

Standards Committee
30 NOVEMBER 2022

Present: Councillors: Diana van der Klugt (Chairman), Peter Burgess (Vice-Chairman), Joan Grech, Kate Rowbottom, David Skipp, Belinda Walters, Tricia Youtan,

Independent Persons: John Donaldson, Michael Rumble,
Parish Council Representatives: Philip Baxter and Stephen Watkins

Also Present: Councillor Tony Bevis

SC/11 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 June were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Prior to the meeting the Chairman advised a correction to SC/6 Announcements, amending to “Members also sent their sincere condolences to the family of Mary Burroughs, Senior Clerk to Slinfold Parish Council, who had recently passed away”

This correction was made to the minutes prior to the meeting.

SC/12 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/13 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman wished to thank the Monitoring Officer for her support, advice and hard work on the Committee over a number of years and wished her well in her future role.

SC/14 **THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW**

The Feedback Officer gave an overview of the complaints made against the Council to the Ombudsman in 2021/22.

18 complaints against the Council had been decided by the Ombudsman, two were upheld; 11 complaints had been closed after initial enquiries; three had been referred back to the Council for local resolution; and 2 had not been upheld.

It was noted that this was a significant increase compared to the 8 complaints received and resolved during 2020/21. He advised this was due to the Ombudsman having paused work for four months because of the covid pandemic which resulted in fewer results being received than normal.

The two upheld Council complaints compared favourably however with national complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) where 66% of cases that were fully investigated were upheld.

Members noted the contents of the report and acknowledged that any upheld complaints were addressed fully and improvements put in place for the future.

SC/15 **STEYNING PARISH COUNCIL - REVIEW SUPPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Monitoring Officer updated the Committee on the Steyning Parish Council review, support and recommendations following the report produced by specialists Hoey Ainscough Associates.

It was agreed at Standards Committee in March 22 to commission Hoey Ainscough Associates to undertake a review due to the vast increase over the last 3 years of code of conduct complaints received by Horsham District Council of which 70% related to Steyning Parish Council.

The report considered six main areas these were; Behaviour, Roles and Responsibilities, Policies and Procedures, Meetings, Ambition and Strategy and Monitoring of Plan.

Findings were presented to the Parish Council at a meeting in September and 36 recommendations were set out and an action plan to address issues. It was received positively and acknowledged that the report should be used as a new benchmark for the Parish Council to move forward.

A Draft Implementation Plan was also completed and agreed at a Steyning Council meeting on 21 November as well as agreement to sign up to the NALC/SLCC Civility and Respect Pledge.

Progress on the implementation of the action plan will be reported to Horsham District Council in 6 and 12 months.

Members felt the report was encouraging and offered clear guidance and recommendations for the future of the Parish Council. It was noted that progress should be carefully monitored.

SC/16 **STANDARDS UPDATE**

The Legal Services Business Manager updated the committee on Standards complaint cases.

The committee were reminded that from April 2021 to March 2022 there was a total of 34 Code of Conduct complaints of which 26 related to Steyning Parish Council.

During the first eight months of the current year from April 2022 to November 2022 up to last week, there had been a total of 9 Code of Conduct complaints. 4 related to Horsham District Councillors, 3 related to Steyning Parish Councillors and 1 related to Nuthurst Parish Council and Pulborough Parish Council.

Out of the 9 complaints and following assessment and consultation with the Independent Person no further action was required in 5 of the cases, 1 case was satisfactorily dealt with by informal resolution and 3 cases related to Steyning Parish Council and were dealt with during the review and support provided by Hoey Ainscough Associates.

However within the last week a further 4 code of conduct complaints had been received from Steyning Parish Council which required further assessment.

Members were updated on the recent Code of Conduct training. 86 District, Parish and Neighbourhood Parish Councillors had attended the on-line training which was also recorded for those unable to attend.

Positive feedback had been received and further comments were encouraged from those that attended.

Members felt that due to the majority of Parish and Neighbourhood Councils recently adopting the same Code of Conduct, it was extremely useful for consistency and best practice moving forward.

SC/17 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 11.28 am having commenced at 10.00 am

CHAIRMAN