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STANDARDS COMMITTEE

17 October 2024 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillors Huntley (Chair), May (Vice-Chair), Batley, Kelly, Turner, Woodman, Worne and Lawrence (Substitute for Ayling)

Also present was Independent Person Mr John Cooke

197. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Purser, Goodheart and Ayling and Independent Persons Mr John Thompson and Mrs Sandra Prail.

198. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

199. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2024 were approved by the Committee and signed by the Chair.

200. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA WHICH THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

There were no urgent matters for this meeting.

201. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No public questions had been submitted for this meeting.

202. MONITORING OFFICER REPORT - OCTOBER 2024

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report to Committee. He highlighted paragraph 4.2 'Maintaining the Constitution', explaining that he had amended the Constitution to reflect the changes to the senior management structure following the arrival of Dawn Hudd as Chief Executive in July 2024. These changes were being made under the Monitoring Officer's delegated authority.

There were no questions from Members.

The Committee noted the report.

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203. MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report, explaining that the training matrix had been updated to reflect that additional training for the Licencing Committee had taken place, and all Members of the Licencing Committee were now trained to sit on it.

One Member had submitted a question in advance of the meeting to the Monitoring Officer, which was around the take up of online Data Protection Training with Hut Six in July 2024 for all Council Members. The Monitoring Officer explained that he had been unable to find the answer to this prior to the meeting, however would circulate this separately to Members of the Committee.

The Committee noted the report.

204. RECRUITMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS

[Independent Person John Cooke and Alan Ladley (who was seated in the Public Gallery), left the meeting during discussion of this item]

The Chair wished thanks to be recorded for the current Independent Persons, Sandra Prail, John Cooke and John Thompson, who are coming to the end of their terms of service.

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report, explaining the Independent Person interviews had taken place on Friday 4 October 2024. The interview panel consisted of Councillor David Huntley, Chair of the Standards Committee; Councillor Maralyn May, Vice-Chair of the Standards Committee; Councillor Mark Turner, Member of the Standards Committee; Sandra Prail, Independent Person; and Daniel Bainbridge, Group Head of Law & Governance. Having interviewed the candidates and assessed each against the criteria previously agreed by the Committee, the interview panel agreed to recommend the appointment of Alan Ladley, John Cooke and John Thompson. The Committee were asked to recommend to Full Council that they be appointed as Independent Persons for the period of 4 years from 7 November 2024.

There were no questions from Members.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Kelly and seconded by Councillor Turner.

The Committee

RECOMMEND TO FULL COUNCIL

That Alan Ladley, John Cooke and John Thompson be appointed as Independent Persons for the period of 4 years from 7 November 2024.

205. INDEPENDENT PERSON PROTOCOL

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report. The functions of the Standards Committee included those relating to the standards of conduct of District Councillors, Town and Parish Councillors and co-opted members under the Localism Act 2011 or regulations made under it. National good practice was that the Council should devise and adopt a protocol to ensure clarity around the roles of Independent Persons and to make sure that there was clear separation of the roles of the Independent Persons, the Monitoring Officer and the Standards Committee. The Council had an adopted set of Local Assessment Procedures (LAP) which comprehensively set out the way in which complaints about Member conduct would be dealt with by the Monitoring Officer and the Standards Committee, and the proposed Protocol mirrored the LAP's requirements. The Protocol had been devised at the recommendation of the Independent Persons and Hoey Ainscough Associates, who supported the delivery of Code of Conduct and Standards Committee induction training in 2023, and who also supported the development of the model Code of Conduct and the Council's Local Assessment Procedures. The Monitoring Officer reminded Members that subjects of complaints, were also entitled to seek views from an Independent Person, and this would be a different Independent Person to the one providing views to the Monitoring Officer in that particular complaint.

The Chair invited debate from Members, and one Member spoke to say he was supportive of the content of the proposed protocol, but suggested the final version should be formatted with paragraph numbering and headings. The Monitoring Officer confirmed he would be happy to do this.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Kelly and seconded by Councillor Turner.

Having considered the Protocol,

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the Protocol be formally adopted.

206. REVIEW OF COUNCILLORS GUIDE TO PERSONAL SAFETY

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report to Committee. The Councillors Guide to Personal Safety had last been reviewed in March 2023, and recent incidents in 2024 which had impacted upon Councillor safety suggested that a review of the document should be undertaken and refreshed to reflect updated guidance. The Councillor Guide to Personal Safety was introduced to help Councillors to maintain personal safety whilst conducting their duties and was attached

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to the agenda pack at Appendix 1. The recommendation was that the Committee consider the Councillors Guide to Personal Safety and any updates necessary, and then for Members to seek views from their political groups regarding potential updates to the Guide. In the meantime, the Monitoring Officer would also be contacting Group Leaders to seek views, and the report would be brought back to Committee for consideration at its meeting on 16 January 2025.

The Chair invited debate, and one Member shared his experience of an incident threatening his personal safety, and he expressed concern with how the police had handled his complaint. The Monitoring Officer would liaise with the Police to establish the protocol for dealing with such complaints.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Batley and seconded by Councillor Lawrence.

The Committee

RESOLVED that

1. The Councillors Guide to Personal Safety and any updates that it considers necessary were considered; and
2. Its Members seek views from all political groups on updates to the Guide, for consideration at the meeting on 16 January 2025.

207. REGISTER OF ASSESSMENTS OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST COUNCILLORS

Upon the invitation of the Chair, the Monitoring Officer introduced the report to Committee. He highlighted paragraph 4.2 which showed the complaints received, and the progress of each complaint, a number of which had been completed since the Committee last met. When looking at patterns and trends, the Monitoring Officer noted that most complaints related to Town and Parish Councillors, however some did involve Arun District Council (ADC) Councillors. There had been an increase in numbers of complaints from towns and parishes. As a comparison from last year, there had already been as many complaints in the first 6 months of this year as in the entirety of last year or the year before. He was hoping this trend would not last, and that the outcome of each complaint would have a positive impact. The Monitoring Officer had a good relationship with the Town and Parish clerks around the District, and had recently delivered Code of Conduct training in Aldwick, which had been positively received by the Councillors. There had been fewer complaints about and between Arun District Councillors than two years ago. He also felt the standard of conduct in the Council Chamber had greatly improved at ADC and Members were more aware of what was expected of them. Members and Officers were working together to achieve a reduction in complaints. There was no pattern in terms of the types of complaints being made, which was very varied.

There were no questions from Members.

The Committee noted the report.

208. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted the Work Programme.

(The meeting concluded at 7.11 pm)

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