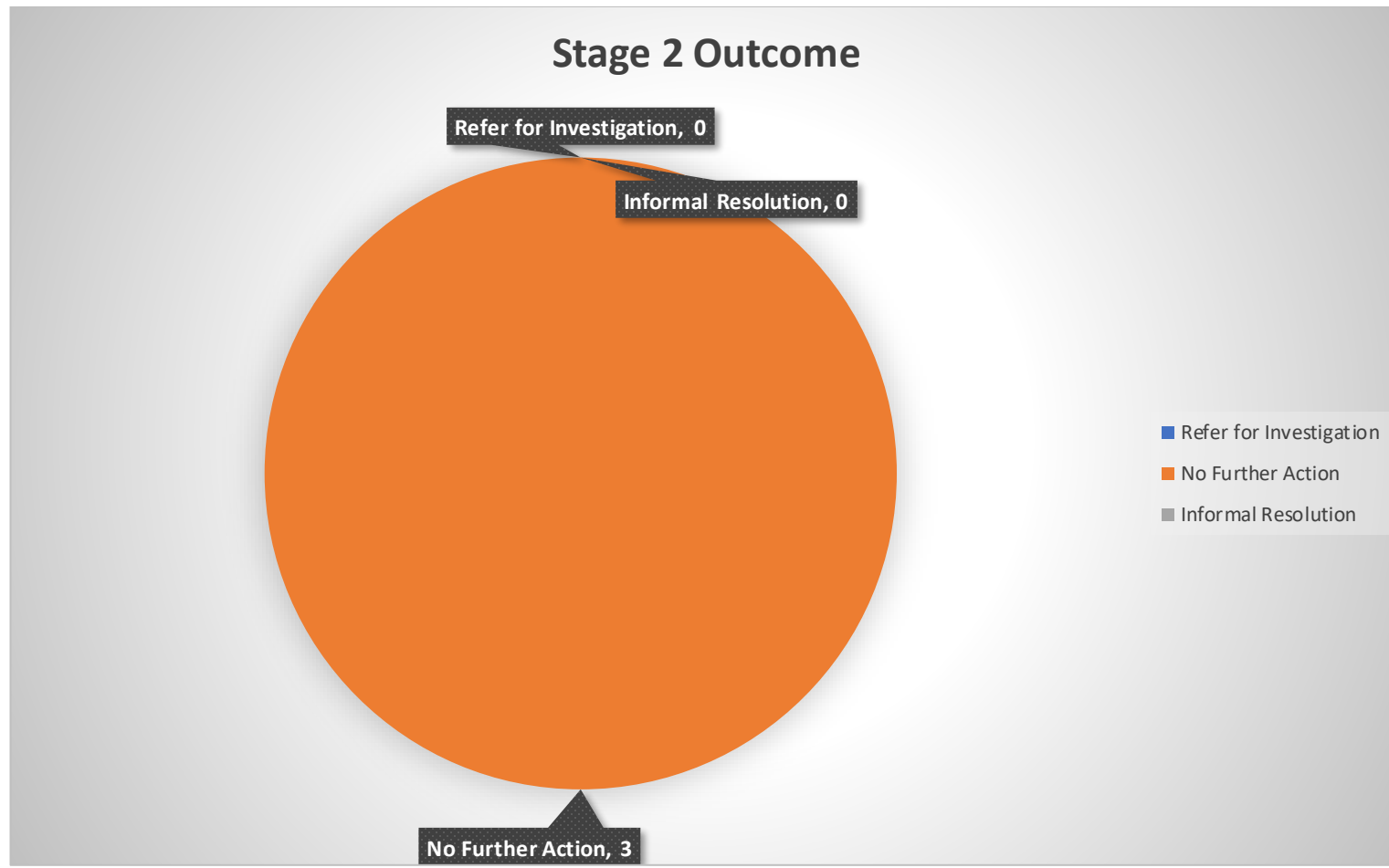
Data Charts summary of 2025 to date

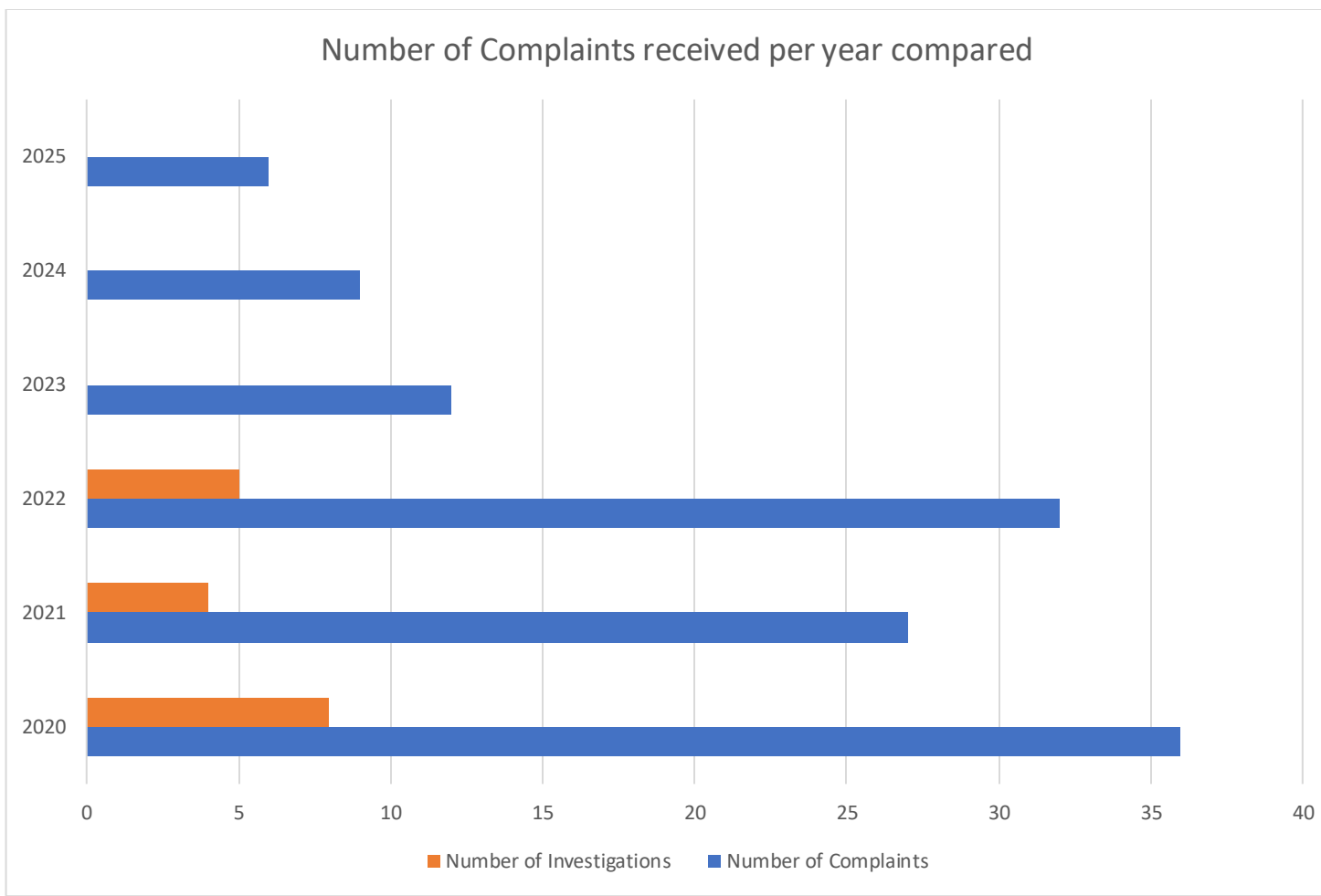


Area of Alleged Code Breach









Report to: Standards Committee

Date of Meeting 17 July 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A



Standards Update report

Report summary:

It is important that the Monitoring Officer provides a regular report to the Committee on ethical standards and Code of Conduct issues. The Monitoring Officer will provide a verbal update at the meeting in relation to:-

1. Recent standards decisions;
2. Training of District Councillors in relation to the Code of Conduct;

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

That the Committee note the verbal update.

Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that Committee are kept up-to-date regarding ethical standards and code of conduct issues.

Officer: Melanie Wellman, Director of Licensing and Governance and Monitoring Officer, email melanie.wellman@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Assets and Economy
- ☒ Communications and Democracy
- ☒ Council, Corporate and External Engagement
- ☐ Culture, Leisure, Sport and Tourism
- ☐ Environment - Nature and Climate
- ☐ Environment - Operational
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Place, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk; This report ensures that Members are having sufficient oversight in relation to Ethical standards matters.

