

HDC STANDARDS - CODE OF CONDUCT CASES

Last financial year, from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 there was a total of 20 code of conduct complaint cases received by the Monitoring Officer. These are official written complaints where the required complaint form has been completed and there are allegation(s) of a breach of the code of conduct.

All complaints have been against Parish Councillors in relation to Parish business and there has not been any formal and written code of conduct complaints against Horsham District Councillors (“HDC”), (other than one Cllr complained of within his role as a Parish Councillor as a dual hatter, so was also an HDC Councillor).

The breakdown of the code of conduct complaints received, between the Parish Councils is detailed below:

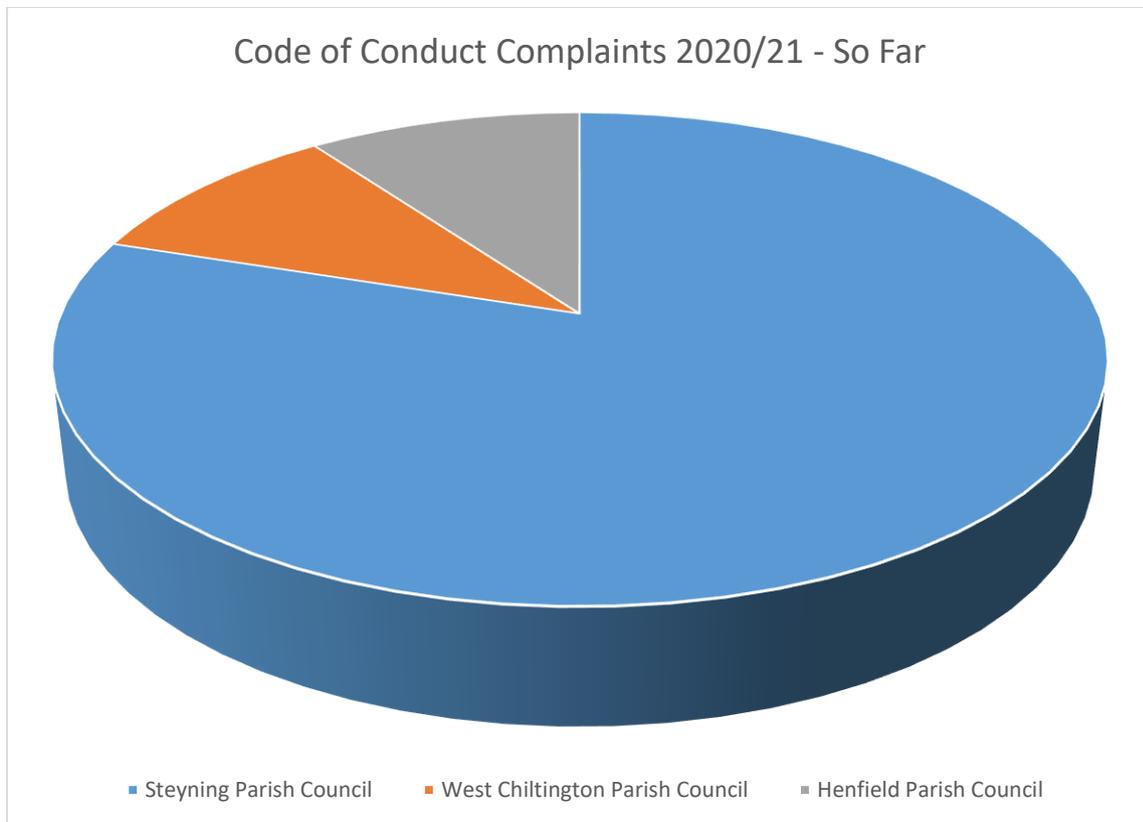
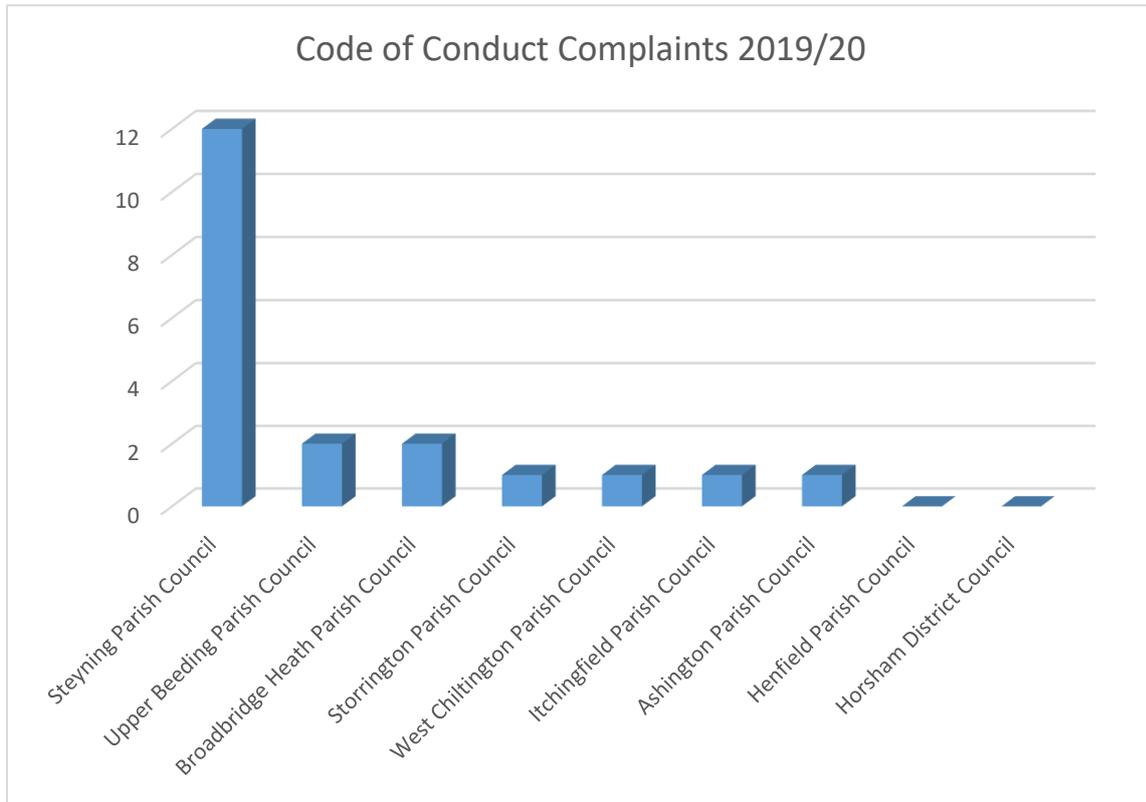
Totals	<u>2019/2020</u>	<u>2020/2021 so far</u>
	20	10
Steyning Parish Council	12	8
Upper Beeding Parish Council	2	0
Broadbridge Heath Parish Council	2	0
Storrington Parish Council	1	0
West Chiltington Parish Council	1	1
Itchingfield Parish Council	1	0
Ashington Parish Council	1	0
Henfield Parish Council	0	1
Horsham District Council	0	0

HDC has x35 Parish and Neighbourhood Councils and Steyning Parish Council alone amounted to 60% of all standards complaints in 2019/20 and currently represents 80% of all complaints thus far in 2020/21.

The Monitoring Officer who is also the Head of Legal and Democratic Services for HDC also receives queries and has regular liaisons and contact with the Parish Councils, residents and Councillors regarding standards complaints and other matters that do not necessarily result in official complaints being submitted. These can be numerous and time consuming.

The time and cost of looking and dealing with these complaints and other related matters which are often detailed and run to many pages, are hundreds of hours and the real cost is thousands of pounds and include the time and expense of the Independent Person, and can include the involvement of the Parish Representative and also members of the HDC Standards Committee.

APPENDIX 1



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The Monitoring Officer has received concerns from District Councillors and County Councillors who have witnessed meetings and has received direct complaints from members of the public about Steyning Parish Council with concerns over the effectiveness and efficiency of the Parish Council. One comment received from a resident after viewing a Council meeting was as follows:

I fully get they (councillors) have been elected through a democratic process, but there is very little evidence of them conducting themselves to the standards of public service and are locked in some sort of tribal battle for power that shows little respect to each other or the office. This has rendered the Council totally ineffective, at a challenging time when there is so much they could be doing to support the community.

If the time HDC spent dealing with Parish and Standards matters were split evenly across all Parish and Neighbourhood Councils then the percentage of time would be around 3% for each Council. Currently Steyning Parish Council is taking up 72% of the time of the Standards Team, who all have other responsibilities, roles and work and invariably they have to deal with either these (or other) matters in additional unpaid hours over and above their normal working week.

It is estimated that if the current levels of complaints and involvement of the Monitoring Officer and the Standards team for Steyning Parish council persisted for the remainder of this financial year, then the cost could be approximately £50k pa. Whilst this is a very rough estimate it is based on time spent and projected time and notional hourly rates for the Monitoring Officer / Solicitors / Officers within the Legal Department at HDC.

As discussed and detailed HDC, the Monitoring Officer and Standards Committee wish to help, intervene, mediate and resolve any divisions and current difficulties at Steyning Parish Council if at all possible.

We hope that Councillors will participate and work together in order that improvements can be made, which leads to better conduct, less complaints and an environment where the Parish Council can work and carry out its business in an effective manner for the benefit of the residents of Steyning.

HDC are willing to offer training, guidance and any other help and assistance as necessary. Anything that the Parish Council think will help or any suggestions for HDC will be welcome.

The idea is also to draw a line, a new beginning and for improvement in the future. HDC does not want to discourage standards complaints being made, rather they would like to remove the behaviour that might give rise to any complaints being made in the first place.

HDC are also reviewing their current process and procedures in dealing with standards complaints and any subsequent complaints made thereafter will be dealt with quickly, efficiently and fairly, but if necessary robustly. Where there are determinations that the code of conduct has been breached, these may be published and relevant sanctions applied. The time and cost relating to individual Parishes may also be released.

Standards Team at Horsham DC

10th November 2020