

EAST HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Standards Committee held on 8 December 2020

Present

Councillor: M Johnson (Chairman)

Councillors: G Boxall, P Davies, D Evans, M Gass and B Mouland

21 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

22 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

23 Chairman's Announcements

There were no Chairman's announcements.

24 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

25 Governance Review Report

The Chairman introduced the item. He explained that the Governance Review had been commissioned by the Leader and Chief Executive with the Terms of Reference in consultation with himself as Chairman of the Standards Committee and Cllr Boxall. The Terms of Reference could be found on page 2 of the report.

In terms of the process for this meeting, Mr Bowles would introduce his report and the committee would be invited to comment and ask questions of Mr Bowles prior to his report being considered by Cabinet and Council in January 2021. The Chairman advised members that this was the sole topic they were considering at the meeting.

Mr Bowles presented his report and confirmed that he had received a copy of the comments and questions submitted by members in advance of the meeting. Mr Bowles addressed these in his presentation and subsequently took questions from members of the committee.

He referred members to the Terms of Reference which could be found on page 2 of the report, which had been wide ranging. He confirmed that he had spoken to officers and Councillors including group leaders. He referred members to the recommendations which could be found on pages 26 – 31 of the report.

Members thanked Mr Bowles for his complete and professional review and noted the recommendations contained within the report.

Following the discussion, the Governance Review Report was **NOTED** and the Committee welcomed the referral of the report to Cabinet and Council in January 2021.

26 Governance Improvement Report

The Leader of the Council introduced the report. Mr Bowles had described in his report long standing governance issues that had resulted in a legacy culture in the Council. He also described how this had impacted on the decision and governance of the organisation. He had been aware of the issues for some time and had started to address them as soon as he had become Leader in 2017. This had been a challenge as changing behaviour and culture took time and doing the right thing was rarely easy but as the Leader it was his responsibility and duty. He wanted to be very clear that the behaviours that led to this are historic and not prevalent or systemic in his administration or in the Council now. The Leader stated he would not tolerate poor behaviour or bullying and would address poor behaviour wherever it was found. He had attended an all staff briefing with the Chief Executive and had apologised personally for this legacy and given the staff his assurance that he was committed to addressing past mistakes.

The Leader confirmed that how and the Chief Executive had already done a great deal to improve governance over the last three years as set out in the report and he was committed to continuing to work hard to embed an open and collaborative culture. He wanted a culture where Councillors and officers worked together and felt confident that they could challenge each other openly and respectfully to enable the council to best develop possible solutions to the problems they faced. This was ultimately how they would ensure high quality services for the residents of the district.

Following a discussion, the committee **NOTED**

- the update on the current governance arrangements in place and the reporting mechanisms used to monitor compliance;
- the improvements made over the last three years to address long-standing governance issues;
- the initial organisational response to the matters raised during the Independent Governance Review; and
- **INVITED** the Chief Executive to prepare a detailed action plan, in response to the final Independent Governance Review for consideration by the Standards Committee in early 2021.

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm and concluded at 7.40 pm