

**Minutes of a meeting of Standards Committee
held on Monday, 18th March, 2024
at 7.00 pm**

Present: M Cornish (Chairman)
C Wood (Vice-Chair)

A Beecroft
M Belsey

D Denham St Pinnock
M Kennedy

J Russell

Also Present: Independent Persons for Standards: Dr David Horne, Wendy Swinton-Eagle and Paul Cummins.

Absent: Councillors C Phillips and C Salimbeni

1. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies were received from Councillors Phillips and Salimbeni.

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

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

Councillor Denham St Pinnock declared an interest, as he is Chairman of West Sussex Association of Local Councillors and Chairman of Mid Sussex Association of Local Councillors.

4. TO BE AGREED BY GENERAL AFFIRMATION THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2023.

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2024 were agreed by the Committee and signed by the Chairman.

5. PARISH NOMINATION.

The Chairman introduced the item, confirming that Councillor Sarah Webster has been put forward by Horsted Keynes Parish Council as the fourth Parish representative on the Standards Committee.

As there were no comments received on this item, the Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendation to appoint Councillor Webster to the Standards Committee, proposed by Councillor Denham St Pinnock and seconded by Councillor M Belsey. The recommendation was agreed unanimously with 7 in favour.

RESOLVED

The Standards Committee agreed the appointment of Councillor Sarah Webster to the Standards Committee, as proposed by the Parish Council of Horsted Keynes.

6. MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT - COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE.

Kevin Toogood, Monitoring Officer introduced the report noting that the Code of Conduct is intended to support the Council to ensure Members can be held to account if they fall short of standards expected of them. Part of the constitutional role of this Committee is to ensure Members uphold high standards of conduct, so it is appropriate for the Committee to have the opportunity to review the arrangements.

In response to a question, the Monitoring Officer clarified that the Council's procedures are a relatively standard set of arrangements, but which individual Councils can adjust as they see fit. He confirmed that if a complaint proceeds to a member panel, Members cannot sit on both the Assessment Sub Committee and the Hearing Sub Committee, and he clarified the terminology and process around assessing a complaint. With regards to Independent Investigators, he confirmed that they are external people with experience in this area and could include specialist law firms.

David Horne, one of the Council's Independent Persons for Standards noted three areas for consideration and improvement related to the independent Person's role, which the Monitoring Officer agreed to take on board. Firstly, regarding p12 of the papers, there should be a distinction between the role of the Independent Person's involvement in deciding whether to proceed with a formal investigation, and their provision of guidance to the person involved in the process thereafter. Secondly regarding p13 and the Assessment Sub-Committee there is reference to the papers for that sub-Committee including the Monitoring Officers written advice. This advice should include the view of the Independent Person as well. The final point put forward related to the conclusion and result of a decision made by the Sub Committee which could be more robust. The Model Code of Conduct refers to a decision notice being published on website as soon as possible, including a brief statement of facts, the code, the view of the Independent Person and any sanction applied.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendation in the report, proposed by Councillor Russell and seconded by Councillor M Belsey. The recommendation was agreed unanimously with 8 in favour.

RESOLVED

The Standards Committee discussed the Council's current procedure for addressing Code of Conduct complaints and made recommendations to the Monitoring Officer of improvements that could be made.

7. STANDARDS COMMITTEE - ANNUAL REPORT UPDATE.

The Monitoring Officer introduced the item noting that a mid-year report was provided to the Committee in September. The purpose of this report is to conclude the year and bring the reporting back to an annual schedule. The next Annual Report will therefore be in February 2025.

Since the report in September there have been 8 complaints received, relating to 3 separate issues. The broad nature of the complaints are set out in the report and following initial consideration, it was agreed that no further action was required in each case.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendation in the report. This was agreed unanimously, with 8 in favour.

RESOLVED

The Standards Committee noted the contents of this report.

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

None.

The meeting finished at 7.14 pm

Chairman