

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** held on 10 June 2020
at 6.00 pm

Present

Councillors

C J Eginton (Chairman)
Mrs F J Colthorpe, C R Slade,
Mrs M E Squires, L D Taylor, A White,
A Wilce, Mrs N Woollatt and A Wyer

Also Present

Councillor(s)

R M Deed and L J Cruwys

Also Present

Officer(s):

Kathryn Tebbey (Head of Legal (Monitoring Officer)), Maria De Leburne (Legal Services Team Leader), Deborah Sharpley (Solicitor) and Sally Gabriel (Member Services Manager)

1 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Cllr C J Eginton be elected Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2020/21.

2 **PROTOCOL FOR REMOTE MEETINGS (00-03-33)**

The protocol for remote meetings were **NOTED**.

3 **ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN (00-03-46)**

RESOLVED that Cllr A Wilce be elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for the municipal year 2020/21.

4 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (00-04-27)**

There were no apologies.

5 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (00-04-35)**

There were no questions from members of the public present.

6 **MINUTES (00-04-43)**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

7 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (00-05-10)

Members were reminded of the need to make declarations of interest when necessary.

8 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00-05-55)

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

9 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

The Committee had before it a * report of the Monitoring Officer providing an overview of the preceding year.

She outlined the contents of the report stating that this provided evidence of the work that had taken place during the previous municipal year. She highlighted the following:

- The recruitment of the second Independent Person – Mr Rob Jeanes (who was present and introduced himself to the committee); the role of the Independent Person and whether they could be used in additional ways to assist the work of the committee.
- The role of the Deputy Monitoring Officers
- Complaints received under the Code of Conduct which were identified within the annex to the report
- The use of social media and its advantages and disadvantages; the guidance produced by the council and the lack of further national guidance
- Town and Parish Councils and the issues that had arisen with newly elected/co-opted councillors not complying with the requirement to submit a register of interest form within the required timescales. Following discussions with the committee the Monitoring Officer had written to those who had registers outstanding and 2 councillors had (with the agreement of the committee) been referred to the police for investigation. She informed the meeting that the Police had written to the individuals but that the issue had not been progressed any further. In view of the timescales involved she needed to look at proceedings for a Standards Hearing.
- Committee on Standards in Public Life, the committee had considered the report but legislative changes would be required to enact many of the recommendations, however some of the best practice highlighted within the report had been put in place.
- Gifts, hospitality and register of interests and how the system had been streamlined encouraging members to use a new form.

Consideration was given to:

- Whether there had been a rise in the number of complaints in the last year and whether the complaints were against district or town and parish councillors.
- The timescales for dealing with complaints
- With regard to the outstanding Register of Interest Forms and lack of progress made by the police whether the Police and Crime Commissioner should be contacted to follow this up on the committee's behalf

- How the gifts and hospitality forms would be published

RESOLVED that:

- a) The report be **NOTED** and circulated to all Town and Parish Councils for information; and
- b) The Chairman write to the Police and Crime Commissioner seeking assistance from the Police with regard to the 2 outstanding Register of Interest Forms.

(Proposed by the Chairman)

Note: *Report previously circulated, copy attached to minutes.

10 **NEW MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT - CONSULTATION (00-34-18)**

The Committee had before it a *draft model Code of Conduct which had been issued to Monitoring Officers prior to any formal consultation date.

The Monitoring Officer informed the meeting that a consultation document had now been made available and had been circulated to the committee, there was a need to decide how to engage with the wider membership and the town and parish councils. She explained that the consultation period was from 8 June – 17 August and that some of the recommendations from the Committee for Standards in Public Life had been incorporated into the specific obligations of general conduct.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer (Maria de Leburne) then provided an overview of how the new draft code had been formulated through LGA events and workshops; the 12 specific obligations within the model code, the lack of mention of pre-determination within the draft model, and how the use of social media had been incorporated into the 'Civility' section. She then walked Members through the consultation questionnaire.

Consideration was given to:

- The on-line questionnaire and how Members and the town and parish councils should be encouraged to take part in the consultation either individually and/or collectively via the Monitoring Officer
- Whether a request could be made for the consultation period to be extended to allow for the Town and Parish Councils to meet to consider the consultation document

RESOLVED that:

- a) The email correspondence received from the LGA with regard to the consultation process for the Model Member Code of Conduct be forwarded to all Members and to the town and parish councils with a note to encourage participation either individually or by contacting the Monitoring Officer with regard to feeding into a collective response from the local authority; and
- b) The Monitoring Officer write to the LGA on behalf of the Committee requesting an extension to the consultation period to 30 September 2020.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs N Woollatt and seconded by Cllr C R Slade)

Note: * Draft Code previously circulated, copy attached to minutes.

11 COMPLAINTS (1-08-25)

The Monitoring Officer explained that her annual report had provided all the data for the municipal year 2019/20, she then outlined the number of complaints received since the end of March 2020.

12 IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (1-13-05)

The following items were identified for the next meeting of the committee:

- A potential update from the Governance Working Group depending on how far the work of that group had progressed and whether the input of the Committee was desirable or necessary
- Possible outcomes of the consultation on the model draft Code of Conduct and information on any other national documents that may be available.

(The meeting ended at 7.15 pm)

CHAIRMAN