

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Standards Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 20 November 2025

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 9.00 am and ended at 10.35 am

12 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the Standards Committee held on the 17th July 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

13 Declarations of interest

Cllr J Bailey; ORI Member of Devon County Council; did not take part or vote in minute item 18 as County Councillor.

14 Public speaking

None.

15 Matters of urgency

None.

16 Confidential/exempt item(s)

None.

17 Appointment of Independent Representatives, Independent Persons and Town and Parish Representatives

The report from the Monitoring Officer set out the recruitment process and the outcome of the interviews to fill the seats that expire this year.

The report recommended individuals to the Committee to recommend on to Council for co-option. Once appointed, the six applicants will be in place for a term of 4 years or until local government reorganisation, whichever is sooner. They will also receive an annual allowance of £400 per annum in accordance with the adopted scheme.

The Chair and committee members gave their warm thanks for the valued contribution of Professor Diana Kuh (Independent Person), Cllr Mrs Pauline Stott (Town and Parish Representative) and Mr Robert Wood (Independent Member) and their work on the committee over many years.

The committee did raise the issue of the number of women now on the committee as a whole, once the appointments had been approved. Getting the recruitment out to individual town and parish councils was also discussed. Whilst the committee were assured that the recommendations were meeting the requirements of the positions, any further recruitment would be discussed at a future meeting.

RECOMMENDED to Council the appointment of:

1. Mr Steve Jupp and Mr Philip Wilde as co-opted non-voting Independent Members on the Standards Committee for a term of 4 years, or until local government reorganisation, whichever is sooner;
2. Cllr Chris Lockyer of Sidmouth Town Council and Cllr Francis Pullman of Westhill Parish Council as co-opted non-voting Town/Parish Representatives on the Standards Committee for a term of 4 years, or until local government reorganisation, whichever is sooner;
3. Mr Martin Goscombe and Mr Pat Coulter as Independent Persons for a term of 4 years, or until local government reorganisation, whichever is sooner.

18 **Applications for dispensations**

The Committee had previously considered and approved a number of dispensations for local government reorganisation at the beginning of the year.

Following County Council elections in May 2025, applications for a dispensation have been received from District Councillors who were appointed to the County Council at that election. These were from Cllrs Arnott, Hayward and Hookway.

The categories of dispensation available to the Committee to grant in these circumstances are:

- considers that granting the dispensation is in the interests of persons living in the authority's area; and
- considers that it is otherwise appropriate to grant a dispensation

The Committee were asked to consider the applications and decide whether or not to grant the dispensation. Any grant was recommended to be in place until the next District Council election or local government reorganisation, whichever is sooner.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that those granted a dispensation would receive guidance that the dispensation does not override the legal requirement to avoid bias or predetermination.

The committee sought to amend the proposed recommendations in order to handle subsequent dispensation applications.

RESOLVED

1. the granting of dispensations to dual-hatted County and District Council members, including any future applications that meet the same criteria, to enable them to discuss and vote on any matter relating to devolution or local government reorganisation in Devon, be approved, with effect from the date of this meeting or the date of the application, whichever is sooner;
2. that the dispensations are approved on the basis that granting the dispensation is in the interests of persons living in the authority's area;
3. that the dispensations are granted until the next District Council elections or until the date of vesting for a new Unitary Council, whichever is sooner.

(Cllr Jess Bailey left the meeting for this item)

19 **Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework consultation update**

The Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for local authorities in England consultation sought views from members of the public, current and prospective local authority elected members, local government officers from all types and tiers of authorities, and local authority sector representative organisations.

The Committee considered the consultation on the 16th January 2025 and delegated authority to the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair to respond to the consultation by the February deadline.

The update report set out the summary of government proposals in response to the consultation, on the elements of:

- Introduction of a mandatory code of conduct
- Standards committees for all authorities
- Empowering individuals affected by councillor misconduct to come forward
- Introducing the sanction of suspension
- Interim suspension
- Disqualification for multiple breaches and gross misconduct
- Appeals and a national appeals function

There was no timetable set for when legislation changes would come before Government.

Discussion on the proposals included:

- What would be put in place for the benefit of the electorate where their elected member had been suspended; the electorate would effectively be disenfranchised if a suspension was imposed on a single member ward;
- If allowances would be paid to a suspended member if they were subsequently cleared of any breach of the code of conduct;
- Detail on the proposals would come forward once the legislation was put before Government for debate.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the update.

20 **Code of Conduct Complaints update**

The report gave details of complaints covering the period January to November 2025.

The update highlighted a positive move to fewer complaints being received; and a consistent reduction in investigations over the past five years. The Chair and Vice Chair gave thanks to the hard work of both officers, and the Independent Persons on complaints.

In response to a question, whilst training was done regularly for District Council members, at town and parish level the resources varied; DALC could provide training, and the Monitoring Officer had plans to arrange a further session for Towns and Parishes in the near future.

RESOLVED that the Committee noted the update.

21 **Gifts and Hospitality update**

The committee received an update on the registration of gifts and hospitality received for the period January to October 2025.

Training on the updated protocol on registration would be provided to Members in the coming months.

Feedback on the report included:

- The appropriateness of accepting tickets;
- Pleased to see declarations of below the agreed threshold, for reason of transparency;
- Declarations at town and parish level were dependent on the code adopted;
- All offers, accepted or declined, should be declared to demonstrate to the public the level and type of offers being made to both councillors and officers.

RESOLVED that the update be noted.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

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

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

R Collins

Independent Persons

D Kuh

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)

Apologies:

Pat Coulter, Independent Person

Chair

Date: