

Standards Committee
8 SEPTEMBER 2021

Present: Councillors: Brian Donnelly (Chairman), Diana van der Klugt (Vice-Chairman), Lynn Lambert, David Skipp
Independent Persons: John Donaldson, Michael Rumble
Parish Representative: Philip Baxter

Apologies: Councillors: Alan Britten, Karen Burgess, Jim Sanson
Parish Representative: Stephen Watkins

SC/9 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 June were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SC/10 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/11 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

SC/12 **THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW 2020 - 2021**

The Feedback Officer gave an overview of the complaints made against the Council to the Ombudsman in 2020/21. He advised that the Ombudsman had paused work for four months because of the pandemic so there was a backlog of cases on a national level.

Only eight complaints against the Council had been decided by the Ombudsman and none of these had been upheld: two had been closed after initial enquiries; five had been referred back to the Council for local resolution; and one had not been upheld.

This compared favourably with the national picture, set out in the LGSCO's annual report, which showed that 67% of cases investigated in 202/21 had been upheld.

The Chairman congratulated officers on this excellent record, which demonstrated how the Council had continued to operate well despite the challenges of the pandemic.

SC/13 **STANDARDS UPDATE**

The Legal Services Business Manager advised that there had been 23 new cases submitted since the beginning of the Financial Year (compared to 20 cases over the entire of 2020/21).

Twenty of these cases were from Steyning Parish Council. The complainants were mostly Parish Councillors and some of the cases were interrelated. Committee members discussed the on-going issues with this particular Parish Council and what might be done to address them. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that she and her team were giving support to the Parish Clerk.

The Legal Services Business Manager agreed that he would advise the Committee how much dealing with complaints relating to Steyning Parish Council was costing the Council.

The Monitoring Officer advised that a government review of sanctions available to local authorities when dealing with breaches of the Code of Conduct had been delayed. She would look into how best to make representations to government regarding the need for more robust sanctions, such as suspension from office.

SC/14 **REVIEW OF THE PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH STANDARDS COMPLAINTS**

The Monitoring Officer reminded the Committee that Councillor van der Klugt was to chair a working group with a view to finalising new procedures and arrangements for dealing with formal complaints. Officers had already carried out some work regarding legislation and the practices of other local authorities, which would help inform the process.

Membership of the working group was confirmed as: Diana van der Klugt, Lynn Lambert, David Skipp and John Donaldson.

The Chairman of the Committee confirmed that:

- The whole Committee would be consulted on draft proposals put forward by the working group.
- An additional meeting of the Committee would be arranged (to be held remotely) to finalise the proposed procedure, with a view to recommending it for adoption to the ordinary Council meeting scheduled for 8 December.

The meeting closed at 11.04 am having commenced at 10.00 am

CHAIRMAN