

East Devon District Council: The Democratic Alliance

Introduction:

The Democratic Alliance was formed on Thursday 12th March 2020, as an umbrella political group on EDDC, for Green, Independent East Devon Alliance, Independent and Liberal Democrat Councillors with shared values. Members are committed to running a new style of administration which marks a clear break from Conservative rule and establishes a Council which works in a fully transparent way to improve the quality of life for all in East Devon.

Our success will depend on members having a shared vision and continuing to encourage, and promote, a spirit of trust and cooperation.

Standing Orders:

Part 1 – Values

1. We will work constructively in this authority for tangible improvements in the economic, social and environmental conditions of the communities and people that we represent.
2. We will operate democratically, as our name suggests. The Leader and Deputy Leader will be fully transparent with the rest of the Group in respect of conversations and/or correspondence they have had with officers of the Council and others (whilst abiding by GDPR).
3. The Democratic Alliance will never whip or offer any incentives to any Member to vote in a particular direction. We believe that all Members ought to vote in an informed way based on the strength of argument, on their conscience, and representing their electorate.
4. Party political point scoring devalues the reputation of local government. In the spirit of our formation, we support cross-party working. If a political opponent raises an idea that the group agrees with, we will work with them and not exclude or ignore them, nor dismiss their contribution or proposal, out of hand.
5. Members subscribe to the Nolan Principles and must uphold the highest standards of integrity and probity when it comes to decision-making in public life.
6. The Democratic Alliance group title is limited to our work on the Council – for our engagement in the local community, and fulfilling our duties as Ward Members, all Members are free and encouraged to embrace their respective party or independent identities.

7. Our aims and priorities will be formed by all of our Members and agreed by resolution of a quorate meeting. If the Democratic Alliance Group does take on the administration of the Council, the Leader / Deputy Leader / Portfolio Holders / Committee Chairs will not push their own ideas through the executive process without reporting to and consulting with the group beforehand.

Part 2 – Group Meetings

1. The Democratic Alliance will elect a Chair, and Vice-Chair, who will convene and, chair, group meetings. The Chair must not be a member of the executive branch of the Council. This will ensure that members of the Democratic Alliance group who are not part of the executive will always have a strong voice, and a means whereby their views will be considered.
2. The chair of the Group shall preside at all meetings, and in their absence, the vice-chair or other person nominated by the group will take the chair of the meeting.
3. If the Democratic Alliance does assume control of the Council, and forms the new administration, the group will nominate the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council. Unless otherwise decided, the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Democratic Alliance Group will also be the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council itself.
4. Meetings will close after ninety minutes from the notified starting time, unless two-thirds of present members support an extension; that extension to last no longer than 60 minutes, unless a further extension is then agreed by two-thirds of those present.
5. All Council member appointments will be proposed to the group by the Leader and ratified in a group meeting at the start of each Council year. Changes to representation during the course of a Council term may be done using email.
6. Meetings will normally take place once a month, and be focussed on Council business and if appropriate ideas for motions, questions, calling minutes, etc. These meetings will give an opportunity for group members, to communicate where they stand on policy issues, and share ideas about future policy development.

7. Members shall give priority to issues of importance to the Council.
There shall be standing items of business encompassing updates and reports from the Leader and Cabinet / Lead Members on Committees or panels, to ensure collective group awareness of council business and member activity.
8. The quorum for meetings of the group shall be 50 percent of the total membership, plus one e.g. in a group of 30, quorum would be 16.

Part 3 – Membership:

1. The Democratic Alliance is comprised of EDDC Councillors who are Independent, or members of the Green, Independent East Devon Alliance, or Liberal Democrat parties, who decided to come together in a spirit of cooperation and have full confidence and trust in one another to work together in a constructive and transparent way.
2. The Democratic Alliance is open and inclusive and therefore welcomes requests to join from Councillors who feel that they share our values and who demonstrate a spirit of cooperation. Any prospective Member must first express an interest in joining the group by contacting any existing member, who will then inform the Leader. The Leader will then seek a proposer and a seconder for that nomination. If there is a proposer and seconder, the Group will be informed by email. If there are no objections received within seven days of that email, the Councillor making the request to join will become a member of the Democratic Alliance. However, if within seven days of the proposal and seconding, one or more existing Member(s) write to the Leader objecting to that Councillor's application to join the group, a vote / ballot will be held and that Councillor's entry to the Democratic Alliance will need to be agreed by a majority of the Members, subject to a minimum of two-thirds of the existing Members voting thereupon.
3. Members will not harass, intimidate or victimise anyone for any reason. Members are reminded that they must abide by the Equality Act legislation at all times.
4. Membership can be rescinded if a Member does not continue to abide by the group's values or breaches these Standing Orders or behaves in a manner that the group considers brings the Democratic Alliance into disrepute.
5. The process whereby membership of the Democratic Alliance can be rescinded is detailed below:

