

Horsham Association of Local Councils (HALC)

Chair: Cllr Malcolm Eastwood (Henfield Parish Council)
Secretary: Anna Beams, Mulberry & Co, 9 Pound Lane, Godalming, GU7 1BX
Tel: 03303 450597
Email: horshamalc@gmail.com

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Horsham Association of Local Councils held on Wednesday 26th July 2023 at 5.30pm at Parkside, Chart Way, Horsham, RH12 1RL.

Present:

Cllr Ann Blakelock	Bramber Parish Council
Cllr	Broadbridge Heath Parish Council
Cllr Sandy Duck	Billingshurst Parish Council
Cllr Mike Croker	Bramber Parish Council
Cllr John Evans	Coldwatham Parish Council
Cllr Stephen Davies	Colgate Parish Council
Guy Stanley	Forest Neighbourhood Council
Cllr Malcolm Eastwood	Henfield Parish Council, Horsham DC (Chair)
Cllr Elaine Goodyear	Henfield Parish Council
Cllr Jane Jones	Henfield Parish Council
Cllr Sally Wilton	North Horsham Parish Council
Cllr Val Court	Nuthurst Parish Council
Cllr Jon Campbell	Pulborough Parish Council
Cllr Len Ellis-Brown	Pulborough Parish Council
Cllr Paul Kornycky	Rudgwick Parish Council
Cllr Sue Kornycky	Rudgwick Parish Council
Cllr Ritchie Gatt	Rusper Parish Council
Cllr Fenella Maitland-Smith	Rusper Parish Council
Cllr Matthew Payne	Shipley Parish Council
Cllr Derek Moore	Southwater Parish Council
Cllr Anna Worthington-Leese	Storrington & Sullington Parish Council
Tracey Euesden	Storrington & Sullington Parish Council
Cllr Caroline Instance	Thakeham Parish Council
Cllr Norman Prince	Thakeham Parish Council
Cllr Sally Pavey	Warnham Parish Council
Cllr Steve Buddell	Washington Parish Council
Cllr R Pustar	West Chiltington Parish Council
Cllr David Green	West Grinstead Parish Council
Anna Beams	Secretary

1. Welcome and apologies

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting

2. Apologies

Received and accepted from Cllrs Tony Moss (Ashington PC), Terry Oliver & Geoff Clark (Broadbridge Heath PC), Jeannie Esdaile (Pulborough PC), Stephen Watkins (Thakeham Parish Council), Morah Warrack (Trafalgar NC) and Jason Thomas (Washington PC).

3. Election of Officers of HALC

- a) **Chair:** Cllr Anna Worthington-Leese proposed Cllr Malcolm Eastwood as Chairman, seconded by Cllr Len Ellis-Brown.

Cllr Eastwood reminded members that the Constitution states that a Chair may only serve for two consecutive years which he has done and advised that members need to be agreeable to overriding the Constitution. He further advised that he is no longer the nominated Henfield Parish Council representative to HALC and would therefore be a non-voting Chair except in the case of a tie when he would have the casting vote. The room indicated that they were agreeable to both by show of hands.

Cllr Malcom Eastwood was duly elected as Chair **AGREED UNANIMOUSLY**

- b) **Vice Chairman:** The Chairman thanked the previous Vice Chairman, Cllr Donald Mahon, for his support during his time in the role.

Cllr Anna Worthington-Leese nominated Cllr Val Court, seconded by Cllr Malcolm Eastwood and **AGREED BY THE MAJORITY – 1 ABSTENTION**

Cllr Caroline Instance joined the meeting

- c) **Secretary/Treasurer:** The Chairman proposed Anna Beams as Secretary/Treasurer, seconded by Cllr Anna Worthington-Leese **AGREED UNANIMOUSLY**

4. Approval of the Minutes of the previous meeting held on 22nd February 2023

It was **AGREED** that the Minutes should be approved and signed as a correct record.

5. Appointment of representatives to outside bodies

- a) **WSALC Board:** It was **AGREED** that the Chairman, Cllr Malcolm Eastwood, and Vice Chairman, Cllr Val Court, are appointed representatives to WSALC. No objections.
- b) **CPRE:** in the absence of Cllr Susie Fischel, it was agreed to approach her regarding continuing in the role.
- c) **HDC Standards Committee:** The Chair thanked Philip Baxter for his time spent as the representative. There were two volunteers to stand, Cllr Terry Oliver (Broadbridge Heath PC) and Cllr David Green (West Grinstead PC). In the absence of Cllr Oliver, the Chair preferred to put a representative who was in attendance therefore it was agreed that Cllr David Green's name would be put forward to HDC as successor to Cllr Philip Baxter.

