Minutes of the Meeting of the VEXATIOUS CORRESPONDENCE AND COMPLAINTS POLICY SUB-COMMITTEE held at the Town Hall, Swanage on WEDNESDAY 7th MAY 2025 at 1.15 p.m.

Present: Councillor C. Moreton - Chairman

Councillor D. Monkhouse Councillor W. Trite

Also in attendance: Dr. M. Ayres Town Clerk

Mrs E. Evans Democratic Services Officer

Public Participation Time

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

1) Apologies

There were no apologies to record.

2) <u>Declarations of Interest</u>

Members were invited to declare their interests and consider any requests for Grants of Dispensations in accordance with section 9 and Appendix B of the Council's Code of Conduct.

There were no declarations of interest to record.

3) <u>To approve as a correct record Minutes of the Meeting of the Vexatious</u> Correspondence and Complaints Policy Sub-Committee held on 14th April 2025

It was proposed by Councillor Monkhouse, seconded by Councillor Trite and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Minutes of the Vexatious Correspondence and Complaints Policy Sub-Committee meeting held on 14th April 2025 be approved as a correct record.

4) To review the current Vexatious Correspondence and Complaints Policy

Further to Minute No. 4 of the Vexatious Correspondence and Complaints Policy Sub-Committee meeting held on 14th April 2025, it was noted that the Town Clerk had received no further suggested amendments to the Vexatious Correspondence and Complaints Policy.

A discussion ensued during which the following amendments were suggested, as indicated in red below:

1 Defining vexatious correspondence or complaints

Vexatious complaints and correspondence can be characterised in one or more of the following ways:

- 1.1 Displays an approach which is experienced by councillors and/or staff as one or more of the following: Behaviour which is perceived as obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious.
- 1.2 Displays an insistence on pursuing unmeritorious matters issues and/or irrational unrealistic outcomes beyond all reason.
- 1.3 Displays an insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints or concerns issues in an unreasonable manner, for example failing to focus on addressing a matter the issue in a harmonious and pragmatic way.
- 1.4 Forms part of a scatter gun approach, with copies of letters being sent to several recipients on a regular basis, often including various council officers, the media, the MP, the Mayor, other Councillors and external regulators) sometimes before the person to whom correspondence is addressed has had a reasonable opportunity to respond; and/or appears to be is part of a completely random approach, lacking any clear focus, or seeming to have been solely designed for the purpose of speculatively seeking 'fishing' for information without any idea of what might be revealed.
- 1.5 Repeated and/or frequent requests for information, which have already received a response, or frequent (more than quarterly) requests for new information, whether or not those requests are made under the access to information legislation.
- 1.6 Repeated use of social media to criticise Council members or officers could also be judged as vexatious conduct, as this which could amount to cyber-bullying.

It was proposed by Councillor Trite, seconded by Councillor Moreton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

TO RECOMMEND:-

That the Finance and Governance Committee adopts the revised Vexatious Correspondence and Complaints Policy, subject to the amendments as set out above.

5) Items of Information and Matters for Forthcoming Agendas

Members noted the draft Terms of Reference for the Vexatious Correspondence and Complaints Policy Sub-Committee, circulated prior to the meeting, and it was AGREED:-

That the Finance and Governance Committee review the draft Terms of Reference for the Vexatious Correspondence and Complaints Policy Sub-Committee alongside a review of the Terms of Reference of all Committees, Sub-Committees and Advisory Committees.

6) <u>Date of Next Meeting</u>
It was noted that the date of the next meeting would be confirmed as and when necessary.

The Meeting closed at 1.45 p.m.