

Standards Committee

29 November 2021 – At a meeting of the Standards Committee held at 2.15 pm at County Hall, Chichester, PO19 1RQ.

Present: Cllr Bradbury (Chairman)

Cllr Wickremaratchi, Cllr Burrett, Cllr Cherry, Cllr Gibson, Cllr Johnson, Cllr A Jupp, Cllr Kenyon and Cllr Sparkes

Apologies were received from Mr Cooper

Also in attendance: Mr Donaldson

Part I

13. Declarations of Interest

13.1 In accordance with the code of conduct Cllr Bradbury declared a personal interest in item 5, Whistleblowing Policy, as a member of the Standards Committee of Mid Sussex District Council.

14. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

14.1 Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 September 2021 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

15. Annual Complaints and Compliments Report 2020

15.1 The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director of Place Services and Director of Communities (copy appended to the signed minutes). The report outlined the number and nature of complaints and compliments received during 2020 and the learning from them.

15.2 The report was introduced by David Tominey, Complaints Manager, who advised that a single corporate report had been produced in contrast to the previous year when separate reports had been produced. He apologised for the delay in the production of the report, but hoped that future reports would be available quicker in future. He highlighted that there had been a rise in the number of complaints by around 6% in 2020, more complaints were resolved earlier and around 33% were upheld, in line with long term trends.

15.3 The Committee welcomed the Council's transparent approach and the evidence that the Council was striving to learn from all complaints received. It noted an increase in the reporting of compliments, although these still appeared to be underreported.

15.4 In response to questions about the reasons behind the rise in complaints overall, Mr Tominey and Dave Loveman, Customer Relations Manager, felt that this was partially because people were less accepting of poor service and partially because people were

more willing to come forward to complain. Efforts were continuously made to advertise complaints channels through online methods and in correspondence to make it easier for people to make complaints. Complaints about staff were sometimes related to a decision that had not worked in the complainant's favour.

15.5 Mr Loveman, Customer Services Manager, confirmed that council contractors usually fall within the complaints remit of the County Council and most contractors take complaints seriously. He also clarified that reports on Ombudsman case decisions were included in the report for the year being reported, as complaints could be submitted to the Ombudsman up to two years after an incident had taken place and long, detailed discussions were often necessary before a decision was reached. The Ombudsman's recommendations on remedies were followed by the Council, including financial remedies, which are often seen as a last resort.

15.6 Resolved – That the report be noted.

16. Whistleblowing Policy

16.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Assurance (copy appended to the signed minutes). The report provided an update on the Whistleblowing Policy and gave advice on a suggestion from a former member that the Policy should be extended for the use of members.

16.2 The Director of Law and Assurance reported that no referrals had been made through the Whistleblowing Policy since the last meeting. He confirmed that he did not recommend the extension of the Whistleblowing Policy to members because they are not employees and have other routes through which they are able to raise concerns.

16.3 The Committee agreed with the rationale set out by the Director and this was also supported by the Independent Person, Mr Donaldson.

16.4 Resolved –

(1) That the activity generated by referrals made pursuant to the Council's Whistleblowing Policy be noted.

(2) That no extension be made to the Policy to elected members of the Council.

17. Date of Next Meeting

17.1 The Committee noted that the next meeting is due to be held on 27 June 2022.

The meeting ended at 2.55 pm

Chairman