

Standards Committee
15 JUNE 2022

Present: Councillors: Diana van der Klugt (Chairman), Joan Grech,
Kate Rowbottom, Belinda Walters, Tricia Youtan,
Independent Person: John Donaldson
Parish Representatives: Philip Baxter and Stephen Watkins

Apologies: Councillors: Peter Burgess, David Skipp
Independent Person: Michael Rumble

SC/1 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED

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

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

RESOLVED

That Councillor Peter Burgess be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

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

That the Standards Committee meet at 10 am for the ensuing municipal year. Meetings are scheduled to take place on 14 September, 30 November, 15 March.

SC/4 **MINUTES**

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

Prior to the meeting Councillor Grech advised a correction to SC/26 amending to "15 complaints in 2020" (not 2019). This correction was made to the minutes prior to the meeting.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/6 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the committee and thanked Councillor Brian Donnelly for serving on the committee successfully for many years.

Members also sent their sincere condolences to the family of Mary Burroughs, Senior Clerk to Slinfold Parish Council, who had recently passed away.

SC/7 **UPDATE ON REVIEW AND SUPPORT FOR STEYNING PARISH COUNCIL**

The Monitoring Officer reminded the Committee of the five principal aims of the review and support being given to Steyning Parish Council. Consideration would be given to processes and procedures to operate more effectively, identify underlying issues to work more effectively in the future, improve the reputation of the Parish Council and define clear roles and understanding of Councillors and Officers to form an action plan for the future.

The Committee were updated on the progress of the review. Specialists Hoey Ainscough Associates had issued questionnaires; these had been returned and were being analysed, face to face interviews were due to take place shortly with Councillors and Officers, initial feedback also advised that engagement from all parties was positive.

It is hoped that a final report will be received during the summer and reported to the next Standards Committee in September.

SC/8 **DEPARTMENT FOR LEVELLING UP, HOUSING & COMMUNITIES OF GOVERNMENTS RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE'S REVIEW OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT ETHICAL STANDARDS PUBLISHED IN JANUARY 2019.**

The Monitoring Officer updated the committee on the report produced following the response of the Government to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's ("CSPL") review of Local Government Ethical Standards published in January 2019.

The CPSL conducted a review of Local Government Ethical Standards and highlighted recommendations of best practice to improve ethical standards in local government. These recommendations were made to Government and the Standards Committee were awaiting the Government's response.

The Monitoring Officer advised the Government report was a detailed document and evidence received by the CPSL supported the view that the vast majority of councillors and officers maintain high standards of conduct. There was however some evidence of misconduct by a small minority of councillors primarily relating to bullying, harassment or other disruptive behaviour.

24 recommendations went to Government looking at changes for primary legislation including the introduction of the right to suspend a member for up to 6 months. This matter had been discussed previously at Horsham District Council Standards committees. It was hoped that tougher sanctions would be made available to act as a deterrent and ultimately minimise misconduct complaints.

The Committee considered that the response from Government was highly disappointing. Government believed that a legislative response was not required and could be dealt with more appropriately, effectively and swiftly by local authority best practice.

As detailed in the report it was noted that the government had agreed to very few of the recommendations although various recommendations would remain under review.

The committee discussed recommendations as stated in the report and expressed some disappointment that very few had changed significantly.

SC/9 **STANDARDS UPDATE**

The Legal Services Business Manager reported there were no current outstanding Standards complaint cases.

From April 2021 to March 2022 the highest ever amount of code of conduct complaints had been received totalling 34.

26 related to Steyning Parish Council, 3 related to Horsham District Councillors, 2 to West Chiltington Parish Council and 1 complaint related to Henfield, Nuthurst and Storrington & Washington Parish Councils.

One complaint had been assessed so far this financial year requiring no further action.

It was reported that the new amended Model Code of Conduct and procedures adopted by Horsham District Council and the majority of Parish and Neighbourhood Councils within the district in December 2021 had assisted greatly with Standards complaints.

The committee were extremely positive about the adoption of the new Code of Conduct and agreed that the new guidance was excellent in ensuring a consistent, clear approach across the district. The whole process had been streamlined and had seen a significant improvement for staff and Councillors.

It was reported that new Code of Conduct training would be arranged as soon as possible for Members.

SC/10 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 10.50 am having commenced at 10.00 am

CHAIRMAN