Links to background information

None

Link to Council Plan

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ A supported and engaged community
 - ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
 - ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
 - ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services
-

Purpose of Report

It is important that the Monitoring Officer provides a regular report to the Committee on ethical standards and Code of Conduct issues. The Monitoring Officer will provide a verbal update at the meeting in relation to:-

- Recent Standards Decisions;
- Training of District Councillors in relation to the Code of Conduct.

Two case scenarios are included in appendix 1 for training purposes.

Financial implications:

There are no financial implications to be added to this report.

Legal implications:

It is important that the Committee receives regular updates regarding ethical standards and code of conduct matters, to ensure it is having appropriate oversight of and meeting its Terms of Reference.

Standards Case Updates - July 2025 Standards Committee

Courtesy and Respect Vs Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination

Courtesy and Respect –

- I treat other councillors and members of the public with courtesy and respect.
- I treat Council employees, employees and representatives of partner organisations and those volunteering for the Council with courtesy and respect and respect for the role they play.

Respect means politeness and courtesy in behaviour, speech, and in the written word. Debate and having different views are all part of a healthy democracy. As a councillor, you can express, challenge, criticise and disagree with views, ideas, opinions and policies in a robust but civil manner. You should not, however, subject individuals, groups of people or organisations to personal attack. In your contact with the public, you should treat them politely and courteously. Rude and offensive behaviour lowers the public's expectations and confidence in councillors.

In return, you have a right to expect respectful behaviour from the public. If members of the public are being abusive, intimidatory or threatening you are entitled to stop any conversation or interaction in person or online and report them to the Council, the relevant social media provider or the police. This also applies to fellow councillors, where action could then be taken under the Councillor Code of Conduct, and Council employees, where concerns should be raised in line with the Council's Member / Officer Protocol.

Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination -

- do not bully any person.
- I do not harass any person.
- I promote equalities and do not discriminate unlawfully against any person.
- I do not do anything which may cause the Council to breach a statutory duty or any of the equality enactments (as defined in section 33 of the Equality Act 2010).

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) characterises bullying as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means that undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. Bullying might be a regular pattern of behaviour or a one-off incident, happen face-to-face, on social media, in emails or phone calls, happen in the workplace or at work social events and may not always be obvious or noticed by others.

The Protection from Harassment Act 1997 defines harassment as conduct that causes alarm or distress or puts people in fear of violence and must involve such conduct on at least two occasions. It can include repeated attempts to impose unwanted communications and contact upon a person in a manner that could be expected to cause distress or fear in any reasonable person.

Unlawful discrimination is where someone is treated unfairly because of a protected characteristic. Protected characteristics are specific aspects of a person's identity defined by the Equality Act 2010. They are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The Equality Act 2010 places specific duties on local authorities. Councillors have a central role to play in ensuring that equality issues are integral to the Council's performance and strategic aims, and that there is a strong vision and public commitment to equality across public services.

Case Study 1

Summary of Allegation

It is alleged that at the Town Council offices, the Subject Councillor made inappropriate comments to the Complainant when discussing whether a grant application made could be approved.

It is alleged that the Councillor:

- i) questioned whether money for the grant could be taken from elsewhere in the Town Council;
- ii) suggested that the Complainant spoke to the Town Clerk to try to persuade him to change his mind by wearing a low-cut top and to push her breasts out so that they sit like a balcony;
- iii) during a further conversation, made an inappropriate comment to the Complainant by saying that she made him feel calm and he wanted to give her a cuddle,
- iv) on a previous occasion when the Subject Councillor attended the Town Council offices, he made an inappropriate comment by saying to the Complainant she was his crush for the day, and he was falling in love with her,
- v) ignored the request for Councillors to make an appointment with officers before attending the Town Council Offices and when he did attend, he stood in such close proximity to the Complainant as to touch her arm.

Summary of the evidence considered, and the representations made

The Subject Councillor stated that in response to the Complainant resolving a system issue, he stated “You are fantastic, I’d like to give you a big cuddle but I’m sorry I can’t. You are my crush for the day/week and I could fall in love with you”.

It was also agreed by the Subject Councillor that he told the Complainant about a time when he was in St Tropez and described an experience he had whilst standing at a market stall explaining that a woman stood next to him wearing bikini bottoms and an open blouse, with a white bra with a fringe which meant that her breasts were at his eye level.

