

**Minutes of a meeting of Standards Committee
held on Monday, 7th June, 2021
from 6.00 pm - 6.22 pm**

Present: L Bennett (Chairman)
C Ash-Edwards (Vice-Chair)

A Bennett
P Bradbury
R Clarke

D Denham St Pinnock
K Healy
A Eves

S Smith

Absent: Councillors B Von Thunderclap and P Cummins

Also Present: Dr David Horne, Independent Person on Standards Matters
Ms Wendy Swinton-Eagle, Independent Person on Standards Matters

Councillors R de Mierre and N Webster

1. ROLL CALL AND VIRTUAL MEETING EXPLANATION.

Tom Clark, Head of Regulatory Services, welcomed the Members and took a roll call. He then provided information on the format of the virtual meeting.

2. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN.

Councillor Ash-Edwards nominated Councillor Liz Bennett as Chairman of the Committee for the 2021/22 Council year. This was seconded by Councillor Bradbury and with no further nominations put forward, this was agreed.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Liz Bennett be elected Chairman of the Committee for the 2021/22 Council Year.

The Chairman welcomed the Committee and thanked Councillor Bradbury for his work as Chairman.

3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN.

The Chairman nominated Cllr Ash-Edwards as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the 2021/22 Council year. This nomination was seconded by Councillor Clarke and with no further nominations put forward, this was agreed.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Ash-Edwards be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the 2021/22 Council year.

4. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies were received from Mr Paul Cummins and Councillor Baron Von Thunderclap.

5. TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS THAT THE CHAIRMAN AGREES TO TAKE AS URGENT BUSINESS.

None.

6. TO RECEIVE DECLARATION OF INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF ANY MATTER ON THE AGENDA.

Councillor Denham St Pinnock declared that he is Chairman of West Sussex Association of Local Councils.

Councillor Bradbury declared that he is ex-officio Chairman of the Standards Committee at West Sussex County Council.

7. TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE HELD ON 8 MARCH 2021.

Dr Horne and Ms Swinton-Eagle noted that their presence was not recorded in the minutes of the previous meeting. The Chairman apologised for this oversight and the amendment had been made in the published minutes.

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 March 2021 were amended and approved as a correct record and electronically signed by the Chairman.

8. CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS.

Tom Clark, Head of Regulatory Services, introduced the report which provided criteria for consideration of Code of Conduct Complaints. He noted that the Committee last looked at these criteria in 2016 and West Sussex County Council's Standards Committee would also shortly be looking at its own Assessment Criteria. Given complaints are more varied than they were five years ago, when most related to Neighbourhood Plans, he asked Members to consider whether any additions or changes should be made.

The Head of Regulatory Services reflected on various aspects of the Assessment Criteria, including time lapses under investigation, the necessity of evidence before investigation and the issue of anonymity. He drew Members' attention to criterion No. 10, which reflected on suitability for investigation, adding that a serious breach, such as failure to disclose financial matters, could also be a potential criminal offence, so therefore would be referred to the police.

A Member asked about the number of complaints relating to town and parish councils, including how many go to further investigation. The Head of Regulatory Services replied that complaints vary from year to year, though there were more in 2020.

Another Member said he was content with the Local Assessment Criteria, but questioned criterion No. 7 about if a complaint is serious enough for local

investigation. He requested if the numbers of the complaints deemed not serious enough for investigation, could be identified in the annual report.

A Member queried the provision on feedback from complaints. The Head of Regulatory Services replied that feedback is included in annual report and he added that there may be a need to expand on the text in future.

A Member reflected on figures from 2020, which he felt were quite high, and expressed his hope that the end of the pandemic would lead to a reduction in complaints.

The Chairman recommended the inclusions for the annual report. The Head of Regulatory Services confirmed that the report would be with the Committee in early 2022. The Chair then moved to the recommendation contained in the report, which was approved.

RESOLVED

The Standards Committee considered the present criteria used to assess complaints and delegated the update of the criteria to the Monitoring Officer in the light of that debate.

9. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.2 DUE NOTICE OF WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN.

None.

The meeting finished at 6.22 pm

Chairman