

Meeting on 27th July 2021

Agenda Item No 8

Questions by Members to Full Council under Procedure rule 9.2

Question 1: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Democracy & Transparency from Councillor Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Democracy & Transparency, with reference to Part 52, Paragraph 7.2 of the Constitution (Code of Conduct for Employees, 'Personal Interests'), in the central register held by Democratic Services how many Council officers have declared (a) friendships with Council contractors, (b) interests in businesses or community groups which 'might benefit from Council activity', (c) own a house or property which 'might benefit from Council activity', and (d) membership of private organisations which does not have a formal membership but has a commitment of allegiance and secrecy about its rules, membership or conduct, including freemasonry.

Answer:

Following the asking of this question at April's Council meeting – [28th April 2021 Council Meeting](#) – the work to check around 490 employees' register of interests has just been concluded which is why a written answer wasn't provided earlier. The number of officers in each category are as follows;

- (a) friendships with Council contractors
8. It should be noted that some of the employees have erred on the side of caution by declaring the interest despite there being no active contract with any current Council contractor.
- (b) interests in businesses or community groups which 'might benefit from Council activity'
4.
- (c) own a house or property which 'might benefit from Council activity'
1.
- (d) membership of private organisations which does not have a formal membership but has a commitment of allegiance and secrecy about its rules, membership or conduct, including freemasonry.
3. One of these is unlikely to meet the specified criteria but has been declared anyway and is therefore included.

Question 2: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Paul Millar

With reference to a statement made on 23rd May 2019 in which he explicitly advocated 'a move from Cabinet governance to the more democratic Committee system in which all Councillors play an equal part', has his experience of being Council Leader during a pandemic changed his view on Cabinet governance and does he believe that the Governance Review Working Party continue its work or be curtailed?

Source: <https://seatonmatters.org/2019/05/24/official-east-devon-alliance-statement-issued-on-cooperation-with-independent-group-at-eddc/>

Answer:

Thank you to Cllr Millar for raising this question.

It was a personal priority for me on election in May 2019 that the council reviews the way it has been governed in the past. I was pleased, therefore, when a working party was set up which resolved to seek counsel from other authorities elsewhere. Sadly, this decision came shortly before the pandemic and these visits have not been possible to date. It is a pity that dithering around this issue had previously frittered crucial time.

Question 3: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Leader of the Council from Councillor Paul Millar

To ask the Leader, with reference to Councillor allowances and the increasing diversity of membership of East Devon District Council (with a shift from well-heeled retirees to office and shop workers and people studying), the increasing responsibilities for Members since the pandemic and in certain areas due to regulatory changes (e.g. Assistant Portfolio Holders, Vice Chairs of Strategic Planning Committee, Audit & Governance, Scrutiny and Licensing & Enforcement), would he agree to call an Independent Remuneration Panel in the autumn to allow a fully independent review of roles and responsibilities and whether the comparatively very modest allowances (one of the lowest in England) may be due a modest increase, given that the allowances at Devon County Council and Exeter City Council have increased on multiple occasions in recent years, while EDDC allowances have been completely frozen since 2010?

Answer:

I agree that much-delayed progress around this subject should be picked up again as soon as possible.

Question 4: Procedure Rule 9.2 to the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities from Councillor Paul Millar

To ask the Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Homes & Communities, with reference to the LGA Modern Slavery event both she and I attended, does EDDC a) have an officer lead for

modern slavery as the LGA advise and b) publish information on our website about how residents and Councillors can report their suspicions of modern slavery and our policy?

Answer:

This matter was covered in the report to Cabinet in July on our Safeguarding Policy, which covers Modern Slavery and Prevent (preventing radicalisation and extremism). The corporate lead for the Council is the Strategic Lead for Housing, Health and Environment supported by the Community Safety & ASB Coordinator. The policy also appoints Service Leads as champions for their Service in these areas.

The Safeguarding policy is on the website as well as information on modern slavery and associated ant-social behaviour guidance.

[Useful community safety links - East Devon](#)