The Subject Councillor categorically denied that he suggested to the Complainant that she dress in a particular way when discussing the grant application. This was a matter of factual dispute between the Complainant and Subject Councillor.

The Sub-Committee heard evidence from the Complainant. She stated that during the discussion about the grant application the Subject Councillor had asked her to wear a low-cut top with a balcony bra when discussing the matter with the Town Clerk. She also stated that it was during that conversation on 23rd June 2022 that the Subject Councillor told the story about the time when he was in St Tropez and standing at a market stall when a woman

stood next to him wearing bikini bottoms and an open blouse with a white bra with a fringe which meant that her breasts were at his eye level.

When asked how the conversations made her feel, the complainant stated that they made her anxious, that she would hide when the Councillor came into the offices, she found the conversations embarrassing, demeaning and insulting, that the Councillor made her feel nervous and that she was scared to be around him or alone with him.

The Subject Councillor accepted that he did make reference to the Complainant's cleavage, which he was very conscious of, on account of the low-cut top she was wearing as he did not want her to think that he was looking at her breasts.

Cllr Murphy explained the context to his accepted comments in that he was having difficulty with some Software and asked for the number for the technical team to assist him. However, the complainant offered to help herself so he fetched his tablet device and she was able to fix the issue with ease. He asked her to show this again and she did so. The Subject Councillor explained that he was so relieved that the computer issue was finally fixed, that he uttered the words, "I could hug you, but that would not be allowed. Instead, I think I will make you my crush for the week / day." He also said words to the effect that if she was able to fix things with such ease, he could "fall in love with her".

The Subject Councillor explained that he did not think that the Complainant was dressed appropriately and he decided that he should deal with this issue himself. It was in this context that he attempted to draw an analogy with what is acceptable dress in one context may not be acceptable in another, by giving an account of the encounter he had had in St Tropez.

The Subject Councillor accepted that in hindsight the reference to the woman in St Tropez was inappropriate, that he got it wrong and that he regretted it. He stated that he did not intend to offend or insult the Complainant or make her feel uncomfortable and would not deal with the matter in that way if he found himself in the same situation. He explained that he had taken time to read literature on unconscious bias and now considered himself to be more sympathetic and empathetic and stated that he was deeply sorry that he did not empathise with the Complainant at the time of his comments.

Case Study 2

Summary of Allegations

Another Councillor put a post on Facebook containing a video clip of a bird surrounded by litter with the words:

"Sad to see South Kesteven Greens refusing to support wildlife near the A1.

Despite this setback, I'm proud to have seconded a successful amendment to the Budget, securing £60,000 to clean up the A1 and protect our environment. The new reserve will be called the 'Clean the A1' reserve. Local Greens, along with Labour, Liberals, and most Independents, either abstained or voted against this. Shameful. "

A second councillor commented on the post, saying:

"Ben, Could you please explain why you voted AGAINST the overall budget which included the employment of a Tree Officer post, £700,000 for void repairs, financial support for our play parks and leisure centres and the creation of a reserve for litter-picking on the A1?"

A member of public replied to that comment by saying:

"... the answer is simple, he is a self-promoting Pratt and very selective with the truth. Had he ever achieved anything as a councillor."

The Subject Councillor liked this comment which was the basis for the first complaint.

Another Councillor posted, on Facebook a link to a Lincsonline article and wrote:

"Former portfolio holder for bins at SKDC, Cllr Patsy Ellis, has left the Cabinet and the Green Party. Did she jump before she was binned?"

The Subject Councillor commented on the post. He stated:

"What a vile disrespectful piece of garbage you really are Ben !! What do you know about Cllr Ellis and her person[al] life or me[n]tal health ?? Have you given any consideration to this ? ...I think not !! Given your obvious low intellect !! and FYI if you don't report my commentI'll be very disappointed !!! You vile disrespectful fool !!!"

A member of public commented on the post to say:

"You disgusting little turd. No doubt you will get away with this abuse yet again just like you have gotten away with every report made against you!!! Odd that. Time to look a little closer into who is reviewing these complaints I think!!! Vile man."

The Subject Councillor responded to the comment to say:

"Well said " and gave a thumbs up emoji.

