

Standards Committee
16 JUNE 2021

Present: Councillors: Brian Donnelly, Lynn Lambert, Jim Sanson, David Skipp,
Diana van der Klugt,
Independent Persons: John Donaldson, Michael Rumble
Parish Representatives: Philip Baxter, Stephen Watkins

Apologies: Councillors: Alan Britten and Karen Burgess

SC/1 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED

That Councillor Brian Donnelly be elected Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

SC/2 **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED

That Councillor Diana van der Klugt be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

SC/3 **TO APPROVE THE TIME OF THE MEETINGS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THE ENSUING YEAR**

RESOLVED

That the Standards Committee meet at 10.00am for the ensuing municipal year.

SC/4 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 19 April were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SC/5 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/6 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

SC/7 **STANDARDS UPDATE, AND REVIEW OF PROCEDURE/ARRANGEMENTS FOR DEALING WITH STANDARDS COMPLAINTS**

The Legal Services Business Manager presented the report and gave details of Code of Conduct complaints received during the last Financial Year. It was stated that Steyning Parish Council (SPC) accounted for 63% of Code of Conduct complaints; Nuthurst Parish Council had accounted for 30%.

There had been 10 complaints this Financial Year to date, including four received since publication of the report, nine of which were from SPC. It was reported that persistent complaining from one Parish consumed considerable amounts of officers' time.

Members questioned how other authorities dealt with complex issues. The Monitoring Officer advised that the SPC situation was very unusual and she knew of no other Monitoring Officer to have experienced such an extreme level of complaints within a Parish Council setting.

The Chairman agreed that the report should be shared with HALC.

With regard to the review of procedures for dealing with Code of Conduct complaints, the Monitoring Officer advised that the delivery of a new streamlined procedure would include measures to deter trivial or persistent complaints and achieve more early-stage local resolution. A new complaints form was being designed to help deliver the new arrangements. It was suggested that the guidance regarding the 28 days reporting process be strengthened.

The Chairman expressed frustration at the lack of sanctions available to local authorities. It was noted that the introduction of new national Code of Conduct sanctions had been delayed owing to the impact of Brexit and the pandemic.

One success highlighted was the move to publishing Decision Notices following the assessment of complaints. This had the potential to deter Code of Conduct breaches.

A working group was proposed to finalise new procedures and arrangements, including a newly designed complaints form, which would be brought to a future Standards Committee for consideration. It was unanimously agreed that Councillor van der Klugt should chair this working group.

SC/8 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 10.54 am having commenced at 10.00 am

CHAIRMAN