

## Wiltshire Council

### Standards Committee

4 February 2021

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#### Item 5 – Public Participation

##### Question from Andrew Nicolson

###### Question

By way of introduction to the question, here is some context:

Council Rules of Procedure section 22.5 states, "... the names for and against the motion or amendment **or abstaining from voting** will be recorded in the minutes." [I added the emphasis].

From a citizen's perspective, the identities of those present for a motion but voting neither 'For' nor 'Against' is always of interest as an element of members' voting records, and a matter of democratic accountability and transparency, but especially in the run-up to an election.

On trying to compile a complete voting record on a 2019 Full Council motion, I discovered that is possible, but very time-consuming, cumbersome and technical, to figure out which members were present and non-voting, over and above those registering 'Abstain'. This exercise involved cross-checking the attendance and apologies records, the printable and web-based recorded vote lists and the meeting departure times.

I have concluded that section 22.5 is not working: not all the names of the members present but **not** voting are being recorded in the minutes. The reason is that some members present are recording 'Abstain' but others appear to be just not voting, and of those in turn some are being minuted but others possibly not.

I can see that it isn't feasible for the Constitution to compel a member to either vote or register an 'Abstain' on the system. I cannot see what sanction there could be if they don't.

So my question is:

Will the Standards Committee consider, directly or after a referral to the Constitution Focus Group, adding a clause in the members' Codes of Conduct that defines it as best practice for each member present at meetings to register an 'Abstain' if voting neither 'For' nor 'Against' a motion (and conversely not good practice to omit to do that), together with a rationale for that new clause?

###### Response

A verbal response was received at the meeting, agreeing to refer the matter to the Constitution Focus Group for consideration.