

Standards Committee
17 MARCH 2021

Present: Councillors: Brian Donnelly (Chairman), Diana van der Klugt (Vice-Chairman), Alan Britten, Karen Burgess, Philip Circus, Jim Sanson,
Independent Persons: John Donaldson and Michael Rumble
Parish Representatives: Philip Baxter and Stephen Watkins

Apologies: Councillors: Godfrey Newman

SC/21 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 25 November were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman.

SC/22 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/23 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed the two new members of the Committee, Michael Rumble, Independent Person, and Stephen Watkins, Parish Council Representative.

SC/24 **STANDARDS UPDATE**

The Monitoring Officer briefed Members on the outcome of a recent Standards Sub-Committee, which had considered four Code of Conduct complaints. They had considered each allegation at length, taking into account all the available information including the opinions of the Independent Person and Parish Representative. The sub-committee found that there had been breaches of the Code in three of the cases. The Committee noted details of the breaches and the sanctions recommended to the Parish Council, as set out in the Decision Notices, which had been published in full on the Council website. All the complaints related to Steyning Parish Council and, given the history of numerous complaints from this Parish, the sub-committee had agreed that details of the cases and recommended sanctions should be made public.

The Legal Services Business Manager gave an overview of the 18 formal complaints received since April 2020 that comprised ten from Steyning, five from Nuthurst, and one each for West Grinstead, Henfield and Slinfold parishes. There were six outstanding complaints, including a number of interlinked cases regarding Nuthurst.

Members referred to the discussion at the previous meeting of the Committee regarding the possibility of publishing all Decision Notices where a breach had occurred, so that the name of the Councillor would be in the public domain. It was noted that this was considered best practice. The Committee discussed the implications of this and whether the publication of cases where there had been no breach would be appropriate.

Members of the Committee considered that more information was needed on the advantages and disadvantages, and options available, regarding the publication of Decision Notices before being able to make an informed decision.

The Chairman therefore requested and it was AGREED that:

The Monitoring Officer prepare a briefing on the publishing of Decision Notices for presentation at the next meeting of the Committee so options and implications could be considered before a decision is made.

SC/25 **MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Monitoring Officer introduced her report on the Local Government Association's new Model Code of Conduct, which had been published following consultation last year with local authorities and other organisations. The LGA would be providing commentary to accompany this in due course, and sanctions would be introduced once the necessary legislation was in place. It was intended that parish councils would also adopt the Model Code in order to bring consistency across local authorities.

The Committee noted comparisons between the Model Code and HDC's existing Code of Conduct. They were broadly supportive of the Model Code, which clearly explained expected behaviours and contained clear advice regarding the declaration of interests.

Members identified some grammatical errors and some wording which some felt should be amended. It was noted that the Model Code would be updated annually to take into account changes in legislation and other considerations, and that minor amendments could still be submitted prior to the Model Code being finalised.

The Chairman proposed that the Committee should agree any minor amendments to the Model Code so that it could be recommended to Council before the start of the new Municipal Year.

AGREED

- i) That the Monitoring Officer work with Councillors Philip Circus and Diana van der Klugt on making minor amendments to the Model Code, to be circulated to all Committee members for consideration.

- ii) That the Committee meet with a view to agreeing the Model Code, as amended, with a view to recommending its adoption to Council on 28 April.

SC/26 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent businesses.

The meeting closed at 11.20 am having commenced at 10.00 am

CHAIRMAN