STANDARDS & ETHICS COMMITTEE – 9 JULY 2020

PETITION REGARDING PARTON PARISH COUNCIL

LEAD OFFICER: Sarah Pemberton, Director of Corporate Resources and Commercial Strategy

REPORT AUTHOR: Stephanie Shaw, Electoral and Democratic Services Manager

WHY HAS THIS REPORT COME TO THE STANDARDS & ETHICS COMMITTEE?

As Members are aware two petitions have been received by the Council, one requesting that “Copeland Borough Council dissolve Parton Parish Council and hold fresh elections” and the other “opposing the terms of the original petition and in support for the Parish Council to remain”.

Full Council agreed on the 10th February, that the responsibility for consideration of the petition and counter petition be delegated to the Standards and Ethics Committee.

RECOMMENDATIONS: That

a) the petitions be noted by the Committee;
b) the Committee hears representations from both petition organisers, ward councillors and Parton Parish Council;
c) the Committee consider whether any further action should be taken in connection with the petitions received.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A petition has been submitted to Copeland Borough Council requesting that “Copeland Borough Council dissolve Parton Parish Council and hold fresh elections”.

1.2 The Petition Organiser submitted the petition, containing 151 signatures to Sarah Pemberton, Monitoring Officer, on 20th December 2019.
1.3 A further 14 signatures were received on 2nd January 2020, together with an additional 28 on 27th January 2020.

1.4 135 of the signatures have been verified.

1.5 A counter petition was submitted to Sarah Pemberton, Monitoring Officer on 10th February 2020 in support of Parton Parish Council, which contained in excess of 300 signature. 186 of those signatures have been verified.

1.6 Full Council agreed on 10th February 2020 to delegate this matter to the Standards and Ethic Committee for consideration.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Parton Parish Council has an electorate of 680. The turnout of the election in May 2019 was 37%.

2.2 11 Members of Parton Parish Council were elected in May 2019.

2.3 Since May 2019, the Parish Council appears to be having difficulties in working together to achieve their objectives, and to transact council business in an effective and cordial manner. This has resulted in public unrest at meetings, abandonment of a meeting, and, on occasion the Police needing to be in attendance.

2.4 There has also been a number of longer serving members tendering their resignations during this time, with three resignations in August, one in September and a further one in April this year.

2.5 The vacancies have subsequently been filled by co-option by the Parish Council, with one vacancy pending election, which cannot be held until 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

2.6 Parton Parish Council also made the decision in November 2019 to dismiss their long serving Clerk. A new appointment has since been made.

2.7 Growing public unrest with regard to the current serving Council is self-evident, with increasing numbers of public attending meetings, and, the level of local news and social media attention.
2.8 Ward Councillors have also been in attendance at parish meetings, and have witnessed the disharmony of the Council and conduct of its members.

2.9 Since the petitions were received it is not clear how many meetings have been held. The Council’s web site shows the last meeting being convened for the 11\textsuperscript{th} March but it is not clear whether this was held and there is no evidence of meetings being held after that date.

3. **PROPOSALS**

3.1 Both of the petition organisers will be invited to attend the meeting (virtually) to outline their issues and concerns.

3.2 Both the Parish Council and Ward councillors will also be invited to speak before the committee (virtually).

3.3 Explore options on how all parties can resolve the issues that have arisen over the last 13 months, and, if possible how they can work together in the future for the benefit of the Parton community.

4. **CONCLUSIONS**

4.1 The Petition received requesting that “Copeland Borough Council dissolve Parton Parish Council and hold fresh elections” is confusing. Some clarity is needed from the petition organiser.

4.2 The counter petition submitted shows that there is local support within the community for the current Parish Council.

4.3 A resolution to the ongoing issues is needed for the benefit of all parties involved.

5. **STATUTORY OFFICER COMMENTS**

5.1 Legal Comments are: No legal issues arise from the petitions as submitted.

5.2 The Monitoring Officer’s comments are: Contained in report.
5.3 The Section 151 Officer’s comments are: No financial issues arising from these recommendations.