

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Standards Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 9 April 2026

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.02 am and ended at 10.59 am

22 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on the 20th November 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

23 Declarations of interest

None.

24 Public speaking

None.

25 Matters of urgency

None.

26 Confidential/exempt item(s)

None.

27 Standards Committee Annual Report March 2026

The report set out the work undertaken by the Standards Committee and supporting team for the 2025/26 civic term.

This included the work on Code of Conduct complaints during 2025. A total of eight complaints were received, relating to both District and Town/Parish Councillors. Following initial assessment, one complaint was rejected as outside jurisdiction, two were resolved informally through training, and no complaints were referred for investigation. The Committee noted a continued year-on-year reduction in the number of complaints and investigations, reflecting early intervention and effective case management by the Monitoring Officer and team.

It also set out the response to Government consultation on proposed changes to the Standards regime. The proposed changes will require a change in legislation and further details are pending.

Dispensations were also granted to dual-hatted Council councillors and those who work for another local authority in Devon, to permit them to speak and vote on any local government reorganisation matter before the authority.

Comments from the committee included:

- Clarity on some complaints having more than one code of conduct breach included in the complaint;
- Helpful and clear report to present the work of the committee to a wider audience;
- Question if feedback was sought from complainants on how they found the process; in response, whilst some feedback was provided, there was no prescriptive way to obtain that. The Monitoring Officer agreed to review the use of a feedback form as utilised by other authorities to help further evaluate the process;
- Entering into discussion with complainants helped to explain fully the process and possible outcomes;
- Overall a positive move on complaints from previous years due to improvements made;
- Concern over pending changes in legislation on bringing back suspensions – in response, the expectation was that there would be safeguards (such as a right of appeal) but the government response was still pending;
- Suggestion to highlight sections 4 and 7 of the report in presenting the report to full Council.

RESOLVED that

1. The Annual Report, outlining the work undertaken by the Standards Committee for the civic term 2025/26, be agreed to be presented to Council, with any subsequent additions from the meeting of the committee to be included;
2. Delegated authority to be granted to the Monitoring Officer in conjunction with the Chair and Vice Chair to make any changes required by the Committee.

28 Code of conduct complaints update

The report covered the period of 2025 along with the number of complaints received since the committee last met in November 2025.

The number of complaints received per year had been decreasing steadily since 2022 with a total of 7 complaints accepted, with 5 as no further action and the remaining two reaching informal resolution.

The committee were updated on the complaints received between November 2025 and March 2026. Three of those complaints since publication of the report had now been rejected due to the complaints not meeting the criteria for demonstrating breach(s) of the code of conduct.

Discussion included:

- Care on succession planning for staff resource for dealing with complaints to keep the time taken to process the complaint to an efficient period. In response, more staff resource was available now following the appointment of the Assistant Director – Legal & Governance (Deputy Monitoring Officer).
- The higher level in complaints relating to District Councillors for 2025 may have been impacted by the County Council Elections.
- Data splitting out the complaint being a member of the public or a councillor would help give the committee more insight and a request was made for this to be included in future reports.
- Complaints are not in the public domain unless the complaint had reached the point where a Standards Hearing had reached an outcome and published their findings.

- The ongoing work to interact with complainants, in explaining the process and possible outcomes, was welcomed.

RESOLVED that the Code of Conduct complaints update be noted.

29 **Standards work programme update**

The committee reviewed the work programme that set out work already undertaken alongside work planned. The work planned had been completed, apart from the consideration of changes to procedures for Officer declaration of personal interests.

Comments on this work included that there was a balance to be struck between the resource in undertaking this review, and the pending work under local government reorganisation whereby the procedure would be reviewed anyway for the purpose of use under the new authority.

Suggestions were also made for more clarity on emerging best practice being brought to the committee outside of the work on case scenarios for learning exercises for committee members; and clarity sought on when training for the Member/Officer protocol and the Gifts and Hospitality protocol would take place. Member training had already taken place at the end of 2025, with staff training planned now that more resources were available to the team for delivery.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

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

Independent Persons

P Coulter
M Goscomb

Independent Representatives

K Bryant
S Jupp
P Wilde

Town and Parish Representatives

S Sexton
C Lockyear
F Pullman

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

R Collins

Officers in attendance:

James Docherty, Assistant Director Governance & Legal
Melanie Wellman, Director of Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Debbie Meakin, Democratic Services Officer

Councillor apologies:

J Whibley

Chair

Date: