

Standards Committee
16 MARCH 2022

Present: Councillors: Brian Donnelly (Chairman), Diana van der Klugt (Vice-Chairman), Karen Burgess, Lynn Lambert, David Skipp, Belinda Walters.
Independent Persons : John Donaldson and Michael Rumble

Apologies: Parish Representatives: Philip Baxter and Stephen Watkins

SC/22 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 December were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SC/23 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/24 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

SC/25 **MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT - PARISH COUNCIL UPDATE**

The Monitoring Officer updated Members on the adoption of the Local Government Association's Model Code of Conduct for Parish and Neighbourhood councils within the district.

Following the adoption by Horsham District Council of the amended Code of Conduct in December 2021, the Parish and Neighbourhood councils had been invited to also adopt the code.

By adopting a national code it would ensure that Horsham District Council, Parish and Neighbourhood Councils were adhering to the same code of conduct, providing clarity, a consistent approach and precedence for Standards Code of Conduct cases across the district. It would also enable relevant training to take place.

The committee were informed there had been an extremely positive uptake of the new code.

30 out of 32 Parish Councils had adopted the code in-line with Horsham District Council with some specific localised amendments.

The three Neighbourhood councils were in the process of amending their code. This was in consultation with Horsham District Council to address their specific status and unique requirements.

The Committee noted the contents of the report, thanked all Officers and Members involved in the new Code of Conduct and the success of adoption with Parish and Neighbourhood Councils.

SC/26 **STEYNING PARISH COUNCIL**

The Monitoring Officer updated the committee on the historical, current and ongoing difficulties at Steyning Parish Council.

Over a number of years there had been a vast number of code of conduct complaints received regarding Steyning Parish Council.

8 code of conduct complaints against Steyning Councillors were received in 2019, 15 complaints in 2020 and 26 complaints in 2021.

Over the last three years the position and behaviour had deteriorated with over 70% of the total code of conduct complaints received by Horsham District Council related to Steyning. The estimated cost of dealing with Steyning complaints alone was in the region of £65 000 per annum.

It was proposed that alternative action was required in dealing with deteriorating relations within Steyning Parish Council, and resolve issues which ultimately would result in better behaviours and less Code of Conduct complaints in the future.

Consideration was given to whether specialist experts Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd should review and provide support to Steyning Parish Council to provide an action plan for the future.

A recommendation was also required to consider if any further action should be taken on outstanding pending complaints from Steyning Parish Council.

The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that the aim of the review was to directly offer support, address underlying issues and improve the Parish Council moving forward. Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd would issue a full report of their findings and recommendations which would be published.

Members were advised the Consultants had suggested that all outstanding and pending standards complaints relating to Steyning Parish Council were halted and a line drawn whilst the review and support took place.

Should further action be required in the future, the Code of Conduct procedure adopted by Horsham District Council would enable those complaints to be re-considered.

Members were supportive of the proposals, wanted difficulties resolved and solutions put in place to move forward. It was discussed that Steyning Parish Council must accept the Consultant's report and work with any recommendations.

Members accepted the need for Consultants, felt the Council had provided as much support as possible already to Steyning Parish Council and had no other recourse to stop the long running issues.

It was noted that Council would need to approve the budget for review.

RESOLVED

That the Committee resolved:

- i) To approve that the Monitoring Officer instructs Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd to undertake a review of Steyning Parish Council and to provide support for Steyning Parish Council.
- ii) To approve that no further action will be taken in relation to any of the outstanding complaints pending this alternative resolution.
- iii) To recommend to full Council approval of a budget sum of £20 000 for Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd to conduct the Steyning Parish Council review.

SC/27 **STANDARDS UPDATE**

The Legal Services Business Manager reported that the highest number of complaints had been received by the Council during this financial year. 32 code of conduct cases have been received so far, 26 related to Steyning Parish Council and 6 other cases. 3 cases related to Horsham District Councillors, 2 to West Chiltington Parish Council and 1 related to Henfield Parish Council.

All matters, other than the Steyning Parish Council complaints have been dealt with and there has been no requirement for further investigation.

SC/28 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 12.25 pm having commenced at 10.00 am

CHAIRMAN