Summary of the evidence considered, and the representations made

The Subject Councillors response to the complaint was:

".....I think it speaks for itself. Is the Resident right? Has Cllr Green behaved like a "Pratt" ? Was the post "Self Serving" ?. I would suggest he and it was! I did ask for the post to be removed before it could cause any Reputational damage to other councillors which it now unfortunately has!. I would consider myself a " Self serving Pratt" if I had posted something which would and could cause Reputational damage to other councillors ? Yes! I would. Also the complaint holds no ground and I do not recognise it, as it is based on the "Code of conduct" Something we have had confirmed as not being worth the paper it is written on given Cllr Jeal can Publicly insult a Female Councillor in the chamber and not be held to account. The code and insults are clearly subjective. I reserve the right to "like" anything and everything on facebook."

"I totally understand Your only doing your job, but I don't recognise the complaints as I don't recognise Ben Green as a Councillor until he takes action to correct his vile behaviour on social media. Ben Green must remove all posts from his social media which have without doubt caused reputational damage and distress. For Graham Jeal to suggest Ben Greens post was a harmless question is outrageous!, he was quite obviously mocking a Person and Cllr whilst they were at a low point. The post is disrespectful and shows a complete lack of compassion for Cllr Ellis and until removed I remain resolute in my stance that I don't recognise Ben Green, therefore I can't recognise any complaints."



Report to: Standards Committee

Date of Meeting 17 July 2025

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

Standards Committee Work Programme

Report summary:

To agree the Committee's Work Programme for 2025/26

Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

Recommendation:

To approve the Work Programme for 2025/2026 with or without amendments.

Reason for recommendation:

To ensure that the Committee has a robust work programme in place and can monitor activity against that Work Programme at each meeting.

Officer: Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance and Monitoring Officer, email melanie.wellman@eastdevon.gov.uk

Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☐ Climate Action and Emergency Response
- ☐ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☒ Council and Corporate Co-ordination
- ☒ Democracy, Transparency and Communications
- ☐ Economy and Assets
- ☐ Finance
- ☐ Strategic Planning
- ☐ Sustainable Homes and Communities
- ☐ Tourism, Sports, Leisure and Culture

Equalities impact Low Impact

Climate change Low Impact

Risk: Low Risk; Agreeing a Work Programme for the Committee will ensure that important issues are not overlooked and that the Committee can monitor progress against that work programme.

Links to background information None

Link to [Council Plan](#)

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☐ A supported and engaged community
- ☐ Carbon neutrality and ecological recovery
- ☐ Resilient economy that supports local business
- ☒ Financially secure and improving quality of services

Purpose of Report

1. The following table sets out the proposed Work Programme for the Standards Committee for 2024/25. The Committee are invited to consider the draft and make any changes that they see fit.

Description	Timetable	Responsible Officer	Comments
Annual Report from the Chair of the Committee regarding the work of the Committee	April 2026	Chair/Monitoring Officer	
Promote ethical standards by providing support and training in relation to the Code of Conduct to District Councillors , Parish Clerks and Councillors (as required);	<p>Training provided to District Councillors in May/June 2023</p> <p>Training provided to Town and Parish Councils in September and November 2023 (including District Councillors)</p> <p>Further training to be provided in Autumn 2025.</p>	Monitoring Officer	
Receive conduct of hearings training	To be agreed if required	Monitoring Officer	
Continue to investigate ways of resolving issues before they escalate to a formal complaint	Report as required – presentation from early 2025 to be presented to any new members of the Committee as part of induction	Monitoring Officer	
Promote ethical standards by engaging via the Chair of the Committee on a regular basis with the political leaders and Chief Executive of the Council	Twice a year	Chair	

Receive updates regarding Code of Conduct complaints	Every meeting	Monitoring Officer	
Hear Standards complaints where an investigation has concluded there has been a breach of the Code and the Monitoring Officer refers the matter for hearing	As required	Monitoring Officer Sub-Committee of Standards Committee	
Consider dispensation applications	When applications received	Monitoring Officer	
Conduct a review of the Code of Conduct	Reviewed July 2025	Monitoring Officer	
Consider draft Gifts and Hospitality Protocol for Members	July 2025	Monitoring Officer	
Consider changes to the procedures for dealing with Officer Declaration of Personal Interests	November 2025	Monitoring Officer	
Receive an update on Standards issues	Every meeting	Monitoring Officer	
To receive regular updates on the gifts and hospitality accepted or refused by members and officers	July 2025 and January 2026	Monitoring Officer	
To review Protocols relating to standards and behaviour	To be agreed	Monitoring Officer	

Financial implications:

There are no financial implications to be added to this report.

Legal implications:

There are no substantive legal issues to be added to this report.