

Report to: Council



Date of Meeting 11<sup>th</sup> July 2023

Document classification: Part A Public Document

Exemption applied: None

Review date for release N/A

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**Council commissioned an independent investigation by Verita into the actions of EDDC following allegations and then criminal charges against former Councillor John Humphreys**

**Report summary:**

Council at its meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2022 recommended (subject to Senior Officer Decision as the recommendation was made at a consultative meeting) that:

“-This Council hereby commissions Verita to carry out an independent investigation in accordance with Verita’s proposal attached (“the Investigation”) and instructs Simon Davey the Strategic Lead for Finance immediately to complete (or authorise completion of) the contract and any necessary paperwork with Verita; Approves a budget of up to £45,000 (exc VAT) for the Investigation. Approves an exemption to the Council's standing orders that would normally require quotations to be obtained from three suppliers to enable the Council to appoint Verita given their experience and expertise in this highly specialist area. Requests that Verita treats Simon Davey together with Cllr Ian Thomas Chair of East Devon District Council and Cllr Sarah Jackson the Portfolio Holder for Democracy and Transparency and Cllr Jess Bailey as the relevant contacts for the purposes of any queries or day to day matters relating to the Investigation and who shall in the first instance receive Verita's report following completion of the Investigation’-“

Verita’s investigation was initially completed on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023 and their report scheduled to a Council meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> March to be considered. On 21<sup>st</sup> March new information was provided and as a consequence the Council meeting was postponed until the information could be assessed and a determination made by Verita if this had any implications on their report.

Verita have now completed that assessment and details are contained in a supplementary report attached. This additional report needs to be read in conjunction with the earlier report, also attached, the original report contains the main investigation details, conclusions and recommendations. Verita have concluded that the supplementary investigation has not altered their conclusions and recommendations in that original report.

It should be noted that during the time of the second stage of investigation Cllr Ian Thomas did not seek re-election as a district councillor and stepped down from the Commissioning Group on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2003, he was replaced by Cllr Eleanor Rylance as the newly appointed Chair of Council on 24<sup>th</sup> May.

**Is the proposed decision in accordance with:**

Budget Yes  No

Policy Framework Yes  No

**Recommendation:**

That Council:

1. Note the contents and findings of the Verita reports appended.

2. Approve the recommendations identified in the Verita report, namely:
- R1** In the event that a similar event arises in the future, we consider that anyone from EDDC invited to a LADO meeting should not go unaccompanied and should consult the Safeguarding Lead.
- R2** EDDC should revisit its discussions and plans to reform the Honorary Alderman/ Alderwoman process.
- R3** EDDC should consider implementing a development programme for members to incorporate regular 1:1s, ongoing training needs assessments, surveys and exit interviews for councillors.
- R4** The Safeguarding Lead should consider adding specific procedural guidance to the safeguarding policy to help users understand how, in practice how risk should be assessed and managed.
- R5** EDDC should consider designating safeguarding champions from within the councillor body.
- R6** Officers, the Chair of Council and group leaders should encourage all councillors to attend the safeguarding training that is available. This should include induction and ongoing refresher training.
- R7** The Safeguarding Lead should set up a small working group with councillors to consider what training would be appropriate to improve their understanding of preventative safeguarding practice.

**Reason for recommendation:**

These are the recommendations put forward by the independent investigation undertaken by Verita.

Officer: Simon Davey, Director of Finance, [sdavey@eastdevon.gov.uk](mailto:sdavey@eastdevon.gov.uk)

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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;

**Links to background information** Council Meeting Agenda 28<sup>th</sup> September 2022: ([Public Pack](#))[Agenda Document for Council, 28/09/2022 18:00 \(eastdevon.gov.uk\)](#)

**Link to [Council Plan](#)**

Priorities (check which apply)

- Better homes and communities for all
- A greener East Devon
- A resilient economy

### **Financial implications:**

No direct financial implications have been identified in the recommendations of the report other than recommendation R3 which could have financial implications as it is likely additional resources will be required within either our Democratic Service and/or our Human Resources team/s. This will need further assessment and if approved suggest a further report is presented to an appropriate Committee of the Council. The budget approved by Council was £45k there is an estimated overspend of £8k which is attributable to the requirement to carry out additional work required to produce the supplementary investigation report.

### **Legal implications:**

The Verita report sets out the detailed legal position relating to the events covered in the report. It is not proposed to revisit these in this covering report. Any recommendations made will be progressed in line with the legal structure in which the Council operates in terms of both internal and external governance. Where further legal points are raised these can be answered either in the meeting or subsequently.