6. To present the annual accounts for the financial year ending 31st March 2023

In response to a question, the Chair advised that income had increased from the previous year due to an increase in annual subscriptions and a new member joining. He added that HALC now had full membership with all parishes and neighbourhood councils in the district now members.

The annual accounts were accepted. ([Appendix A](#))

7. To appoint 3x signatories to the HALC bank account

It was **AGREED** that the signatories are Anna Beams, Cllr Malcolm Eastwood and Cllr Val Court.

8. Agree annual subscription for 2023-24 – preposed to remain at £20

It was **AGREED** that the subscription would remain at £20.00.

9. Report of last year's activities by the Chairman

The Chairman referred to his report circulated with the agenda ([Appendix B](#)). There were no further questions.

10. Reports from outside bodies

- a) WSALC: No report as the next WSALC Board meeting has not yet taken place.
- b) HDC Standards Committee: the report submitted and circulated prior to the meeting was taken as read. ([Appendix C](#))
- c) CPRE: no report

11. Motion proposed by Storrington & Sullington Parish Council, seconded by Washington & Ashington Parish Councils: to give HALC members the opportunity to vote on whether to support the Local Plan when a draft version is available.

Cllr Anna Worthington-Leese explained that, following the last iteration of the Plan, it had been stated by HDC that all parish councils were in favour of the Plan. This statement was not correct as not all parish councils were in favour. She suggested that a recorded vote of the parishes could take place to present to HDC, thereby giving them an indication of where the parish councils stand on the matter.

The Chair explained that, while the vote would not be binding, the decision making being with the District Councillors, it would give HDC a good indication of the views of the parishes but he warned that the vote would be linear ie parish councils would either be in favour of the Local Plan or rather have no plan as there would not be more than one version of the new Local Plan. This was accepted.

Following a full discussion, the Chair proposed that a recorded vote takes place by Zoom as soon as the Plan is available. An urgent meeting will be called by the secretary, HALC representatives will vote and the results sent to HDC by the Chair. The vote will be a simple yes/no vote to indicate whether the council support the Plan or not.

It was **AGREED BY THE MAJORITY** to hold a recorded vote by Zoom for HALC representatives to indicate whether their council support the Local Plan or not. **1 ABSTENTION.**

12. Motion proposed by Billingshurst Parish Council: that parish councils who can demonstrate that they have a public question time at all meetings be excused of their obligation to hold an Annual Parish Meeting of electors each Spring.

The Chair explained that it is written in law that a town and parish council must hold an Annual Meeting of electors and read the relevant section of the Local Government Act 1972. He explained that any legislative changes have to be escalated through WSALC, NALC and the Government. It was suggested that an alternative would be for Billingshurst Parish Council to call an Annual Parish Meeting on some day between 1st March and 1st June instead of holding its usual Parish Council Meeting.

The motion was not carried as it would have to comply with legislation and was **WITHDRAWN.**

13. Matters of concern to your council not on the agenda.

Cllr Steve Buddell (Washington PC): raised concerns regarding Neighbourhood Plans and the issue of developments being approved despite the Neighbourhood Plan. He gave a specific example of a care home being approved on a site which was not selected in the Neighbourhood Plan (NHP) because the NHP did not specifically state that a care home could not be built. He expressed concerns that NHPs can be interpreted to suit developers needs and effectively ignored. The Chair suggested that the matter is raised with HDC officers at the joint HALC/HDC meeting immediately following this meeting.

Cllr Sally Pavey (Warnham PC): questioned whether HALC can help to promote the role of parish councillor and improve the profile of parish councils because of the shortage of volunteers coming forward. Several ideas were put forward, including simplifying the election process and ideas to involve younger members of the community, including young or little councils. The Chair suggested that he take the matter to the next WSALC Board meeting.

Cllr Caroline Instance (Thakeham PC): suggested that councils need help in understanding water neutrality and deciphering information received from developers and asked whether HDC could do more to assist with this. The Chair suggested the matter is raised at the joint HALC/HDC meeting.

Cllr Len Ellis-Brown (Pulborough PC): suggested that HALC members could come together as a collective in some matters in order to carry more weight. The Chair explained that the Constitution was amended last year to reflect that a group of parish councils are entitled to form temporary Working Groups to address specific shared issues as long as the Board are aware that they are acting under the HALC banner and that Members are made aware at the next HALC meeting.

