

Standards Committee
9 SEPTEMBER 2020

Present: Councillors: Brian Donnelly (Chairman), Diana van der Klugt (Vice-Chairman), Alan Britten, Karen Burgess, Peter Burgess, Godfrey Newman, Jim Sanson, Philip Baxter and John Donaldson

SC/12 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 18 June were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

SC/13 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/14 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman of the Committee announced that Paul Bickford, Parish Representative, had resigned from the Committee because he had stepped down as Parish Councillor on 1 September 2020. He thanked him for the opinions and guidance he had given.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Alan Britten. He was replacing Councillor Frances Haigh on the committee because of her new role as Leader of the Liberal Democrats.

SC/15 **THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW 2019/2020**

The Feedback Officer presented the report on the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual review 2019/2020. There had been 15 complaints made to the LGSCO this year, compared to 13 in 2018/19. Seven had been closed without investigation, four had not been upheld and two had been referred back to the Council for resolution. Only two complaints had been upheld. The Committee noted details of the complaints, as set out in the report.

The Chairman considered that the report reflected well on the Council.

SC/16 **STANDARDS UPDATE**

The Monitoring Officer reported that the Committee's response to the new Model Code of Conduct consultation had been submitted. The pandemic was delaying the outcome of the consultation, but it was expected that concerns regarding the current lack of sanctions would be addressed.

The Monitoring Officer updated the Committee on Code of Conduct complaints cases. Thirteen cases had been reviewed by the Monitoring officer, taking into account the opinion of the Independent Person. In each case, they had concluded that an investigation by a Standards sub-committee was not required.

Eleven of these cases were from Steyning Parish Council. The Committee discussed the history of complaints from this parish and the need for a solution to prevent persistent, often tit-for-tat, complaints by finding the underlying cause and resolving it through training or mediation.

The Chairman thanked the Monitoring Officer and her team for the thorough and time-consuming work they had undertaken. It was noted that use of social media played a significant role in a majority of the complaints.

The Committee debated the best way forward and resolved that:

- The Monitoring Officer to approach Steyning Parish Council to invite Parish Councillors to volunteer to attend an informal meeting with herself, the Legal Services Business Manager or Independent Person, as considered appropriate.
- The parish councillors to be given the option to bring a neutral companion for support.
- Potentially in the future and if appropriate and when restrictions caused by the pandemic have been reduced, the Monitoring Officer may set up a meeting with all Steyning Parish Councillors and some Committee Members and relevant officers.

With regards to the need to appoint a Parish Representative to replace Paul Bickford, Philip Baxter agreed to ensure that the appointment of a new Parish Representative be on the agenda for the next meeting of HALC (Horsham Association of Local Councils).

The Monitoring Officer would also write to HALC to request that this is the case.

The meeting closed at 11.10 am having commenced at 10.00 am

CHAIRMAN