

INDEPENDENT PERSON PROTOCOL

This Protocol sets out the expected conduct of Mid Devon District Council's Independent Persons (IP) when carrying out their consultation functions in relation to an allegation that a Member, or co-opted Member, of the District Council, or a Member, or co-opted Member, of a Town or Parish Council within the District, has failed to comply with the relevant Council's Code of Conduct.

Principles

1. The role of the IP is set down in legislation (section 28 of the Localism Act 2011). *Arrangements put in place by the Council must include provision for the appointment by the authority of at least one independent person, whose views are to be sought, and taken into account, by the authority before it makes its decision on an allegation that it has decided to investigate, and in any other such circumstances it considers appropriate.*
2. The purpose of the IP role is to enable the public to have confidence in how the District Council deals with allegations of misconduct and to promote and maintain high ethical standards of conduct for members, ensuring they are adequately trained and understand the Code of Conduct.
3. This Protocol applies to all IPs equally and complements the Monitoring Officer Protocol. If the Council is in a position where less than three IPs are appointed due to vacancies, this Protocol still applies in its entirety, so long as one IP is in place (as required by the legislation).
4. The Protocol has been prepared in light of the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 and associated regulations and will be kept under review and amended where necessary.
5. In carrying out the role, the IP will ensure that he/she –
 - (a) Acts in accordance with –
 - (i) any relevant legislation or guidance and the respective Council's Code of Conduct in force at the time; and
 - (ii) the agreed processes/ procedures approved by the District Council's Standards Committee and the Council's Constitution; and
 - (b) Acts impartially at all times, without political bias or prejudice and in accordance with the rules of natural justice; and

- (c) Maintains confidentiality at all times.
6. The IP role is consultative at various stages of the process, in accordance with the Complaints procedure and Monitoring Officer's (MO) role is to give advice to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee.
 7. The IP is not a member of the Council's Standards Committee or Sub-Committee but is able to attend meetings of the Committee, as a member of the public.
 8. The outcome of any prior consultation with the IP undertaken by the MO will be included within any written report presented to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee for their consideration. The IP views must be sought before a decision is made after a complaint has been investigated. This will be undertaken by the MO in the first instance, but it may be appropriate for the Committee or Sub-Committee to do this directly in exceptional circumstances.
 9. If the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee invites the IP to attend any meeting, the IP does not have any voting rights when doing so.
 10. The MO will consult the IP on complaints received in accordance with the Council's procedure and requests for dispensations received in accordance with the Localism Act 2011.
 11. While the MO will have regard to the views expressed by the IP, he/she is not bound to accept his/her views on the matter.
 12. When deciding on how to progress with a complaint, the MO/IP should consider the conduct complaints assessment criteria.
 13. The IP should inform the MO if they feel there are circumstances which would suggest that they had a conflict of interest e.g. being a friend of either the complainant or Member concerned; or have previously been involved in the matter.
 14. If all of the IPs are conflicted out from dealing with the issue, the MO will consider making a request to use the services of an IP from another principal authority.
 15. All contact with the IP should be made through the MO and should the IP be contacted directly by a complainant or Member, he/she should inform the MO immediately.
 16. In terms of confidentiality, the IP must not discuss any matters about a complaint, either past or present, with the media or any other third party without appropriate advice having been taken.

17. The IP must provide the MO with appropriate methods of contact e.g. email and telephone numbers, and must make themselves available at all reasonable times.
18. On those occasions when the IP knows that they will not be contactable, he/she must inform the MO with as much reasonable notice as possible so that the reserve IP can be advised that he/she would be required to stand-in as necessary during this period.
19. The IP should be prepared to give the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee, through the written report, an independent view on the complaint and the merit of the evidence put forward as required to assist the Committee in coming to a decision on the matter.
20. When discussing the complaint with the complainant or the Member subject of the complaint, the IP's role is not to give views on the merit of the complaint or the evidence in support but to give advice and reassurance on the process.
21. In each complaint, one IP will be allocated a role by the MO, which will be one of the following:
 - (a) Available to the Complainant – see paragraph 20 above; or
 - (b) Available to the Member subject of the Complaint - see paragraph 20 above; or
 - (c) Available to the Standards Committee or Sub-Committee for consultation as part of the complaints procedure and in accordance with the Localism Act 2011.
22. The MO will rotate the roles between the IPs on a case by case basis. Should less than 3 IPs be appointed at any time, so long as 1 IP is in place the IP will be expected to be available for the respective parties set out in 21 (a-c).
23. The MO will ensure that the IPs are kept up to date with changes in legislation, national guidance or good practice.