

**Minutes of a meeting of the Mid Sussex District Council
Standards Committee held on Tuesday, 23 February 2016
from 6:00 p.m. to 6:39 p.m.**

Present: Cllr John Belsey (Chairman)
Town Cllr Christopher Ash-Edwards (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Liz Bennett	Cllr Heidi Brunsdon*	Cllr Anne Jones*
Parish Cllr William Blunden	Parish Cllr Maria Fielding	Cllr Gordon Marples
Cllr Pete Bradbury	Parish Cllr Stephen Hand*	

* Absent

Also Present: Sir Roger Sands and Gerard Irwin Independent Persons on Standards Matters.

15. SUBSTITUTES

None.

16. APOLOGIES

Councillors Heidi Brunsdon and Anne Jones and Parish Councillor Stephen Hand.

17. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

18. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 21 October 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

19. STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2015

The Solicitor to the Council introduced the report which would go on to Council in March. It outlined that the Council had received fewer complaints this year than in previous years and that the overall position was positive.

One Member asked about the on-going dispute against a Worth Parish Councillor and whether the complainant had reached the end of the complaints process and where they should be directed if they remain dissatisfied.

The Solicitor to the Council confirmed that this matter had reached the end of the Council's complaints procedure and that they would either need to take the matter up with the Police or go to the High Court to overturn the Council's decision. He highlighted the importance of Members filling in their Declarations of Interests forms correctly and for Parish Clerks to request their Members to frequently review them.

Following on from a comment raised, the Chairman noted the lack of options the Council's Standards Committee has in adjudicating its decisions. He went on to say that it was good to see fewer complaints and that Members were taking their work seriously.

As there were no further comments, the Chairman took Members to the recommendation which was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

That Members recommend the 2015 Annual Report of the Standards Committee to Council for information.

20. ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR PROVIDERS OF PUBLIC SERVICE

The Solicitor to the Council provided background information to the report and asked for direction from Members on how the Council performs in six areas highlighted by the Committee of Standards in Public Life:

- 1) A leadership commitment to ethical standards.
- 2) Evidence that the applicable Members have understood the need to behave ethically.
- 3) How an organisation deals with the maintenance of ethical standards
- 4) The training given to Members on the Code of Conduct and behaviour generally.
- 5) How good behaviour is recognised.
- 6) That ethical standards are discussed.

He noted that training had been given to all District Members and that most Towns and Parishes had provided training on the Members Code of Conduct.

One Member noted that a third of public sector funding comes from private contracts and felt safeguards should be in place to assess that private companies ethical standards before contracts are let.

Another Member highlighted several areas of the report which would easily transfer and apply to the Council but raised a concern about the differentiation between the size of contracts referred to in the case studies which were national contracts compared to the small jobs which Towns and Parishes will deal with. He went on to ask how these standards would apply to smaller Council contracts.

The Solicitor to the Council confirmed that the case studies do not translate to smaller Council contracts, whilst the Council has a few larger contracts such as the Leisure Contract and the Waste Service. He advised that when procuring contracts of that size the Council balances up the quality of the work and price but would also take references to ensure they adhere to best practices. During the term of the contract, the Council would hold regular monitoring meetings. It was noted that a balance needed to be struck between value for money and ethics.

A Member concurred with this statement and said that this was not an area where one size fits all. She proposed that one option might be to have a universal scoring matrix and that Town and Parish Councils can accord different weighting to certain lines where appropriate for the scale and size of contract being awarded.

The Independent Persons commented that a sense of proportion was needed but that it was important that private companies do not avoid the ethical standards required for public provision. A suggestion was raised that a whistleblowing route from employees of the private company could be made directly to the Council. The Solicitor to the Council confirmed that this point could be considered moving forward.

The Chairman thanked Members for their comments and concluded that the concerns raised should form part of the annual report to Council. He added that he would like to see a provision whereby internal audit could feed ethical standards monitoring into their programme and provide regular updates to the Standards Committee.

As there were no further comments, the Chairman took Members to the recommendation which was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

The Committee noted the guidance and made observations on its contents for further discussion.

21. FUTURE MEETING DATES

The Chairman noted that it was the last meeting of the Committee for Sir Roger Sands, Independent Person who would be stepping down. He thanked Sir Roger for over 8 years of service, with 4 years as the Chairman of the Committee. His leadership and contributions had been valued by Members and officers.

The Chairman confirmed the next meeting dates for the forthcoming year and that meetings would take place at 6pm.

Chairman