

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
10th September 2014

Present: Councillors: Brian Donnelly (Chairman), David Coldwell (Vice-Chairman), Andrew Baldwin, Sheila Matthews, Tricia Youtan

Co-opted advisory members

Present: Parish Council representative: Val Court, Isabel Glenister
Independent persons: Mary Jagger

Apologies: Councillors: Godfrey Newman, Brian O'Connell
Independent person: Paul Byford

SC/9 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 June 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SC/10 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/11 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman introduced Paul Cummins, the new Monitoring Officer, to the Committee.

The Chairman advised Members that Sandra Herbert, Deputy Monitoring Officer, was to leave the Council at the end of the month and thanked her for all her support and hard work as Monitoring Officer and wished her well with her future career. The Chairman also advised Members that Selena Saroy, Senior Solicitor, would also be leaving the Council shortly and thanked her for her help and support and wished her well with her future career. The Monitoring Officer also thanked Sandra for her help over recent weeks and wished her and Selena well.

SC/12 **MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS OF SUB-COMMITTEES**

The minutes of the meetings of the Local Review Sub-Committee held on 30 July 2014 were received.

SC/13 **MATTERS ARISING**

There were no matters arising.

SC/14 **STANDARDS COMMITTEE REPORTS AND DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE FOR INSPECTION**

The list was noted.

SC/15 **ETHICAL FRAMEWORK UPDATE**

The Corporate Services Solicitor presented the report on developments in the ethical framework that affected the role and activities of Councillors and the Council's business, including:

- Training and awareness: The Council continued to subscribe to the Standards Exchange interactive website which gave access to latest news on Standards issues, including case studies and best practice. Training had recently been provided for the Chairman of the Council, as a new Member of the Committee. It was noted that training would be required for the new Independent Person once they were recruited at the end of the year.
- Local assessment, review, other action, investigations and determinations: There had been four assessments and four reviews since the last ethical update on 19 March 2014. Members discussed the potential impact that the new standards regime would have on vexatious complainants, and on the number of LGO complaints. The last review under the previous standards regime would be heard immediately after the current meeting.
- Parish Clerks' Meetings: The Deputy Monitoring Officer had attended the Society of Local Council Clerks' meeting on 1 July 2014 and provided an update on changes to the locally agreed standards regime. An update on the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 regarding the filming and reporting of council meetings had also been provided. The meeting had also been advised of the new Gypsy and Traveller procedures agreed with West Sussex County Council. It was noted that Clerks meetings were a useful forum for the Monitoring Officer to offer education and training.
- Register of Interests: Annual Update forms had been sent to all District Councillors. There were currently three District Councillors who had not returned their forms and they, together with those Parish Councils that had not submitted their update forms, were being chased up by officers.
- Local Standards regime review: The review of the local standards regime had taken place, and changes to the regime had been approved by Council on 14 May 2014. The impact of these changes, in particular the removal of the right of appeal, was discussed.
- Committee on Standards in Public Life: On 14 July 2014 the CSPL had published its report on Ethics and Practice: Promoting Ethical Standards in Public Life. Members noted that the importance of effective induction was identified as a key factor in promoting ethical standards. A copy of the report had been made available to Members.
- Data Transparency: On 1 May 2014, the government had published the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency. A copy of the Code had been made available to Members and details of the revised Code, including the type of information that the

SC/15 Ethical Framework Update (Cont.)

Council must publish, were noted. Members were advised that a team of officers had been set up to ensure compliance with the Code.

- Filming of Public Meetings: On 6 August 2014 the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 had come in to effect. The regulations applied to all public meetings and gave the press and public the right to film meetings and use modern technology and communication methods, including blogging and tweeting, to report proceedings. Members were advised that a protocol for HDC was being drafted to reflect the new legislation. This draft would be circulated to all Members in due course.
- Recorded Votes at Budget Meetings: Members were reminded that the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England)(Amendment) Regulations 2014, which had come into force on 25 February, required councils to amend their standing orders to include provisions requiring recorded votes at budget meetings. It was noted that the Constitution would need to be revised to accommodate this change.
- LGO case summaries and Standards case summaries December 2013 – March 2014: Three LGO case summaries were provided and noted by the Committee. Two Standards case summaries were provided and noted by the Committee.
- Work Programme update: Members noted the updated Work Programme, in particular the review of the local standards regime to take place within the first year after the election of a new Council in 2015.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

REASONS

- i) To ensure that the Committee, the Members of the Council and others to whom the report is circulated are kept up to date with developments in the ethical framework.
- ii) To promote and maintain high standards of conduct amongst Members.

SC/16 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN UPDATE 2013 – 2014**

The Monitoring Officer reported on the number and nature of complaints about the Council made to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). In July the Council had received the Annual Review letter which provided statistics for the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014. A total of 20 complaints had been received during this period. Five complaints had been upheld and one complaint had not been upheld. The rest had either been referred back to the Council or closed after initial enquiries, with one compliant being considered invalid.

Members noted the changes to how the statistics were recorded by the LGO under their new business model so the figures were not directly comparable to previous years.

The Monitoring Officer advised that the LGO had also supplied details of data from all councils, and that this would be circulated to all Members in due course. It was noted that the number of complaints received by HDC was neither significantly higher nor lower to that of comparable local authorities.

The Monitoring Officer reported that the Council's procedure for dealing with complaints, which had been used since 2003, would be changed. The new procedure would include two stages, instead of three, with Stage One being referred to the relevant Head of Service and Stage Two to the Chief Executive.

RESOLVED

That the contents of the report be noted.

REASONS

- i) To ensure that the Committee has the necessary information to ensure that complaints can be made to the Council with ease and complaints are dealt with appropriately.
- ii) To assist with establishing learning lessons so that the Council can improve its performance in the provision of its services.

The meeting finished at 11.15 having commenced at 10.00am.

CHAIRMAN