

Standards Task and Finish Group

Thursday 3 October 2024

Training Room 1

9.30am

CDC Members Present: Cllr's Briscoe, Chant and Vivian (Chair)

Officers: Mr N Bennett and Mrs L Baines

Independent Person: Mr R Andrews (Independent Person)

1. Code of Conduct webpage

Cllr Vivian confirmed that he was happy with the Code of Conduct webpage: [How to make a complaint about a Councillor - Chichester District Council](#). Both Cllr Briscoe and Cllr Chant also agreed. Mr Bennett confirmed that searching the Code of Conduct for Chichester District Council takes you straight to the page.

Mr Bennett suggested that the email address contacts be updated once staffing changes following his departure had been agreed. He requested this take place in January 2025 to update the page so individual single point of contacts are added.

2. Complaints Form

Mr Bennett confirmed that the form is still seven pages long to ensure it includes all legal requirements. He referenced that some complaints deal with personal and sensitive issues.

The introduction makes sure the contact details are included. Any anonymous complaints will be treated as informal. Mr Bennett referenced complaints received via social media. The main section is about who the complainant is to ensure that politician to politician complaints are separated. Mr Bennett explained that it makes it known on the form that the complaint has been reviewed by the Monitoring Officer.

Cllr Chant asked if a parish clerk made a complaint which section would they choose. Mr Bennett explained that formal complaints almost always when from parishes are often sent by parish clerks. Mr Bennett suggested the section relating to other local government employees would make sense.

Cllr Vivian with regard to 'which of the following best describes you rather than use the word 'complainant''. Cllr Briscoe and Cllr Chant agreed.

With regard to the section 'who are you complaining about' Mr Bennett explained the information is just what is required. Mr Bennett explained that there is the option to carry on over the page as complaints have all previously been much longer than the box provided.

Mr Bennett explained that in terms of returning the evidence it provides a checklist but its usually email and screenshot data.

Mr Bennett explained the addition of 'witnesses' as this provides the Monitoring Officer which additional context. Cllr Chant asked if anyone cannot be a witness. Mr Bennett clarified that no one is prevented but the weight attached to their evidence will change. A person in a professional role typically has greater weight. Mr Andrews asked whether to add witness email to contact details. Mr Bennett put 'full name' as a separate box and then 'details'. This was agreed by all. Mr Bennett also expanded the boxes for all the answers so they are five lines long.

Mr Andrews asked with reference to section 3 (the bracketed section) if the title can then reflect the Chichester document title 'Standards Arrangements'.

Mr Bennett also confirmed that the Independent Persons arrangements are also detailed.

Mr Bennett asked the Group to consider the options that can be taken. With regard to the wording the Group agreed with the changes made by Mr Bennett.

Mr Bennett explained that the most time is spent discussing the outcome as most time those putting in a complaint ask for the member to be removed. He added that it is only a Committee that can place sanctions which then may result in the member choosing to resign themselves.

Mr Bennett added that the confidential information middle paragraph has been expanded to explain that confidentiality may not be automatically granted but if that is the case the person submitted the complaint will be given the option to refuse and withdraw the complaint. This is with reference to GDPR data processing.

Mr Bennett drew attention to the request at the end to confirm that the person submitting the complaint wants it to go ahead.

Cllr Vivian thanked Mr Bennett.

Mr Andrews asked about the Members Code of Conduct Monitoring Form on the website and whether it should be added to the form. Mr Bennett confirmed that the complaint form will go in online as an e-form or download it. The equalities forms are being reviewed so that is why they are separate. Once they are updated all the forms should be integrated onto the form that has been approved. It should not therefore be a separate form in the future.

3. Next Steps

Members are requested to agree the format of the report back to the Standards Committee.

Cllr Vivian also wished to thank Nick on his last meeting and wished him well for the future. The Group as a whole wished him well too.

The meeting ended at 10.07am.