

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** held on 3 February 2021 at 6.00 pm

Present

Councillors

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

Apologies

Councillor(s)

A Wyer

Also Present

Councillor(s)

Ms E J Wainwright, B G J Warren, N V Davey, A Wilce and
Miss J Norton

Also Present

Officer(s):

Stephen Walford (Chief Executive), Kathryn Tebbey (Head of Legal (Monitoring Officer)), Maria De Leburne (Legal Services Team Leader), Catherine Yandle (Group Manager for Performance, Governance and Data Security) and Sally Gabriel (Member Services Manager)

Also

In attendance

Mr R Jeanes (Independent Person)

13 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME (00-02-55)**

There were no questions from members of the public present.

14 **PROTOCOL FOR REMOTE MEETINGS (00-03-03)**

The protocol for remote meetings was noted.

15 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (00-03-19)**

Apologies were received from Cllr A Wyer who was substituted by Cllr G Barnell.

16 **ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN (00-03-32)**

As Cllr A Wilce was no longer a member of the committee, the Chairman indicated that was a need to elect a Vice Chairman for the Committee until the end of the current municipal year.

RESOLVED that Cllr R M Deed become Vice Chairman of the Committee for the rest of the municipal year.

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

The Chairman thanked Cllr Wilce (who was present) for his time on the committee.

17 **MINUTES (00-05-42)**

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as a true and accurate record.

18 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT (00-06-12)**

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

19 **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (00-06-35)**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

20 **MOTION 564 (COUNCILLORS: MISS E WAINWRIGHT AND MISS J NORTON - 15 OCTOBER 2020) (00-06-46)**

The following motion (minus Item 4 which was referred to the Scrutiny Committee) had been passed to the Standards Committee from Council for consideration and report.

Council resolves to:

1. Practice equality, fairness and inclusion, and to play its part in creating an equal society for all. There is no place for sexism, racism, bigotry, discrimination or intolerance of any form in our society.
2. Acknowledge that language is a powerful tool for change and inspiration, as well as ignorance, oppression and damaged relationships, and should be used thoughtfully and respectfully. Many people who do not have a voice in the public domain have to suffer the consequences of inaccurate or insulting language.
3. Review and, if needed, update member training, to equip all members with the language and tools needed to actively promote diversity and inclusivity.
5. Ask that the Chairs of the Equality Forum and Community PDG identify and discuss approaches to reaching hard-to-reach communities in Mid Devon.
6. Show leadership by creating a diversity and inclusion strategy, and seek input from residents and local organisations that have expertise, to ensure the council is inclusive towards diverse and hard-to-reach communities in its recruitment, member representation and service provision. As part of this, review and update the MDDC equalities policy.
7. Explore further opportunities to increase inclusivity, diversity and representation in Mid Devon District Council, including but not limited to amongst women, minority ethnic communities, young people, and carers.

(1) *The Fawcett Society and Local Government Information Unit report, 'Does Local Government Work for Women?' found that structural and cultural barriers hold back women's participation in local government. The practices and protocols of local government create unnecessary barriers to participation particularly for women with caring responsibilities.* <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/does-local-government-work-for-women-final-report-of-the-local-government-commission>

Cllr Miss E Wainwright was invited to address the committee. She outlined the reasons for bringing the motion to Council and following discussions with the Equality Forum and other members, she wanted to explore how Mid Devon could be more open, accountable and inclusive and had suggested ways to progress this within the motion.

Cllr Miss J Norton was also invited to address the committee; she stated that there was a need to listen to each other and create a culture and that the main goal was to work together as a Council and that no accusations were being made.

Consideration was given to:

- What was meant by hard to reach communities and whether the Council was going everything it could to reach those people
- Whether the motion had been inspired by a national campaign or a local experience and if this was a local experience whether some of the issues raised had been reported
- How the Council could not influence who stood for election but that local residents could be encouraged to attend through conversation groups and asset based community development
- How behaviours could be outlined within the Code of Conduct
- Under (3) staff should be included in diversity training
- A request to include all of the Equality Forum and Community Policy Development Group and not just the chairmen.
- The fact that the Equalities Policy was reviewed annually
- How the Council addressed female members and whether that was seen as equal
- How the motion could be implemented
- Whether the motion was necessary as it was felt by some that although well intentioned most of this was taking place
- The need for a re-run of the equality training to be arranged

RECOMMENDED to Council that:

- a) Motion 564 (1-3 and 5-7) be supported; and
- b) In addition, that point (3) of the motion should include members and officers and the review should include all Council conventions and that in relation to point (5) the Equality Forum and the Community Policy Development Group should be consulted as a whole and not just the Chairs.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs N Woollatt and seconded by Cllr L D Taylor)

Note: Tables of policies previously circulated, copy attached to minutes.

21 **MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT (00-56-47)**

The Committee had before it the * Model Councillor Code of Conduct 2020 which had recently been developed by the Local Government Association.

The Monitoring Officer informed the meeting that following the publication of a report from the Committee for Standards in Public Life in which thoughts for best practice and recommendations had been included, part of that report had included an invitation for the Local Government Association to revise/rethink the Model Code of Conduct. The model was not statutory and local authorities could take what they wanted from the document. She added that detailed guidance would be forthcoming and that it may be best to wait for that guidance before the committee considered the model code. At the same time a working group of the committee may wish to consider the contents of Appendix K (complaints and investigations into members conduct – protocols and procedures) of the Constitution.

It was **AGREED** that a working group be formed consisting of Cllrs Mrs F J Colthorpe, C J Eginton and L D Taylor (the Independent Members also be requested to attend) to consider the model code once the detailed guidance had been received along with Appendix K of the Constitution.

Note: Model Code previously circulated, copy attached to minutes.

22 **GOVERNANCE REVIEW (1-03-11)**

The Monitoring Officer informed the meeting that Council had resolved to set up a Governance Working Group in January 2020 and that any specific changes to the Constitution recommended from the review be passed to the Standards Committee for consideration. At the present time the Governance Working Group were looking at issues with regard to scrutiny and various options around this. It was suggested that once Council had considered the recommendations from the Governance Working Group then that was the time for the committee to be involved in the review of parts of the Constitution as necessary.

The Committee **AGREED** that this was appropriate.

23 **COMPLAINTS AND TRAINING UPDATE (1-07-59)**

The Monitoring Officer informed the meeting that there were currently no complaints in the system. She would provide a detailed account within her annual report to the committee in June, however in the past few months she had dealt with 2 complaints at parish level and 2 complaints at district level. Following review of those and after consultation with the Independent Persons, the decisions had been that there was no requirement for further action or no breach or that it was a minor matter.

With regard to training, due to the current climate there had been very few requests for training, although she had been invited to provide training to Cullompton Town Council which had been well attended and well received.

She reported that following the elections in 2019, the correlation of the Register of Interest Forms had been time consuming and it had been reported at a previous meeting that 2 Register of Interest Forms had not been returned and that the

committee had agreed to refer this to the Police; she could now report that those 2 registers had now been provided.

24 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING (1-12-43)**

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

- The Monitoring Officer's annual report
- Feedback for the working group on the Model Code of Conduct.

Members were requested to contact either the Monitoring Officer or the Chairman with any additional items.

(The meeting ended at 7.15 pm)

CHAIRMAN