5.1. Any member of the Democratic Alliance can leave the Group at any time by notifying the Leader accordingly.

5.2. If a member of the group believes that another member has acted in such a way as to bring the group into disrepute and thus has breached these Standing Orders, they should – in the first instance - submit a written complaint – using the prescribed form* - to the Leader AND Deputy Leader of the group. *If the complaint relates to the Leader of the Group, then the complaint should be submitted to the Deputy Leader, who will nominate another member to consider the complaint. Similarly, if the complaint relates to the Deputy Leader, the complaint should be submitted to the Leader, who will nominate another member to consider that complaint.*

** The form to be based upon the current EDDC Standards Complaint Form*

5.3. Within five working days of receipt, the Leader and Deputy Leader ** will contact both the complainant and the subject of the complaint (the complaine) to obtain further information / clarification and to seek a written statement from the complaine responding to the allegations. This statement to be provided to the Leader and Deputy Leader within 5 working days. If no such statement is received, it shall be presumed that the complaine does not wish to challenge the complaint.

*** Subject to alternative arrangements detailed in 5.2. above*

5.4. Upon receipt of this statement, the document shall be forwarded to all members of the group for their comment to the Leader and Deputy Leader ***; that comment to outline the remedial action that the member responding believes is warranted or justified, which may include – but not be limited to – the rescindment of membership of the Democratic Alliance. Comments must be received within 5 working days from members responding.

**** Subject to alternative arrangements detailed in 5.2. & 5.3 above*

5.5. Subject to a response being received from 2/3rds of the existing membership of the Democratic Alliance, the Leader or Deputy Leader will circulate the majority decision of the group and, therein, outline the remedial action proposed.

If the resolved decision is to rescind the Complaine's membership of the Democratic Alliance, the complaine shall be notified of that decision within 24 hours and be given written reasons for that decision.

5.6. At that point, their membership of the Democratic Alliance will be rescinded and the Monitoring Officer notified accordingly of their departure from the Group so that EDDC records can be amended.

Part 4 – Communications

1. Any official correspondence by the Democratic Alliance will usually be sent out by the group's elected Press Officer. The content will be agreed with both the Leader and the Deputy Leader.
2. Communication on behalf of the group will always be consistent with our values and agreed priorities/aims. Whenever possible, Group members will be made aware of all issues requiring communication before press statements, etc are drafted. Statements will be copied to all members when they are distributed so that group transparency is maintained.
3. Members are free to express their personal views and opinions, but for the avoidance of confusion should make it clear that these are their own views and not necessarily those of the Democratic Alliance. In general, members should assume that any comments will be construed by the public as reflecting the views of the Group and caution must therefore be exercised.

Part 5 – General

1. These Standing Orders were created and compiled after the formation of The Democratic Alliance in March/April 2020. They are, naturally, subject to review and revision over time, and any such changes to these Standing Orders shall be adopted only after due consideration and approval by members, subject to a minimum of two-thirds of the existing Members voting thereupon.
2. These Standing Orders were compiled, and adopted, at a time of national upheaval and crisis, due to the impact of Covid-19. In accordance with extant government guidelines regarding social distancing and measures to prevent infection and ill-health, it was agreed that meetings of the Democratic Alliance could be held both in person, and 'virtually', with members being 'present' by way of such methods including (but not limited to) video conferencing, telephone link-ups, social media platforms and group email. The Group also recognises, within its Aims and Objectives, that good practice in the future – with a view to promoting carbon neutrality and environmental protection – may require other meetings to be held in a similar manner so as to minimise the reliance on fossil fuels and to combat vehicle pollution.