Meeting closed at 18:31

Signed:

Date:

Appendix A

HALC YEAR-END ACCOUNTS
01/04/2022 - 31/03/2023

	<u>2022/23</u>	<u>2021/22</u>
RECEIPTS		
Local Councils' subscriptions	£640.00	£420.00
Conference	£0.00	£0.00
WSALC Grant	£500.00	£500.00
Bank Interest	£0.00	£0.00
TOTAL RECEIPTS	£1,140.00	£920.00
PAYMENTS		
Professional secretarial services	£865.44	£870.00
Postage	£0.00	£0.00
Refreshments	£0.00	£0.00
Meeting room hire	£0.00	£0.00
Leaving gifts	£0.00	£0.00
Audit fee	£50.00	£50.00
TOTAL PAYMENTS	£915.44	£920.00
NET RECEIPTS	£224.56	£0.00
CASH AT BANK START OF YEAR	£1,966.85	£1,966.85
CASH AT BANK END OF YEAR	£2,191.41	£1,966.85

NOTES TO THE STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES AND CASH AT BANK

1. Accounting basis

This statement of financial activities and cash at bank has been prepared on the receipts and payments basis.

Opening	Balance 01/04/22	£1,966.85
	Receipts	£1,140.00
		£3,106.85
	Less unrepresented payments	£3,106.85
		£915.44
Closing	Balance 31/03/23	£2,191.41

Appendix B

Horsham Association of Local Councils (HALC)

Chairmans Report

July 2023

During the last 12 months the HALC Board has consisted of myself (Chairman), Donald Mahon (Vice Chairman) and Anna Beams (Secretary & Treasurer). Donald did not seek re-election in May 2023. We would like to thank him for his support and highlight to members the need to identify a successor as Vice Chairman. Please could one of you step forward.

I would also like to thank Anna for her help in transitioning between Secretaries and Treasurers which is never easy task but we have worked together to deliver against a detailed action plan which is now complete and places HALC on a stable platform. We can move forward with a high degree of confidence. Our operations and finances are well established.

During the last 12 months we have held three meetings of HALC on 27/7/22 with HDC on Water Neutrality, on 30/11/22 a face to face meeting at Horsham District Council and on 22/2/2023. These were well attended and with active member engagement. With the support of members we have now switched our annual face to face meeting at Horsham from winter to summer, the first of these occasions being after our AGM on Wednesday 26th July where we will have the opportunity to hear from the new Leader of HDC, Martin Boffey.

In addition to these formal meetings, working with the Environmental Programme Manager and Cabinet Member at Horsham, HALC members have participated in workshops on Climate Change and the Wilder Horsham initiative. These were well attended with only 5 parishes not attending any of these sessions. We also had good support from District Councillors and it was good to see all levels of local government working together on these issues. HDC have organised follow up sessions to support Parish and Neighbourhood Councils as they develop and implement their own local initiatives.

With Water Neutrality delaying progress with the Local Plan and preventing the Neighbourhood Plans of four parishes from moving forward to referendum HALC has made representations to HDC sharing our concerns, stressing the importance of moving forward and highlighting the risks of delay.

During the year I was elected by its Board to become Vice Chair of WSALC. We should all be pleased that the Board and its Chairman see the HALC organisation and the way its members work together as something of a model for how they would like all of the Local associations in West Sussex to operate. WSALC itself, with its CEO Trevor Leggo and the team at Mulberry & Co is now well established and delivering good support to the parishes and neighbourhood councils across both East and West Sussex. One of the key features of WSALC is the greater involvement of Parish Clerks in its activities with two representatives in attendance at WSALC Board Meetings.

One of my own goals as Chairman was to strengthen the relationship with Horsham District Council and to ensure that HALCs voice and priorities were clear. I have been HALC Chairman for just 28 months and I am now working with my fourth Leader and second CEO at Horsham. Whilst this level of change requires effort to forge new working relationships I am pleased to say that good links have been maintained with Officers and District Councillors throughout the rotation of people with all parties seeking to work with us

more collaboratively. We hope that will continue to be the case and I would say that the early signs working with the new Leader are positive.

Finally it is encouraging to note that all of the Parish and Neighbourhood Councils in Horsham District are now members of HALC and WSALC. I would like to thank all members for their support for our Board during the last 12 months.

Malcolm Eastwood,
Chairman

Appendix C

REPORT TO HALC: HDC Standards' Committee Meeting

Wednesday 15th March 2023

The Agenda and papers considered at the meeting are available in the Public Reports Pack on the HDC website. The proceedings were 'audio-streamed' and so ought to be available for anyone who wants to, to listen to.

There were seven items on the Agenda, five of which were routine and need be of no concern to readers of this note. Most of the time was spent discussing the other two items: '**Standards Update**' and **Steyning Parish Council (SPC)**.

Standards Update: Officers updated those present on complaints statistics. The number of complaints received from 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 was 33 – 26 of which were about Steyning Parish Council and 7 about others. Three related to Horsham District Council, two to West Chiltington, with one each relating to Henfield Nuthurst. From 1st April 2022 up to 15th March 2023 (the meeting date) there had been 21 complaints – 14 relating to Steyning (66% of total thus far), four to HDC, 1 to Nuthurst, 1 to Pulborough, and 1 to Storrington.

