

Standards Committee

27 June 2022 – 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 Johnson, Cllr A Jupp, Cllr Kenyon and Cllr Lord.

Apologies were received from Cllr Sparkes and Mr Cooper (Independent Person)

Also in attendance: Mr Donaldson (Independent Person)

Part I

1. Declarations of Interest

- 1.1 In accordance with the Code of Conduct, Cllr Bradbury declared a personal interest as Chairman of the Mid Sussex District Council Standards Committee, in the items on National Standards Updates and the Standards Committee Annual Report.
- 1.2 In accordance with the Code of Conduct, Cllr Burrett declared a personal interest as a member of Crawley Borough Council in the item on National Standards Updates.

2. Minutes of the last meeting of the Committee

- 2.1 Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 29 November 2021 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

3. Annual Complaints and Compliments Report

- 3.1 The Committee received a report by the Director of Place Services and Assistant Director (Communities) (copy appended to the signed minutes).
- 3.2 The report was introduced by David Tominey, Complaints Manager, who advised that the increase in overall complaints levels was mostly down to three factors: a large-scale reassessment of adult social care support, which had resulted in some customers having to make higher levels of contributions; local well-organised social media campaigns to complain about certain roadworks; and education and skills. He reported that Ombudsman case levels for the Council remained stable. He was pleased to report that there was now more timely reporting of complaints throughout the organisation.
- 3.3 He highlighted a revision to section 2.2 on pages 9 to 10 of the report, to remove a reference to 2020 figures, now reading: 'Nineteen payments were recorded as paid or offered to complainants as financial remedies following complaints made in

2021, up from eighteen payments in 2020. The total decreased from £12,548.66 in 2020 to £10,340 in 2021. A breakdown of the nineteen offers of financial remedy can be found in appendix a of this report.'

- 3.4 The Committee supported the draft annual report and emphasised that it is vital for residents to be kept informed of progress of dealing with complaints. It also asked that the Highways Service remind all contractors of the need to include basic information at the site of all roadworks, including the nature of the works and a contact number. The following changes to the draft report were requested:
- A reference to the impact of Covid-19 causing pressures on the workforce should be added at the beginning as context.
 - Adults Services information to be added to the first stage response bar chart on page 3.
 - Correction of percentages on page 6.
 - Improving the wording on page 26 on the criteria for allowing vehicle cross over timescale to make it clear that extra bureaucracy was not being added.
- 3.5 The Committee also asked the Chairman to write to the Leader to check that all Cabinet Members receive regular updates on complaints monitoring from their directors.
- 3.6 Resolved – That, subject to the comments in minute 3.4 above, that the draft Annual Complaints and Compliments report be supported.

4. National Standards Updates

- 4.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Assurance (copy appended to the signed minutes). The report set out recent Government updates on standards matters, including responding to the recommendations from the Committee for Standards in Public Life on ethical standards and creating a new category of disqualification for standing for election, in the case of people who had received a civil injunction for sexual misconduct.
- 4.2 The report was introduced by the Director of Law and Assurance, who advised that the Local Government Association (LGA) had issued a model Code of Conduct. Now it was clear that the Government does not intend to issue a national model, it was appropriate for the Council to consider whether it should adopt the LGA model code, noting that most other local authorities in West Sussex had now done so.
- 4.3 The Committee welcomed the updates and considered that there would be benefits in the County Council adopting the LGA model code to ensure greater consistency, as long as specific provisions in the current West Sussex code were not lost as a result. The Director of Law and Assurance cited examples of the West Sussex code on predetermination and bias which are not in the LGA model code, but could be retained through an appendix to the model code.

4.4 The Committee asked for further work to be done to bring a suggested new Code of Conduct to the next meeting, with a clear comparison with the current West Sussex Code.

4.5 Resolved –

- (1) That the Government’s response to the recommendations of the Committee for Standards in Public Life on local government ethical standards be noted.
- (2) That the changes in legislation around disqualification for office be noted.
- (3) That a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee with a suggested new Code of Conduct based on the LGA model code, with a clear comparison with the current West Sussex code.

5. Standards Committee Annual Report 2021/22

5.1 The Committee considered a report by the Director of Law and Assurance (copy appended to the signed minutes), which set out a proposed annual report on the Committee’s activities during 2021/22, for submission to the County Council in July 2022.

5.2 The Committee supported the proposed report. In response to a question about the lack of referrals via the Whistleblowing Policy, the Director of Law and Assurance confirmed that the revised Policy had been publicised to all staff via standard communications and that the senior contact officers in the document had been reminded of their role. The contact officers have been proactive in helping complainants to consider different options for progressing a matter, including informal routes to resolution, so nothing had progressed to the formal Whistleblowing Policy during the last year.

5.3 Resolved – That the draft annual report be approved for submission to the County Council on 15 July 2022.

6. Whistleblowing Policy

6.1 The Committee noted that the Director of Law and Assurance has not received any referrals via this Policy since the last meeting of the Committee.

7. Date of Next Meeting

7.1 The Committee noted that the next meeting is due to be held on 31 October 2022.

The meeting ended at 3.35 pm

Chairman