

MID DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of a **MEETING** of the **STANDARDS COMMITTEE** held on 13 April 2016 at 6.00 pm

Present

Councillors

Mrs S Griggs (Chairman)
Mrs J Roach, F J Rosamond, C R Slade,
Mrs F J Colthorpe, L D Taylor, N V Davey,
C J Eginton and Miss C E L Slade

Apologies

Councillor(s)

R J Chesterton and Mrs M E Squires

Also Present

Councillor(s)

R Evans

Also Present

Officer(s):

Julia Stuckey (Member Services Officer) and Amy Tregellas (Head of Communities and Governance and Monitoring Officer)

17 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no members of the public in attendance.

18 APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies were received from Cllr R J Chesterton who was substituted by Cllr C J Eginton and from Cllr Mrs M E Squires who was replaced by Cllr C E L Slade for this meeting.

19 MINUTES

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

20 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

21 REVIEW OF THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUPS

The Head of Communities and Governance reminded the Committee that she had been asked, at the previous meeting, to undertake some research and benchmarking regarding other local authorities and their committee structures. The Committee had before it a report* in which the officer presented the information she had compiled, outlining potential changes that could be made to the current structure.

The officer outlined the contents of the report, informing the Committee that this authority was one of very few that had specific Policy Development Groups (PDG's)

as well as a Scrutiny Committee. However, many of the Councils had task and finish groups that worked on specific areas and reported back to Scrutiny.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The need for the area of economy to have a Policy Development Group to report to;
- The need for the PDG's to be in line with the Corporate Plan;
- The financial implications of adding a fourth PDG which included a Special Responsibility Allowance to the Chairman of £3484 but potential savings with expenses by reducing the numbers on Planning and Licensing;
- The difficulty of having a small pool of substitutes for Planning and having to use a substitute from the same political group;
- Private Sector Housing to be moved from Community to Housing;
- The Economy PDG would free up the other PDG's to concentrate on their own work.

It was **RECOMMENDED** to Council that:

1. A fourth Policy Development Group (PDG) be created so that the PDGs matched the priorities set out in the new Corporate Plan – i.e. Economy, Homes, Community and Environment
2. The number of Members on the Planning Committee be reduced from 15 to 11 and that the number of substitutes be increased from 5 to 7
3. The number of Members on the Licensing and Licensing Regulatory Committees be reduced from 15 to 12
4. The changes to come into effect from the start of the new municipal year

(Proposed by Cllr F J Rosamond and seconded by Cllr C J Eginton)

And **RESOLVED** that the political balance of the Planning Committee be discussed with Group Leaders prior to the annual meeting with an aim to seeking a resolution at the Annual Meeting.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs J Roach and seconded by Cllr C R Slade)

Note: i) * Report previously circulated and attached to the Minutes.

ii) Cllr Mrs J Roach requested that her vote against recommendation 1 be recorded.

22 TRAINING/ASSISTANCE FOR PARISH COUNCILS (0.30.11)

The Head of Communities and Governance had been asked, at the previous meeting of the Committee, to provide information regarding training for town and parish councils. The Committee had before it and **NOTED** information regarding a training session * that had been delivered to town and parishes after the election last year.

The training covered the code of conduct, register of interests and general areas that it was necessary for them to know. The officer explained that a log of queries that had been raised throughout the year had been used to target training. Many of these queries included dealing with resignations, declarations of interests, co-option, procedural aspects and standing orders. There had also been inquiries regarding the new transparency codes for town and parish councils, which were dependent on financial turnover. Areas also covered included staffing matters, vexatious complainants, data protection and recording of meetings. The Officer explained that they had tried to go above and beyond the normal training provided and give guidance in these areas. She had also raised confidentially and the role of being a councillor.

The Head of Communities and Governance informed the Committee that the Learning and Development team were currently looking into whether it was possible to offer training and development to town and parish councils, in areas such as appraisals.

The Head of Planning and Regeneration provided an annual training session regarding planning.

Discussion took place regarding:

- The need for training in the use of social media;
- A protocol for the use of social media which was currently being written and would be distributed when prepared;
- The need to coordinate training with the Devon Association for Local Councils (DALC);
- Those that required the training the most were often the ones that didn't attend;
- Training for clerks to be held in June;
- Register of Interest forms that were still outstanding;
- The possibility of providing a certificate to show that clerks had attended training;
- The need for District Councillors to be aware of procedures for the town and parish councils that they attended;
- Parish Matters and the liaison that took place with parishes.

Note: * Information previously circulated and attached to Minutes.

23 **REVIEW OF THE MICROPHONES AND STANDING AT COUNCIL (0.52.39)**

At the last meeting of the Committee concerns had been raised regarding Members standing at Council. The new microphone system was designed to be used seated but Members preferred to stand when addressing the Chairman. It has agreed that Members would stand at the February meeting and this would be reviewed.

The Head of Communities and Governance informed the Committee that she had listened to the recording of the February meeting and that the quality of the recording was clear. She considered that it would be satisfactory for Members to stand if they so wished.

Discussion took place regarding the recording of meetings and it was **AGREED** that a boundary microphone was required in order that the entire meeting be recorded. Currently recording only took place when a microphone was turned on, which left areas of silence on the recording, and also that an advisory note be placed on the website to explain this.

It was **RESOLVED** that Members continue stand to speak at Council, subject to individual needs.

(Proposed by Cllr Mrs J Roach and seconded by Cllr C R Slade)

24 **COMPLAINTS (1.01.19)**

The Head of Communities and Governance and Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that she was currently looking into one complaint from a parish council and one regarding a District Councillor.

The officer informed the Committee that she had received reports of confidential information being passed to town and parish councils by District Councillors and that she would be issuing a reminder to all Councillors that information given in confidence must not be shared, even with parish councils.

25 **IDENTIFICATION OF ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING**

Guidance for Councillors regarding what was a vexatious complaint
Update regarding potential changes to legislation for disqualification and sanctions for Councillors

(The meeting ended at 7.15 pm)

CHAIRMAN