Of the seven complaints that did not relate to Steyning, no breach of the Code of Conduct had been found in six cases and one, minor, breach of the Code had been dealt with by informal resolution – a meeting between the Monitoring Officer and the parties concerned.

Of the 14 Steyning cases, ten were Councillor vs Councillor and 4 were Members of the Public vs ex-Councillors. Three had been received during the period in which Hoey Ainscough (HA) process (see our earlier report) was being conducted. A further eight complaints had been received after publication of the HA report and after SPC had resolved to accept its (36) Recommendations. A further three complaints had been received this calendar year – one had been resolved after consultation with the Independent Persons and the remaining two had not yet been assessed.

There were no comments on this from any of those present. The Chair reviewed the numbers of complaints relating to Steyning, noting that they amounted to 80% of the total: noting also that in the current year, the reduction from 26 complaints to 14 could be viewed as encouraging. However, there was still a very high proportion of complaints relating to Steyning.

Steyning Parish Council (SPC): a six-page Report by the Interim Head of Legal and Democratic Services (who is also the Interim Monitoring Officer, IMO) was considered. It contained three main Recommendations for decision: (i) to continue support for SPC in implementation of its plan to tackle issues that had been the subject of many complaints, as recommended by Hoey Ainscough; (ii) approve informal resolution of outstanding complaints; and (iii) approve informal resolution of any new complaints unless a formal investigation is warranted.

The Chair had recently received e-mails from four individuals having some association with SPC, raising various points about the Steyning complaints: (1) HDC was failing to deal with complaints – that was clearly not the case, HDC Officers were doing a tremendous amount of work to try to resolve complaints by the informal process and that could be just as effective as formal resolution and sanctions; (2) the HA process was ‘dead-in-the-water’; and (3) one of the individuals had requested that his three outstanding complaints be dealt with by the Standards’ Committee *now* and sanctions imposed – but that is not how complaints are dealt

with under the complaints procedure so the Committee wouldn’t be doing that (in any case, the Committee was not acquainted with the detail).

Again, the Committee noted that prior to April 2022, complaints against SPC had taken up disproportionate time, some 80% of time and an estimated cost of £65,00. This could be considered an unacceptable demand on public money; there appeared to be no real sign of the number of complaints decreasing even after some had been resolved. Resolution had not been helped by the failure of the government to introduce more robust sanctions against alleged misconduct although that had been recommended by Committee on Standards in Public Life. (The government had considered that to be too restrictive of free speech). That was why Horsham District Council had instructed HA to undertake a review of, and to report on, the matter of Steyning Parish Council; and to devise an action plan for the future. Members of SPC had been in favour of that. The 36 Recommendations for action in the HA Report had been considered in November 2022 by SPC and that had resulted in an implementation plan being drawn up. SPC had unanimously resolved to implement the Recommendations and to report on progress to the Horsham District Council Monitoring Officer in 6 months (i.e., by 20th May 2023) and again within 12 months (20th Nov 2023). That work was ongoing.

The IMO noted that SPC had resolved to implement the Recommendations of the HA report but, regrettably, HDC had received a further 11 Code complaints and it was apparent that most parties desired complaints to be investigated formally. If the HA intervention was viewed as having been ineffective, the only other option was to investigate. The IMO considered it appropriate that HDC continued to work with SPC to implement the plan adopted and to provide ongoing support; and that it was prudent for the Committee to consider alternative options – i.e., to resolve to adopt Recommendations (i), (ii) and (iii) above.

Lengthy discussion followed. In summary, there had been acceptance within and by SPC of the need to change some behaviours and everyone (SPC) had *seemed* to want to engage in generating improvements. SPC as a whole had taken the “Civility and Respect” pledge. Some of the 36 HA Recommendation had been implemented. Views had become entrenched and were unlikely to shift in the short/medium term. Whilst HDC did have a ‘vexatious complaints’ procedure, it also had a duty to uphold Code of Conduct behaviour. An inordinate amount of time was being spent on dealing with one Council representing some 6,000 people, of the 34 in the HDC District, compared with about 100,000 in the rest of the District: if complainants wanted formal resolution rather than informal, they should pay for it. HDC had a ‘public interest’ policy – these disputes were so local and involved personalities and they shouldn’t impact on the public at large – so HDC could take the view that it was not in the public interest to proceed with the complaints. The complaints themselves needed to be compliant with the Code of Conduct – how many were and had that been assessed? Suspension was a sanction if Councillors having undertaken to comply with the Code of Conduct did not do so.

The Chair suggested that the Committee vote on the IMO's recommendations (i), (ii) and (iii). It did and they were accepted.

Philip S Baxter & Steven Watkins Parish
Representatives
19th March 2023.