

Report to Standards Committee

Wednesday 30th November 2022

By Sharon Evans, Head of Legal & Democratic
Services & Monitoring Officer



**Horsham
District
Council**

INFORMATION REPORT

Not Exempt

Steyping Parish Council

Executive Summary

This is a report to the Standards Committee to update them following the previous resolution to instruct Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd to undertake a review of Steyping Parish Council.

Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd, who are specialist and experts at reviewing problem Parish Councils, were instructed to review and support Steyping Parish Council in April 2022. They have now undertaken a thorough review and provided a full report and made numerous recommendations. The report which can be found at Appendix A has been provided to Steyping Parish Council who have made and agreed an implementation plan detailing their actions in relation to those recommendations.

Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to note the contents of the report.

Reasons for recommendations

- i) To ensure that the Committee is kept informed as to the position and developments in relation to Steyping Parish Council Standards matters in order to promote and maintain the high standards of conduct of Councillors across the district.

Background Papers

Localism Act 2011

HDC arrangements in dealing with code of conduct complaints

Previous report to Standards Committee regarding this matter:

<https://horsham.moderngov.co.uk/documents/g1957/Public%20reports%20pack%2016th-Mar-2022%2010.00%20Standards%20Committee.pdf?T=10>

Wards affected:

Steyning Parish Council & ALL

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Background Information

1 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Steyning Parish Council has previously taken up a disproportionate amount of the Monitoring Officer and Standards Team's time in dealing with numerous code of conduct complaints and other interconnected matters over the years.
- 1.2 The resource implication has been substantial and the situation at Steyning Parish Council continued to deteriorate, and the Monitoring Officer and Standards Team received ever more complaints. There had been a breakdown of relations within Steyning Parish Council and there was a desire to help and improve the Council to function more effectively and to be able to concentrate on working and delivering for their residents.
- 1.3 Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd were instructed and have undertaken a thorough governance review and have produced a report which can be found at Annex A. There are a number of recommendations contained and detailed within the report. It is hoped that if the recommendations are implemented it will considerably improve behaviours and relations and ultimately lead to less complaints and a more effective and efficient Parish Council.

2 Relevant Council policy

- 2.1 The statutory background can be found in the Localism Act 2011.

3 Details

- 3.1 There has been a long history of problems and difficulties at Steyning Parish Council which has resulted in many code of conduct complaints over the years. The information and details regarding the history can be found within the previous report to the Standards Committee on 16th March 2022. The link to this report is detailed in the background papers.
- 3.2 Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd were commissioned to independently review Steyning Parish Council and assist and support them going forward. Their report details a background summary and their methodology and looks at the following areas:
 - A. Behaviour
 - B. Roles & Responsibilities
 - C. Policies & Procedures
 - D. Meetings
 - E. Ambition & Strategy
 - F. Monitoring of Plan
- 3.3 The Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd report makes 36 different recommendations. It has been acknowledged that some of the recommendations had already been

completed and some have now recently been completed by Steyning Parish Council.

- 3.4 Upon receipt of the report from Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd a full member working party was convened on the 7th November 2022 which included the Monitoring Officer and the Deputy Monitoring Officer in attendance to discuss and look at a way forward. It was agreed that an implementation plan should be made in relation to the recommendations.
- 3.5 Steyning Parish Council have since made an implementation plan and this can be found at Appendix B. The implementation plan says what needs to be done, if anything, in relation to the individual recommendations, and it details by whom and by when. It also deals with reporting back on progress to the Monitoring Officer.
- 3.6 Steyning Parish Council had a Full Parish Council meeting on Monday 21st November 2022 and the following resolution was passed:

*Cllr Norcross **proposed, seconded** by Cllr Parsons that SPC duly note the report from Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd and have prepared a detailed implementation plan in relation to the recommendations contained in the report.*

SPC believes that some of the recommendations have already been completed but the majority require action. The proposed actions and timeframes are detailed within the implementation plan.

*SPC resolves to take the actions and to implement the recommendations as detailed and to report on the progress in 6 months and again in 12 months to Full Council and to the Monitoring Officer at Horsham District Council. **Agreed***

- 3.7 I understand that Steyning Parish Council also agreed at this meeting to take the Civility and Respect pledge which forms part of one of the recommendations.

4 Next Steps

- 4.1 The Committee is asked to note the report.

5 Views of the Policy Development Advisory Group and Outcome of Consultations

- 5.1 Not applicable.

6 Other Courses of Action Considered but Rejected

- 6.1 To continue to try to deal with all existing and ongoing complaints and investigate them, determine them, and issue decision notices. However, it is not believed that this will improve the relations at Steyning Parish Council and indeed it could just make matters worse, resulting in further and continuing complaints.

7 Resource Consequences

- 7.1 There is an estimated spend of £65,000 in dealing with Steyning Parish Council complaints and the cost of instructing Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd, including further training and other assistance is less than £20,000. It is hoped that future relations improve and ongoing complaints reduce, leading to less resource implications on the Legal Department.

8 Legal Considerations and Implications

- 8.1 The Council has a statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct and to have arrangements where allegations of code of conduct complaints can be investigated and decisions made under the Localism Act 2011.
- 8.2 The Localism Act 2011 together with our previous and current arrangement for dealing with Standards complaints allows the Monitoring Officer the discretion to revert to an alternative resolution when and where it is considered necessary.

9 Risk Assessment

- 9.1 There may be a risk of challenge in deciding not to deal with, investigate and determine individual complaints, however the alternative resolution is justified and considered more appropriate and more likely to achieve the desired results.

10 Procurement implications

- 10.1 There are no procurement implications stemming from the recommendations.

11. Equalities and Human Rights implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

- 11.1 There is no detrimental impact on any group, a full Equalities Impact Assessment is not needed.

12 Environmental Implications

- 12.1 There are no environmental implications from this report.

13 Other Considerations

- 13.1 There are no GDPR, Data Protection or Crime & Disorder consequences foreseen.