

APPENDIX A

**REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE OF STEYNING PARISH COUNCIL:
April - October 2022**

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Background summary

- 1.1 Steyning Parish Council is a council in the area of Horsham District Council. It has 15 councillors (14 at present with one vacancy). The Parish is not warded. The population of the town according to Wikipedia is around 6,000 people.
- 1.2 In common with many town and parish councils, Steyning Parish Council councillors do not sit in political groupings. The current Council's term of office began in May 2019 and will end in 2023. Eight of the current fourteen councillors were newly-elected or co-opted in 2019.
- 1.3 The Parish Council has a Clerk and Deputy Clerk who both work full time and also has an office administrator. The Chair of the Council was elected to the Council in November 2019, has been Chair since May 2021 and was re-appointed to the Chair at this year's Annual Meeting.
- 1.4 Relationships within the Parish Council have become strained over recent times, with difficult working relationships in particular between certain councillors and between the Clerk and certain councillors. This has led to a large number of Code of Conduct complaints. While these relationship difficulties seem to go back many years they manifest themselves primarily over differences about the way the Council is run and whether proper procedures are followed, Internally, this has led broadly to several councillors being dissatisfied with the governance of the Council and raising those concerns persistently with the Clerk and Chair as well as with the District Council; and at the same time other councillors complaining about the persistence and tone of those expressions of dissatisfaction. During the period of our review we were copied into or had forwarded to us a number of these email exchanges, some of them relating to matters going back several years.
- 1.5 According to the majority of people we spoke to these differences are sometimes made very forcefully in meetings but most of the conflict has been through email correspondence. This has led to meetings being difficult to manage, becoming protracted, for example over disputes about minutes of the meeting and descending into strong disagreements as passions run high. This has made working relationships unmanageable and made many councillors feel disaffected at the pressure they are under and wondering whether they wish to continue in their voluntary role, and also led to the Council officers feeling constantly under pressure and unable to do their job as effectively as they wish.
- 1.6 This has at times resulted in complaints being made to the monitoring officer at Horsham about alleged councillor misconduct in particular and has also meant that the Parish Council has become frustrated in the way business is conducted. Horsham approached us initially in January 2022 to discuss whether we could assist them in supporting the Parish Council and seeking to help them move forward more constructively and effectively and we were formally commissioned to carry out this review in April.
- 1.7 This review has not been about investigating any particular complaints or grievances, including any specific past incidents. The review was about looking in

general at the Council's processes, procedures and behaviours with a view to establishing and resolving the underlying causes. Our focus has always been on working with the Parish Council to address the way they could operate more effectively in the future, not to adjudicate on specific things that may have happened in the past.

- 1.8 The review team consisted of three people – Paul Hoey and Natalie Ainscough, who are co-directors of Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd, and Sarita Presland, working on behalf of Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd for this review.
- 1.9 Hoey Ainscough Associates Ltd was set up in April 2012 to support local authorities in managing their arrangements for handling councillor conduct issues and wider governance issues. The company was co-founded by Paul Hoey, who had been director of strategy at Standards for England from 2001 until its closure in 2012, and Natalie Ainscough who had worked as his deputy. They have worked with some 400 councils on standards-related issues and advise a number of national bodies, including the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) and the Society of Local Council clerks (SLCC) on local governance issues. They were also commissioned by the Local Government Association to produce a new Model Code of Conduct and supporting guidance in 2020.
- 1.10 Sarita Presland is an experienced local government officer and was until recently the Chief Officer at the Derbyshire Association of Local Councils.
- 1.11 In carrying out this review, we had the full cooperation of everybody that we spoke to at the Parish Council and District Council and we would like to thank them for the open and constructive way in which they approached the review and were willing to answer our questions and provide us with all relevant information we requested. We would also like to thank Trevor Leggo, the Chief Executive of the West Sussex Association of Local Councils who advised us on various issues through the review.

Methodology

- 2.1 Our proposal set out five aims:
 - a) to review the Parish Council's processes and procedures to ensure that the right tools are in place to allow the Parish Council to operate effectively;
 - b) to understand what their underlying issues are and help the Parish Council consider how they can work more effectively;
 - c) to help the Parish Council's reputation through demonstrating that there is a culture of high standards and good governance;
 - d) to ensure there is a good understanding of the different roles of councillors and officers of the Parish Council and that both can do their job effectively; and
 - e) to develop an action plan to help the Parish Council resolve its difficulties and allow the District Council to monitor progress over time.

2.2 In order to carry out a review we divided our work into five phases. These five phases were:

- a) to have an informal discussion with the monitoring officer and the county secretary to understand the background to the Council and some of the underlying issues of the Council;
- b) to carry out a confidential online survey of councillors, officers and other relevant individuals to get a greater in-depth picture of the Council and some personal perspectives on the key issues;
- c) to spend a day in the Council having individual interviews with councillors to develop understanding of the key issues emerging and to spend time talking to the Clerk and reviewing the policies and procedures and ways of working of the Council;
- d) to present some interim findings to the Council and invite discussion on those conclusions;
- e) to prepare a report and action plan for Steyning Parish Council and Horsham District Council setting out ways in which the Parish Council could move forward.

2.3 The questionnaire for phase two was open for responses through May and June. In total, we had 23 responses to the questionnaire.

2.4 We then spent the day speaking to individuals from the Parish Council as phase three of the work on 23 June (with one 'virtual' interview done a few days later), and Sarita Presland carried out a desktop review of the Council's policies and procedures with the assistance of the Clerk. This was followed up by a presentation to the Parish Council for phase four on 6 September.

2.5 Phases two and three provided much of the evidence on which our findings and recommendations are based. It should be noted that the questionnaire and interviews were done on a confidential basis so no individual quotes are attributed in this report. It should also be noted that as sample sizes are inevitably small we have tried to generalise rather than seek to identify individuals or repeat any comments that were made about particular individuals, although inevitably some parts of the report make reference to the role of the Chair or the Clerk given their particular role within the Council.

Findings and recommendations

3.1 Based upon the written and oral comments and responses which we received, we gave feedback to a meeting of councillors and officers of Steyning Parish Council, together with the Monitoring Officer of Horsham District Council and her deputy on the evening of 6 September 2022 as phase four of the methodology set out in the section above.

3.2 We indicated that we would then make detailed recommendations for the consideration of the Parish Council as phase five. These are set out in this report.

3.3 There is a high degree of consistency as to issues affecting the Parish Council as identified in the responses to the questionnaire and the interviews we conducted at phases two and three.

3.4 In our view, the key issues are:

- a) a breakdown in working relations between a number of individual councillors and between some councillors and officers, characterised by mistrust, suspicion, disrespectful behaviour and an inability to have any constructive dialogue at some meetings or in correspondence between meetings;
- b) the need to improve understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Parish councillors and the Clerk;
- c) the need to improve certain aspects of governance in the Council, in particular in the way meetings are conducted and correspondence dealt with; and
- d) the need to review its external communications with its community and become more focussed on strategic outcomes.

3.5 Having considered the information available to us, we therefore set out a series of recommendations and an action plan to address each of these issues in the sections below. A full list of recommendations is attached at Appendix A.

A. Behaviour

3.6 The principal reason that we were asked by Horsham to review and support the Parish Council was because of a series of complaints made about the behaviour of councillors. In particular such complaints alleged, inter alia, instances of disrespectful behaviour, personal attacks on the characters of individuals, complaints about mismanagement of the Council, and the unacceptable behaviour of some councillors towards officers.

3.7 While our review went wider than a focus on behaviour and looked at what underlay some of the issues and wider governance of the Council it is abundantly clear that some councillors need, undoubtedly, to modify substantially their behaviour generally and when conducting Council business (so that it is professional, respectful, appropriate and to the standard you would expect in any workplace and in particular that of individuals who have been elected or chosen to represent their community and to deliver community and social initiatives for the benefit of the local community). Only when this happens can the Council as a whole begin to improve its working processes as outlined in the rest of this report. It goes without saying that the profound lack of appropriate behaviour is the root cause for the vast majority of the issues which exist at this Council.

3.8 Our experience from working with the councillors and observing the Parish Council is that there is an unacceptably high level of animosity between certain councillors which is holding the Parish Council back. While the Clerk is generally well-regarded by the majority of councillors some of that animosity has spilt over into questioning the capabilities of the Clerk which seems to go beyond legitimate questioning and the Clerk has to some extent been caught in crossfire between the mutual distrust between two groups of councillors. The way that these disagreements are articulated on both sides has at times gone way beyond legitimate disagreements about policy or procedures and has descended into disruptive behaviour, allegations being made which question the integrity of individuals and an unwillingness to engage in debate or allow legitimate concerns to be raised. These comments are made in meetings and in widely-circulated

emails. Such comments often lead to a downward spiral and what can start as a legitimate question or concern descends into wholly inappropriate and disrespectful comments and unevidenced allegations of wrongdoing which simply leads to positions becoming entrenched and the Council closing in on itself with defensive positions. The whole culture of the Parish Council thereby becomes deeply unprofessional and brings the Parish Council into disrepute.

- 3.9 It is our experience from working with other councils where they have similar issues that such ways of communicating do nothing to bring about the positive change that may be needed to improve the governance of the organisation or help the Clerk do his job effectively. Instead personal comments or allegations which question people's motives or make unfounded accusations of incompetence and illegality based on assumptions simply make people defensive, stifle legitimate concerns and lead to tit-for-tat accusations which mire the council in animosity.
- 3.10 If councillors are serious about bringing about the change that is needed, they must therefore start to work together collectively as a team and stop personal attacks and feeding the flames of such attacks. Councils, like any organisation, have to work collectively to achieve the best outcomes, and if people feel they cannot work collectively but must resort to disrespectful comments and questioning people's motives with little or no evidence then it is recommended that such councillors resign immediately from the Council as it cannot change while such poison exists within the organisation.
- 3.11 We should say that it is of course vital to any organisation, and in particular to a democratically-elected body, that people can challenge decisions, put forward opposing views and raise concerns that matters are not being implemented properly. However there is a world of difference between discussing those matters in a dignified, professional, measured and respectful way and simply being deliberately obstructive and confrontational and imputing the worst possible motives to matters with which you disagree. It is acceptable to challenge ideas with which you disagree. It is unacceptable to make personal attacks on individuals in a deliberately abhorrent and disrespectful way. In our schools we teach our children about Fundamental British Values. These include tolerance and respect for other people and their values and beliefs. We are afraid that certain individuals on the Council seem to have lost sight of those values. They should ask themselves whether they would act in such a manner in any other workplace and whether such behaviours would indeed be tolerated in other settings.
- 3.12 Councillors therefore need as a priority to stop behaving in this way if they have the interests of the Council and the community as a whole as their priority. The Council does need to change in certain aspects, and some of the concerns raised are legitimate, but change will only happen when councillors start to respect and tolerate each other and behave as mature, intelligent and measured parish councillors.
- 3.13 Of course we recognise that a more rational and trusting atmosphere will work most effectively when all feel they have confidence in the Council's working. It is

perfectly legitimate to have policy differences within the Council and concerns about the way the Council operates but the way in which they have been raised has made addressing them impossible. So there needs to be an agreement on all sides to deal with matters in a calmer and more rational way while the recommendations set out in other sections to improve the Council are adopted and implemented. To do this, each councillor needs to draw a line under what has taken place in the past, look forward, embrace change and the idea of new and fresh positive working relationships and employ coping mechanisms to assist them when dealing with communications or comments which they believe to be inappropriate. Further, all councillors should tailor any communications and ensure they are conveyed in a respectful and professional manner. We do believe the Council can improve the way it operates but we have seen no evidence that the Council is 'dysfunctional' as some councillors constantly claim in emails, and while there have been at times a failure to follow the rules and procedures and advice may not always have been clear or consistent, these more often reflect inherent issues within the local (parish and town) council sector as a whole rather than systemic issues at Steyning. though we do address certain specific issues elsewhere in the report.

3.14 All councillors we spoke to and met appeared to have the best interests of Steyning as a community at heart. However, this view is not consistent with the approach of councillors in failing to behave appropriately, as undoubtedly Council business is adversely affected. It is apparent that while the view of what was best for Steyning differed between individuals, that simply reflects a legitimate democratic plurality. Councillors must learn that disagreeing with a decision does not mean that decision is automatically wrong or the motives behind it wrong – it simply means that collectively the Council has decided to act in a particular way and once a decision has been taken by the Council, the Council is perfectly entitled to implement that decision. Similarly the Council must ensure that where people do have opposing views which are relevant to the matter in hand that those concerns are listened to, provided they remain respectful, and a reasonable amount of debate is allowed. It can be too easy to want to shut down discussion because matters are becoming polarised or personal or being unnecessarily prolonged and this highlights why it is important for behaviour on all sides to become more respectful before some of the issues outlined elsewhere can be resolved.

3.15 The Council has signed up to this review process and this is a positive important step. The problems faced by the Council have been protracted and expensive - not just in terms of reputation and time, but also at a not insignificant cost to Horsham in handling complaints and supporting the Council. But the time, stress to both councillors and officers, and the sheer opportunity cost of the resources that could have been deployed to improve local services rather than dealing with constant sniping has been significant.

3.16 Typical comments made to us were that the disagreements were 'all-consuming', 'exhausting' or 'soul-destroying' and that people felt 'beaten down' and 'battle-weary'. A by-product is that the Council, while it has achieved a number of important things, has lost focus and there have been a lot of councillors who have resigned before their term of office ended. This shows that

behaviours and relationships within the Council must change. Otherwise, one could legitimately question the effectiveness of the Council and its role going forward.

- 3.17 The aim of our report is to better unleash the potential of the Council. That potential is only in councillors' hands and the Council is capable of being a high-performing Council but it will only happen if councillors bring about the behavioural and cultural change that is required to enable people to work collaboratively and with respect.
- 3.18 Whilst we can make recommendations it is only through councillors adopting the report's findings in both letter and spirit that will make the actual difference. If there are instances of poor behaviour they need to be challenged, during debates and discussions as well as when made in correspondence. It is every councillor's responsibility to do this, and the Chair's specifically to ensure proper conduct during Council proceedings. We will pick up those matters later.
- 3.19 There also seemed to be an inordinate amount of time spent discussing procedural issues, reviewing minutes of previous meetings and seeking to challenge advice given or received by the Clerk. While it is right for councillors to raise concerns, too much time can be taken up with dealing with constitutional issues rather than substantive business. Where councillors have concerns about the way a decision has been made or a procedure followed they should discuss this with the Clerk in advance and the Clerk should be allowed to give a ruling with reasons as to whether or not the concern is legitimate. This is within the Clerk's remit and he needs to be afforded the opportunity to do this with confidence and without fear of repercussions, seeking external advice where necessary. Where the concern is legitimate such a ruling should include the steps needed either to rectify the matter or the changes needed to prevent the matter re-occurring. There should also be an agreement that, if advice is needed from Horsham, the West Sussex Association or other external bodies on a matter this should be done through the Clerk rather than individual councillors as this ensures there is a clear route and that advice, where appropriate, is definitive and available to all. If the Council collectively decides not to follow that advice, they are perfectly entitled to do so provided that is documented with their reasons, as the Council collectively is a sovereign body. If the advice is accepted by the Council collectively then that advice should be acted upon accordingly.
- 3.20 The majority of individuals we spoke to felt very strongly that meetings were difficult and the tone of debate, both at meetings and in correspondence, reflected very badly on the Council. It is likely that the constituents of Steyning are of this mind too. For example, the Council was referred to on a number of times as a 'laughing stock' and that the community as a whole had lost faith in it being able to run effectively. This is unacceptable. While we did not attend meetings in person, we did watch some meetings online and we also saw a large number of email exchanges and have seen the Code of Conduct complaints which were made. The weight of evidence presented to us clearly demonstrates that this pattern of behaviour does exist and that it is wholly inappropriate, unprofessional and far from acceptable.

- 3.21 Above all we believe that it is the responsibility of all councillors to challenge disrespectful behaviour in the Council chamber and support the meeting in being run effectively, with the right balance between debate and getting the business done. The Council collectively should therefore agree where the boundaries of respect lie and how that should be enforced in meetings. We therefore recommend as a first step that the Council collectively sign up to and agree to abide by the NALC/SLCC Civility and Respect Pledge which has been recently launched.
- 3.22 If personal attacks are made by councillors in future which breach the Pledge the matter should be referred to Horsham District Council who will deal with the matter in line with set criteria against which complaints will be assessed and will ensure that anything that falls below the Council's agreed standards is appropriately dealt with and breaches of the Code are sanctioned and publicised. Referrals to Horsham District Council should not, however, be pursued lightly, should be done only where there is a genuine belief that there has been a breach of the Code of Conduct (and not as a result, for example, of merely an internal disagreement with a policy or as a means of revenge because of another complaint). It should also be borne in mind that Horsham District Council is not obliged to investigate all complaints but will assess them to see whether they meet the "threshold" for investigation against agreed criteria.
- 3.23 This report is about moving forward so a constant reference back to things that happened in the past, in some cases several years ago, will not help the Council move on. This report should be seen as setting a new benchmark for the Council to move forward with greater respect and tolerance.
- 3.24 We therefore think the Parish Council needs to agree the following actions:

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1 As a priority the Council should sign up to the NALC/SLCC Civility and Respect Pledge.**
- R2 In doing so the Council should collectively agree what language is and is not appropriate in meetings and correspondence among councillors and with officers, how such language should be challenged in meetings and how meetings can be run more efficiently without getting bogged down in minutiae nor stifling legitimate debate. Behaviour needs to be re-set to improve relationships to allow Council business to be transacted.**
- R3 In agreeing to the Pledge, all councillors should give an undertaking to treat fellow councillors and officers with respect and not to make personal attacks on individuals or their integrity. Until such respect is shown the Council cannot move forward**
- R4 All councillors should undertake that, where they have concerns about the way a decision has been made or a procedure followed they should discuss this respectfully with the Clerk and the Clerk should be allowed**

to give a ruling with reasons such as a reference to existing policy or legislation as to whether or not the concern is legitimate. This ruling should be communicated to all councillors. Where the concern is legitimate such a ruling should include the steps needed either to rectify the matter with an agreed timescale or the changes needed to prevent the matter re-occurring. Where the majority of councillors accept that the concern has been dealt with, the matter cannot be raised again for six months in line with Standing Orders.

- R5 All councillors who are unwilling to take, or abide by, the Pledge and modify their behaviour to improve internal relations should consider resigning with immediate effect for the greater good of the constituents of Steyning and Council business.**

B. Roles and responsibilities

Role of councillors

- 3.25 The role of councillor, at whatever tier of local government, can be a difficult and daunting role, particularly to those who come new to the role. We would therefore expect all councils to provide comprehensive induction and ongoing development (to include training in relation to what constitutes acceptable behaviours) to councillors to support them in their job. This is particularly true for councillors who are new in post and inexperienced.
- 3.26 The Council needs to do more work to help individuals understand what is expected of a councillor. There is a lack of clarity in many parish councils about what individuals do or can or should do. The sector of course relies on volunteers and people helping out where they can but the formal role must also be understood and boundaries not crossed. Of course what each individual can give to the Council varies widely – some councillors will work fulltime so cannot devote as much time and energy to the role as others. That is perfectly understandable and normal but does need to be recognised. However beyond that, parish councillors need to be clear what it is they are expected to do and cannot do as individuals. No parish councillor (including the chair) can be given delegated individual decision-making responsibilities. Decisions can either be made by Full Council, a committee or the Clerk depending on the scheme of delegation. Often in practice of course, individual councillors (particularly the chair) will have been authorised by the Council to have some individual responsibilities, either because of the need to react quickly to developing events or else because of a particular recognised expertise. Even in these rare cases, however, any binding decision must formally be taken by the Clerk in consultation with the individual and in line with a delegation scheme agreed with the Council and subsequently be ratified at a Full Council meeting.
- 3.27 We believe the Council should ensure all councillors understand they cannot act without express authorisation from the Council and should agree proper role descriptions and expectations for councillors.

- 3.28 That should include a clear statement of what an individual's role as a councillor in the community is as opposed to their role on the Full Council; and what a councillor's role is with regard to outside appointments where they represent the Council – including clarity about what views they should express, what they are delegated to say or decide and what they should or should not report back.
- 3.29 In particular the Council should seek to put in place a detailed training programme for the incoming Council on the role of the parish councillor, understanding the role of the Clerk, understanding delegated authority, chairing and meeting skills, the Code of Conduct, financial regulations and other matters. This also needs to become an ongoing package for future new councillors.
- 3.30 We would also expect councillors to undergo regular refresher training throughout their term of office. We believe that it is vital councillors have a full understanding of their roles and responsibilities before they start to discharge their functions, and, while training cannot be made mandatory, the Council should therefore consider what training individual councillors must undergo as soon as possible after they take up office. They should also consider what training they would require of councillors before they are allocated permanent seats on any committees to ensure councillors understand fully their role and responsibilities on a particular committee in future.
- 3.31 Individual councillors also need to be aware that, collectively as a Council, they have a duty of care as employees towards their staff. The actions of an individual can have implications for the finances and employment practices of the Council. The Council therefore needs to ensure that it has comprehensive and up-to-date HR and grievance procedures in place, that these are enforced and that any individual's behaviour which risks breaching these policies should be robustly challenged. The Council should work with Horsham and the West Sussex Association to ensure it is following best practice.

- R6 The Council should develop a comprehensive training and development strategy for the new Council which covers all areas of Council business. It should in particular include training on the Code of Conduct and appropriate standards of behaviour.**
- R7 The Council should develop an agreed understanding of the role and expectations for individual councillors when they are acting as Full Council, as committee members, as individuals and as representatives of the Council externally.**
- R8 That councillors are reminded that they cannot speak on behalf of the Council unless authorised by the Full Council to do so. Any correspondence from individual councillors needs to make this clear. Where an individual represents themselves as speaking on behalf of the Council, the Clerk should correct the record at the earliest opportunity.**
- R9 That councillors understand their fiduciary duties and vicarious liability and be reminded that they are all individually and severally liable for the**

finances and employment practices of the Council. Individual councillors should therefore be reminded that they should not act alone and unilaterally once Council collectively has made a decision or agreed a course of action

- R10 The Council should consider working with Horsham and the West Sussex Association or any other appropriate organisation approved by Horsham to ensure it has comprehensive and up-to-date HR and grievance policies and that these are effectively enforced**

Role of the Clerk and officers

- 3.32 While councillors set the tone and strategic direction of an authority, the Clerk and other officers are charged with supporting the Council and delivering its strategy on a day-to-day basis. The Clerk must therefore be resourced adequately and have the appropriate skills to do this.
- 3.33 We believe the current Clerk gives the Council sound support within the parameters of his role. However, the Clerk should be given time and space to complete their CiLCA qualification so that they can ensure they are working to an appropriate professionally-qualified level.
- 3.34 The officers, from our observations, actually work beyond their contracted hours. This is sometimes inevitable particularly in the run-up to and immediate aftermath of Council meetings but the Parish Council should ensure that officers are not over-burdened, that the workload is sustainable and that they ensure they fulfil their duty of care to the staff. That is why all councillors must recognise that there needs to be a more effective management of email traffic and correspondence and there are limitations on what the Council can realistically achieve. The Council as a whole is the Clerk's employer and therefore each individual councillor has employment responsibilities to ensure that the Clerk has a reasonable working environment and is able to manage the workload within contracted hours or else consider as a Council what changes to resources or terms and conditions may be necessary to achieve this.
- 3.35 We found that the Council had set little strategic direction for the Clerk, was not addressing workloads, and there was no clear understanding of what contact with the Clerk was appropriate on a day-to-day basis nor a recognition that individual councillors should not set work priorities for the Clerk.
- 3.36 The Clerk seemed to be asked to respond to a lot of emails and correspondence making very detailed comments and broadly seeking to keep going over similar ground. There is of course nothing that can be done to stop emails being sent and councillors and the public do have right to seek information and raise queries. However, the Council does have to recognise that this can place heavy demands on the resources of the Council and takes the Council and the Clerk away from undertaking the work of the Council. The Council already has an agreed policy limiting email correspondence but this is routinely ignored. Given the other calls on the Clerk's time the Council needs to ensure its policy in

handling emails is rigorously enforced and that the Clerk is empowered to draw a line under certain matters.

- 3.37 The Council also needs to be clear that where governance issues are raised there needs to be sufficient notice to allow a response to be prepared for tabling and/or discussion at a meeting if required. There also needs to be an understanding that the time spent on such matters would have to be limited to allow the transaction of other important business. Thus, for example, it might be that ten minutes is set aside at the start or end of the meeting for any governance issues, and that each councillor is limited to raising no more than one concern. Similarly, if the Council collectively is satisfied that the matter has been addressed it should not be raised again within an agreed period unless circumstances have changed. Steyning's Standing Orders make clear that resolutions previously made cannot be reversed within six months except by special motions or a motion from a committee and the Council should ensure this is enforced to help achieve better governance.
- 3.38 We also believe it would help the Council and the Clerk if some form of schedule of work was prepared. This would help the Council to recognise what was a reasonable expectation on the Clerk and be clear with the Clerk what the priorities on their limited time should be. SLCC has a useful calendar available to clerks to remind them of what needs doing when. The Clerk should get this timetable and share it with councillors so that it can inform this work schedule.
- 3.39 The Council also needs to review the issue of councillor access to officer time. While councillor access to officers is important, there was a view that some councillors were spending too much time absorbing officer time with no clear purpose and were stopping higher priority work being done. The Council therefore needs to look at how officer contact with councillors is regulated – for example by putting a system in place where councillors can only see officers during working hours by prior appointment, or for a set time unless by prior appointment, or only at particular times of the week. This would complement enforcement of the email policy. The aim would be to strike a balance between allowing councillors to raise their own local priorities and issues and support officers with advice while allowing officers time to carry out their job and run the office effectively.
- 3.40 There is a balance to be struck in any public administration between what one might call 'maintenance' on the one hand – that is, the day-to-day running of the council through, for example supporting meetings, carrying out statutory duties etc – and what one might call 'progression' – taking forward longer-term goals and projects. The more ambitious a council is in terms of strategy the more it needs to decide where the balance lies between maintenance and progression and if it is adequately resourced to deliver both. Our view is that given current behavioural issues the Clerk and their staff can do little other than focus on maintenance within their existing hours. The Clerk has tried to move to a more 'progressive' role. For example a Neighbourhood Plan has been produced which seems a good example of an attempt at long-term planning. However, if the Council is to progress it needs to ensure that it is satisfied the right balance is struck by the office between maintenance and progression and the office need to

be given time and space to work on helping the Council deliver this Plan. This may include reviewing resources as ambitions grow but in the short term would be helped by ensuring the Clerk is less focussed on dealing with internal correspondence and other matters.

Recommendations

- R11 The Clerk should complete CiLCA as a matter of priority. A timetable should be agreed between the Chair and the Clerk with dedicated 'professional development' time set aside in the working week to allow this to happen**
- R12 The Council should ensure that its email policy is properly enforced and the Clerk empowered to draw a line under correspondence such that if the policy is breached the Clerk will simply reply to say that the email will not be responded to as it falls outside the policy. There may be exceptions for significant urgent matters but the Council as a whole shall agree a definition of what those exceptions should be. All emails should go through the Clerk.**
- R13 The Council should have an agreed and enforced policy for dealing with persistent or vexatious correspondence to ensure that the business of the Council is not unnecessarily diverted.**
- R14 The Council should agree how governance issues should be raised in meetings to allow reasonable discussion but also to allow other business to be transacted.**
- R15 The Council and the Clerk should agree a work schedule to ensure that officers' time is focussed and that there are realistic expectations on their time within agreed working hours.**
- R16 The Council needs to agree a councillor-officer protocol which would include a shared agreement as to the circumstances when councillors should have access to officer time and how the Clerk should respond to queries from individual councillors.**
- R17 The Council should review its current staffing structure to ensure it is in line with its strategy and able to help the Council deliver it and that the Clerk's key performance objectives and time are geared to deliver that strategy**
- R18 The Council should ensure that the Clerk and the Council make best use of external support and advice from its memberships of professional bodies**

C. Policies and procedures

- 3.41 Aside from the behavioural issues (which we believe to be at the heart of the difficulties experienced at and by the Council), we also carried out an in-depth

look at the governance and administration of the Council. The following sections look at each of the areas we examined in turn and make a series of recommendations, starting with our review of the Council's policies and procedures.

3.42 Overall, we found that the broad suite of policies and procedures at the Parish Council were in place and up to date. However, we believe they should be made more easily available through the Council website. The policies tend to be based on national policies prepared by NALC so conform with good practice.

3.43 We did identify a couple of gaps where we thought significant policies were either missing or not properly enforced. We have already mentioned the email policy above which we think needs to be adhered to, and also the seeming absence of a vexatious and persistent correspondence policy, which we would expect to see in any parish council.

3.44 We also believe there is some confusion around what information held by the Council councillors are entitled to see as a matter of course. Councillors in general are entitled to see most information held by the Council, including exempt information not available to the public, in order to help them do their job. There will always, however, be circumstances where a council is legally entitled to regard certain information as confidential. The law itself sets out grounds for certain business to be considered in private by the Council and it is widely recognised through case law and elsewhere that not all councillors are entitled to see all information at all times, as some personal information for example has to be regarded as confidential unless there is a demonstrable need for an individual councillor to have access to that information to carry out their duties.

3.45 As set out in NALC Legal Topic Note 1, councillors do not have a 'need to know' all aspects of council business and cannot claim an automatic right to see all council documentation and information. In other words, councillors are not permitted a fishing expedition in respect of council documentation and information simply because they are councillors.

3.46 We therefore think the Council needs to agree a 'need to know' policy to establish a common understanding of where the boundaries of confidentiality and access to information might lie. This would also cover any information held by individual councillors and be tied closely to the Council's responsibility to protect information under GDPR.

3.47 In developing a policy, the following extract from NALC LTN 1 may prove helpful in establishing whether a councillor has a 'need to know':

- If a councillor is a member of a committee, he or she has the right to inspect documents or to obtain information relating to the business of that committee;
- If a councillor is not a member of a particular committee, he or she has to demonstrate why sight of the document(s)/or receipt of the information in question is necessary to enable him or her to perform his or her duties as a councillor;

- If the councillor's motive for seeing the documents/obtaining information is indirect, improper or ulterior, then the documentation or information should be withheld.

3.48 Related to this is the Council's approach to freedom of information. The Freedom of Information Act is a mechanism for people to hold organisations accountable. Those people within an organisation, such as in this case councillors, should not need to use a freedom of information request to obtain the information they feel they require and are lawfully entitled to see. All minutes should be freely available to all councillors (and the public). If a committee has a meeting and an item is considered confidential, however, those councillors not on that committee have no right to sit in on a confidential item - based on the principle of "need to know" in essence they have no further rights than a member of the public to see that confidential matter unless they can demonstrate a need to know against agreed criteria. Steyning need to consider their whole freedom of information approach. Whilst the policy they currently have is sound in theory, the way it is implemented and the approach to councillor access to information needs to be re-thought in such a manner that councillors will have access to everything they are entitled to see and need to know in a timely and appropriate manner rather than having to make FOI requests. To this end the office needs to ensure that all information is put onto the Council website or a suitable portal for councillors to see as soon as possible unless it is confidential information which does not meet the 'need to know' test. Just because a councillor did not attend a meeting or is not a member of a committee is no reason to withhold information, subject to rules on exempt and confidential information but see our comment below on meetings.

3.49 We also believe the Council should review its recording of meetings policy. The Council keeps a library of recordings of all meetings. Although laudable as a transparent action however, it is common practice elsewhere that once minutes are approved then all additional records, notes and recordings tend to be deleted so the minutes stand as the official record and thus extracts can't be taken out of context.

3.50 We also believe the Council needs to adopt a Social Media Policy which would cover both appropriate use of social media by individuals and the Council's own approach to social media as an organisation. This is routine best practice elsewhere but seems absent here.

3.51 We also felt the Council needed to review its approach towards planning delegation, although we were told when we met in September that this has already been done but we mention it here in any case, and as an example of where the Council is already moving forward.

Recommendations

R19 The Council needs to review whether it has all appropriate and up-to-date policies in place and ensure that policies are available on the website.

- R20 The Council needs to adopt a clear statement of councillors' right to information and a 'need to know' policy and review its implementation of freedom of information requests in the light of that policy.**
- R21 The Council should adopt a recording of meetings policy and decide how long it needs to keep recordings once minutes have been agreed**
- R22 The Council needs to adopt a social media policy which would cover both appropriate use of social media by individuals and the Council's own approach to social media as an organisation**
- R23 The Council needs to review its approach towards planning delegation if this has not already been done in the last six months.**

D. Meetings

- 3.52 We understand that some meetings have been difficult to run because of conflict in the meetings and the disruptive behaviour arising from this conflict. This section therefore makes some recommendations for making meetings run more effectively and efficiently.
- 3.53 Although we did not attend Council meetings in person, we have watched some online, and it was clear to us from all that we have been told and noted from our observations and also reading of past minutes that Council meetings have become increasingly difficult to manage.
- 3.54 Everybody is dissatisfied with the way the meetings take place. A wholly disproportionate and inordinate amount of time is spent revisiting matters. People have stopped listening to each other and meetings need to become genuine discussions again rather than disagreements. Individuals need to accept that it is perfectly fine to disagree and healthy debate is to be encouraged as it leads to better decision-making but there must be a recognition that once a decision is made, that is the democratic decision of the Council. It must also be recognised that a balance needs to be struck between progressing the business of the meeting effectively and not unnecessarily stopping discussion and stifling the progress of Council business.
- 3.55 It is essential, therefore, that the Parish Council draws up a proper protocol about how councillors treat each other which needs to be observed fully at all times and properly enforced if failings arise. Matters should be properly managed in meetings and the standards framework should not be misused to air disputes about personalities or perceived procedural failings but should be used where there are genuine cases where the Civility and Respect pledge is not adhered to.
- 3.56 We would always look to the chair of a meeting to enforce behaviour standards clearly, firmly and fairly. The role of the chair is to act as an impartial referee, to ensure that people are treated equitably, everyone is encouraged to contribute to the debate and that the meeting is conducted in an orderly and civil way so that business can be conducted. A chair should know when to seek advice from the clerk but should not let the clerk run the meeting. A chair also

needs to be conversant with Standing Orders and ensure that they are applied. However, the chair also needs the support of other councillors to ensure that Standing Orders are consistently and fairly applied to all councillors. We say this as it is apparent that councillors in general felt that meetings were not being effective because of disruptive behaviour and the balance being wrong about how some discussions were held owing to the fact that a uniform approach was not applied to all councillors' conduct.

- 3.57 To ensure that debate can be managed efficiently, we believe the Parish Council needs to enforce the '2 minute' rule at its meetings as set out in its Standing Orders – that is people's interventions in meetings – whether councillors or the public - should be strictly limited to 2 minutes and, when the 2 minutes is up, they should stop speaking. Most councils actually have a 3-minute rule, so if it is to be rigorously enforced, the Council may consider whether 2 or 3 minutes is appropriate.
- 3.58 Everybody is entitled to an equal say at meetings but all should equally respect that others should have an input and interventions should be limited to allow the meeting to proceed. By enforcing this rule it ensures that people are treated fairly – not being allowed to speak for too long, but equally not being cut off before their allocated time.
- 3.59 There may of course be times when an agenda item is of such significance that councillors collectively will wish to speak for more than 2 or 3 minutes. Any waiving of the rule for a particular item should be proposed by the Chair at the start of a meeting and agreed by the meeting.
- 3.60 We also believe it would be helpful to have a timetable alongside the agenda of how long can be spent on each agenda item so that the business of the meeting can be progressed, and not too much time spent, for example, discussing the wording of previous minutes or raising procedural issues. Again the Chair could waive the timetable should the meeting collectively agree that an item was more significant than initially considered.
- 3.61 We also want to cover the taking of minutes. Charles Arnold-Baker (the so-called Parish Bible) says "minutes should be a formal record of official acts and decisions, not reports, still less verbatim reports of the speeches made by councillors. Minutes should, therefore, be as short as is consistent with clarity and accuracy, and the arguments used in the discussion need be recorded only if the decision cannot be clearly expressed in any other way."
- 3.62 We believe too much time has been spent at meetings arguing about minutes of previous meetings. We therefore recommend that Council agree that minutes follow the model of simply being a recording of the decision rather than a verbatim record. As it is important that all councillors are clear what has been agreed we recommend that at the end of each item the Chair asks the Clerk to read out what he believes has been agreed as the decision for that item so that all present are clear and agree that what has been noted is sufficient for the minutes.

- 3.63 Minutes should be agreed at the following meeting and cannot be deferred under any circumstances save in the event of manifest error. The Council also needs to be clear that amendments can only be proposed by those who attended the meeting and should be factual only rather than opinion. Likewise when minutes come to be agreed it is not legal or appropriate for somebody to add in further comments as to the validity of the narrative especially if they did not attend the meeting.
- 3.64 One issue raised with us related to substantive motions being raised at meetings and thus taking the place of items for report only. We do not think this is appropriate. There is no clear national guidance on this as far as we know but an agenda must be sent out three clear working days before the meeting specifically to enable people to have time to consider the items and appropriate responses - noting a report is quite different from coming along prepared to discuss a substantive item and it would be unfair to change the nature of the item at the last minute. The better way to deal with this would be to agree to discuss the item as a substantive item at a future meeting.
- 3.65 Apologies for absence should be properly recorded and only accepted if the Council is satisfied with the reason; otherwise they should simply be noted but not accepted. Where a councillor does not wish to disclose a reason publicly, for example because of health or security issues, they should nevertheless notify the Clerk of the reason in confidence who can then satisfy the meeting that there is a good reason.
- 3.66 It would also be helpful if all councillors had a pack which contains all policies, Financial Regulations and Standing Orders that they bring to each and every meeting to aid understanding and avoid confusion. Further, it is incumbent upon councillors to familiarise themselves with such regulations and orders and we recommend, therefore, that councillors are clear about the rules prior to meetings to aid the conduct of meetings and the progression of Council business.
- 3.67 We note that Steyning's standing orders require that voting is recorded but this is not usual or necessary. The important thing is whether a decision was reached either unanimously or by a majority and the resulting decision stands alone in a court of law. It has been noted that some councillors, if they cannot attend a meeting, will still send their views for consideration at that meeting. That is not allowed and should be stopped
- 3.68 There also needs to be a greater understanding of how motions to move to next business can be used to ensure business is got through effectively where discussions are proving difficult to manage.

Recommendations

- R24 All councillors need to be familiar with Standing Orders and should have a pack which contains all policies, Financial Regulations and Standing Orders that they bring to each and every meeting to aid understanding and avoid confusion.**

- R25 The '2-minute' rule in Standing Orders should be enforced and all councillors should support the Chair in ensuring the meeting is run efficiently and without conflict. The rule may be waived in exceptional circumstances where an agenda item is of particular significance but this must be agreed at the start of the agenda item and a revised time limit (say 5 minutes) agreed**
- R26 Minutes should be agreed at the following meeting. Amendments can only be proposed by those who attended the meeting and should be factual only rather than opinion**
- R27 Minutes should be done in the recommended style as a record of the decisions made at meetings to help anybody understand the process by which a decision is made. So they should make clear the decision taken with some brief summary of matters considered for and against**
- R28 The requirement that voting is recorded should be reconsidered**
- R29 The practice of allowing a councillor who cannot attend a meeting to send their views for consideration at that meeting should be stopped**
- R30 The agendas for meetings should be timetabled to ensure business is effectively transacted. Where there needs to be a variation to the timetable that should be agreed at the start of the meeting**
- R31 Apologies for absence should only be accepted where a valid reason is either given to the meeting or given to the Clerk in confidence**

E. Ambition and strategy

3.69 While Steyning Parish Council has delivered on a number of projects for the community over recent years, and has recently developed a Neighbourhood Plan, we believe it can improve its approach towards a long-term strategy for the town. Its in-fighting and constant and relentless bickering in particular has meant that the Council has not been able to focus adequately on its community or real sense of long-term purpose. Indeed we were impressed by some of the things the Council has managed to achieve despite all this bickering but we believe there is the potential to do more. The Council needs to improve sufficiently that the incoming Council is better equipped to implement a measurable and costed action plan to improve the town. Previous lack of strategic direction has had two effects. It has left the Clerk and officers unclear about their role or what they are meant to be achieving beyond the day-to-day. And it has left councillors free to pursue certain projects without a wider context – almost acting as pseudo-officers in the absence of guidance or strategic direction.

3.70 We therefore believe the incoming Council will need to put in place a strategic vision which looks at what it wants to achieve over the next 5-10 years, with realistic aims, financial planning and milestones. This needs then to be matched up with the resources needed to deliver that vision and measured to ensure progress.

- 3.71 While not everyone will share the same vision, the Council needs to work together to come to a collective understanding and then ensure there is an agreed consensus to deliver that plan for the town.
- 3.72 As part of this we consider that the Council should strengthen its relationship with the community by developing a shared vision and strategy for delivering priorities. It is always a difficult issue for any council at this level and with limited resources to ensure it is sufficiently strategic and engaged with its community but this is not insurmountable and other councils are successful in implementing such strategies. A lot of work was done earlier this year around the Neighbourhood Plan, but we think it particularly important given current circumstances that Steyning is seen to continue to consult widely on its priorities and to have engaged as fully as possible with the community about its work. Some of this will no doubt form part of individual election campaigns but, following the election, the new Council should re-evaluate how to build on its Neighbourhood Plan to communicate and develop its strategic vision with its community - for example through one or a series of open days where the community are invited to help shape future priorities and agree objectives.
- 3.73 Some of this engagement needs to happen soon, however, as part of a drive to promote the profile of the Council to encourage more people to engage with the Council and ultimately to stand for election with a view to moving to contested elections. The Council therefore also need to consider how to encourage more and different members of the public to attend meetings and help promote the visibility of the Council through a more effective communications strategy.

Recommendations

- R32 After the next election the new Council should develop a fully costed and resourced long-term strategic plan for the Town putting personal agendas and differences aside for the greater good of the Steyning community**
- R33 The Council should review its communication strategy in conjunction with the public to evaluate its effectiveness and ensure that the public understands the work of the Council, is engaged in developing a vision for Steyning and is able to participate more fully in local decision-making.**
- 3.74 We believe that all councils should be aspirational and demonstrate to their public that they are working effectively. We think this is particularly important for Steyning in future given the issues it has faced. In our view there is no reason why, once it has developed a deliverable strategy, it should not be capable of becoming an outstanding council for its size and receiving external validation for its work. We therefore recommend that the Council Chair and Clerk actively seek opportunities on behalf of the Council to learn from and share best practice with outstanding councils in their vicinity. A good starting place would be to work with the West Sussex Association to look at local councils in the area who have been recipients of the Local Council Award Scheme.

Recommendation

R34 The Council Chair and Clerk should look to learn from and share best practice with outstanding local councils.

F. Monitoring of this plan

- 3.75 While these recommendations are a matter for Steyning Parish Council, we feel it is important that they are accountable for ensuring that these actions are considered properly and, where appropriate, instituted. We therefore think Horsham District Council needs to be able to monitor progress. Whilst the District Council does give valuable support to Steyning, this support comes at a price in terms of time and resources and there has been considerable investment of council taxpayer's money in this review. It is important that in due course Steyning's demands on the monitoring officer's time at Horsham are substantially reduced.
- 3.76 The Parish Council's first steps should therefore be to review and prioritise these recommendations and share its implementation plan. When it has done so it should provide a copy to Horsham. This initial implementation plan should be drawn up within six weeks of the report being presented to the Council. Some of the recommendations need urgent action to get business back on an even keel but should be relatively straightforward – for example, the review and enforcement of policies; others have a longer-term output but are strategically important. It goes without saying that the modification of behaviours, the consideration of the Civility and Respect Pledge and strategies surrounding the improvement of behaviour should be the first item and should be treated with the utmost urgency and as a priority. We have not put deadlines on the recommendations but the Parish Council should meet and agree an over-arching action plan to put these recommendations into place by no later than six weeks from the receipt of this report.
- 3.77 The Council need also to be aware that if the internal issues in Steyning Parish Council do not improve to Horsham's satisfaction, Horsham is entitled to carry out a Community Governance Review in consultation with the local community (which could have as an outcome a recommendation for the dissolution of Steyning Parish Council)
- 3.78 In conclusion, the onus must be on Steyning Parish Council to adopt the recommendations noted in this report and bring about modified behaviours and the cultural change that is required to enable the Council to function effectively. However, Horsham District Council will support the Council, monitor progress and the implementation of any strategies recommended within this report and the Parish Council should co-operate with Horsham District Council to facilitate such review. Councillors must strive to work out their differences maturely and professionally. Otherwise the Council needs to be aware that if the internal issues in Steyning Parish Council do not improve, it could find itself the subject of a Community Governance Review including the option to dissolve Steyning Parish Council.

Recommendations

- R35** Where Steyning Parish Council needs to use external support to comply with these recommendations, they should consult with Horsham District Council and the West Sussex Association before agreeing such support to ensure they have considered all the options and are obtaining expert advice at value for money.
- R36** Steyning Parish Council should develop an initial implementation plan within six weeks of the report which should be shared with the monitoring officer of Horsham District Council. They should also report on their progress in implementing this action plan to the monitoring officer in 6 months and again in 12 months after the date of this report

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1** As a priority the Council should sign up to the NALC/SLCC Civility and Respect Pledge.
- R2** In doing so the Council should collectively agree what language is and is not appropriate in meetings and correspondence among councillors and with officers, how such language should be challenged in meetings and how meetings can be run more efficiently without getting bogged down in minutiae nor stifling legitimate debate. Behaviour needs to be re-set to improve relationships to allow Council business to be transacted.
- R3** In agreeing to the Pledge, all councillors should give an undertaking to treat fellow councillors and officers with respect and not to make personal attacks on individuals or their integrity. Until such respect is shown the Council cannot move forward
- R4** All councillors should undertake that, where they have concerns about the way a decision has been made or a procedure followed they should discuss this respectfully with the Clerk and the Clerk should be allowed to give a ruling with reasons such as a reference to existing policy or legislation as to whether or not the concern is legitimate. This ruling should be communicated to all councillors. Where the concern is legitimate such a ruling should include the steps needed either to rectify the matter with an agreed timescale or the changes needed to prevent the matter re-occurring. Where the majority of councillors accept that the concern has been dealt with, the matter cannot be raised again for six months in line with Standing Orders.
- R5** All councillors who are unwilling to take, or abide by, the Pledge and modify their behaviour to improve internal relations should consider resigning with immediate effect for the greater good of the constituents of Steyning and Council business.
- R6** The Council should develop a comprehensive training and development strategy for the new Council which covers all areas of Council business. It should in particular include training on the Code of Conduct and appropriate standards of behaviour.
- R7** The Council should develop an agreed understanding of the role and expectations for individual councillors when they are acting as Full Council, as committee members, as individuals and as representatives of the Council externally.
- R8** That councillors are reminded that they cannot speak on behalf of the Council unless authorised by the Full Council to do so. Any correspondence from individual councillors needs to make this clear.

Where an individual represents themselves as speaking on behalf of the Council, the Clerk should correct the record at the earliest opportunity.

- R9** That councillors understand their fiduciary duties and vicarious liability and be reminded that they are all individually and severally liable for the finances and employment practices of the Council. Individual councillors should therefore be reminded that they should not act alone and unilaterally once Council collectively has made a decision or agreed a course of action
- R10** The Council should consider working with Horsham and the West Sussex Association or any other appropriate organisation approved by Horsham to ensure it has comprehensive and up-to-date HR and grievance policies and that these are effectively enforced
- R11** The Clerk should complete CiLCA as a matter of priority. A timetable should be agreed between the Chair and the Clerk with dedicated 'professional development' time set aside in the working week to allow this to happen
- R12** The Council should ensure that its email policy is properly enforced and the Clerk empowered to draw a line under correspondence such that if the policy is breached the Clerk will simply reply to say that the email will not be responded to as it falls outside the policy. There may be exceptions for significant urgent matters but the Council as a whole shall agree a definition of what those exceptions should be. All emails should go through the Clerk.
- R13** The Council should have an agreed and enforced policy for dealing with persistent or vexatious correspondence to ensure that the business of the Council is not unnecessarily diverted.
- R14** The Council should agree how governance issues should be raised in meetings to allow reasonable discussion but also to allow other business to be transacted.
- R15** The Council and the Clerk should agree a work schedule to ensure that officers' time is focussed and that there are realistic expectations on their time within agreed working hours.
- R16** The Council needs to agree a councillor-officer protocol which would include a shared agreement as to the circumstances when councillors should have access to officer time and how the Clerk should respond to queries from individual councillors.
- R17** The Council should review its current staffing structure to ensure it is in line with its strategy and able to help the Council deliver it and that the Clerk's key performance objectives and time are geared to deliver that strategy

- R18** The Council should ensure that the Clerk and the Council make best use of external support and advice from its memberships of professional bodies
- R19** The Council needs to review whether it has all appropriate and up-to-date policies in place and ensure that policies are available on the website.
- R20** The Council needs to adopt a clear statement of councillors' right to information and a 'need to know' policy and review its implementation of freedom of information requests in the light of that policy.
- R21** The Council should adopt a recording of meetings policy and decide how long it needs to keep recordings once minutes have been agreed
- R22** The Council needs to adopt a Social Media Policy which would cover both appropriate use of social media by individuals and the Council's own approach to social media as an organisation
- R23** The Council needs to review its approach towards planning delegation if this has not already been done in the last six months.
- R24** All councillors need to be familiar with Standing Orders and should have a pack which contains all policies, Financial Regulations and Standing Orders that they bring to each and every meeting to aid understanding and avoid confusion.
- R25** The '2-minute' rule in Standing Orders should be enforced and all councillors should support the Chair in ensuring the meeting is run efficiently and without conflict. The rule may be waived in exceptional circumstances where an agenda item is of particular significance but this must be agreed at the start of the agenda item and a revised time limit (say 5 minutes) agreed
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- R32** After the next election the new Council should develop a fully costed and resourced long-term strategic plan for the Town putting personal agendas and differences aside for the greater good of the Steyning community
- R33** The Council should review its communication strategy in conjunction with the public to evaluate its effectiveness and ensure that the public understands the work of the Council, is engaged in developing a vision for Steyning and is able to participate more fully in local decision-making.
- R34** The Council Chair and Clerk should look to learn from and share best practice with outstanding local councils.
- R35** Where Steyning Parish Council needs to use external support to comply with these recommendations, they should consult with Horsham District Council and the West Sussex Association before agreeing such support to ensure they have considered all the options and are obtaining expert advice at value for money.
- R36** Steyning Parish Council should develop an initial implementation plan within six weeks of the report which should be shared with the monitoring officer of Horsham District Council. They should also report on their progress in implementing this action plan to the monitoring officer in 6 months and again in 12 months after the date of this report