

ETHICS AND ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Thursday 31 January 2013

6:00pm

**Committee Room 1, City
Hall**

Membership: Councillors Geoff Ellis (*Chairman*), David Jackson (*Vice Chairman*), Chris Burke, Brent Charlesworth, Ronald Hills, Rosanne Kirk, Hilton Spratt, Ralph Toofany

Independent Members: Russell Pond

Substitute Members: Councillors Edmund Strengiel

Officers attending: Democratic Services, Carolyn Wheeler

AGENDA

This meeting replaces that postponed from 21 January 2013.

SECTION A	Page(s)
1. Confirmation of Minutes - 12 December 2012	1 - 7
2. Declarations of Interest	
Please note that, in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, when declaring interests Members must disclose the existence and nature of the interest, and whether it is a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) or Personal and/or Pecuniary.	
3. Code of Conduct: Cases Review	8 - 10
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5. Councillors' Use of Social Media	15 - 19
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NB There are no Section B Items

Present:	Councillor Geoff Ellis (<i>in the Chair</i>)
Councillors:	Chris Burke, Brent Charlesworth, Ronald Hills, Rosanne Kirk and Ralph Toofany
Independent Person(s):	Russell Pond
Apologies for Absence:	Councillors David Jackson and Hilton Spratt

1. Confirmation of Minutes - 22 October 2012

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 22 October 2012 be confirmed.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

3. Revised Terms of Reference

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- a. presented a report summarising the revision to the Committee's terms of reference which had been agreed by Council.
- b. emphasised the shift in the Committee's status to ensure a more proactive approach with regard to ensuring standards for member conduct.
- c. noted the increase in the Committee's remit to cover matters relating to engagement and member development.
- d. invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- noted recent reports regarding the inclusion of citizenship classes within schools, and questioned whether the Committee would be able to promote similar activities in local schools.
- questioned whether the revised terms of reference incorporated additional scope to apply sanctions to any members in breach of the Code of Conduct.

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services responded that:

- the Committee would now be able to investigate the provision of citizenship information with regard to the promotion of democratic engagement.

- changes made through the Localism Act 2011 had removed the statutory basis for sanctions; an emphasis was instead placed on internal sanctions applied by political groups where relevant.

RESOLVED that:

1. the revisions to the Committee's terms of reference be noted.
2. the provision of citizenship lessons within local schools be investigated at a future meeting.

4. **Dispensations for Members Holding Licences to Occupy Land within the City**

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- a. presented a report proposing the granting of dispensations to members who held licences to occupy land within the city to participate in the determining of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- b. noted that the report had been consulted upon with both the Leader and the Leader of the Opposition.
- c. highlighted the nature of the dispensation, which would prevent councillors from being excluded in relation to the discussion of the Medium Term Financial Strategy, which was a decision of high relative importance in comparison with the nature of the relevant disclosable pecuniary interest.
- d. recommended that the dispensation should be granted as being in the interests of persons living in the authority's area, in order to ensure their representatives' rights to discuss and determine relevant matters.
- e. invited members' questions and comments.

RESOLVED that a dispensation be agreed for a period of four years from 12 December 2012 for all members who met the following criteria:

1. the member has a disclosable pecuniary interest for any licence held (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer; **and**
2. the nature of the business specifically related to the consideration of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy as a whole.

5. **Members' Interests and Criminal Investigations**

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- a. presented a report noting the potential value in creating a formal agreement between the Council and Lincolnshire Police with regard to any criminal proceedings in relation to the declaration of interests by members.
- b. noted that while it was to be hoped that use of the protocol would not be required, its provision would provide clarity regarding the manner in which any interaction with Lincolnshire Police would proceed.
- c. invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- noted that the provision for information being reported back to the Monitoring Officer in the event that the police would not pursue a prosecution was unlikely to result in additional investigation by the Council.
- questioned whether the authority to prosecute a member in the event of a relevant potential criminal offence would reside with the police or the Director of Public Prosecutions.

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- confirmed that, as had been made clear during the passage of the Localism Act 2011 through parliament, the Council was unlikely to pursue a matter which had been rejected for further consideration as not being in the public interest to prosecute.
- responded that the decision to prosecute would rest with the Crown Prosecution Service; the final version of any protocol would be amended to make this and any other relevant points clear.

RESOLVED that the Monitoring Officer be requested to seek to put in place a written protocol with Lincolnshire Police, either solely or in combination with other councils' monitoring officers, in relation to potential criminal proceedings regarding the declaration of interests by members.

6. **Code of Conduct: Cases Review**

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- a. presented a report containing information on recent cases relating to other local authorities' codes of conduct.
- b. highlighted that members should identify any issues raised within the report as being relevant for further consideration with regard to their impact upon members of the Council.

- c. invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- noted the present distinction between those cases involving criminal sanctions and the more limited powers provided to local authorities under the Localism Act 2011.
- discussed the cases, particularly noting that involving the receipt of two IT allowances by councillors who represented both a lower and upper tier council.

The Democratic Services Officer responded that he understood the case relating to IT allowances had not been found to concern a breach of the respective authorities' codes of conduct as the IT allowance of one council was integrated within a broader allowance and had not been separately claimed.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

7. Councillor Role Descriptions

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- a. presented a report proposing the adoption of role descriptions relating to the overall role of a councillor, in addition to more specific role descriptions for other roles to which councillors may be appointed.
- b. noted the benefits which role descriptions could provide, with particular regard to the guidance which they would offer to prospective councillors, the public, and officers.
- c. explained that the descriptions had been under consideration by officers for some time, and that similar documents were already in place at other local authorities.
- d. invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- noted that the idea was positive, while stressing the responsibility of political groups to ensure members delivered the political manifesto on which some had been elected, with particular regard to portfolio holders.
- noted that the role descriptions represented a best practice model which would be particularly useful for the public.
- discussed the drafting of role descriptions relating to members not within the controlling political group.
- noted that references to collective decision-making could be problematic for members who did not support a particular decision.
- debated the production of a role description relating to advocate members such as the Advocate for Children and Young People's Advocate.
- welcomed the production of the role descriptions, noting their particular value with

regard to educating the public, informing new councillors, and promoting transparency.

RESOLVED that the Executive be recommended to adopt the proposed councillor role descriptions for guidance purposes, subject to the addition of a role description for advocate members and the clarification of references to collective responsibility.

8. Member-Officer Protocol

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- a. presented a report considering the suitability and current awareness among both councillors and officers of the Member-Officer Protocol.
- b. noted that a number of small amendments to the protocol were proposed within the report.
- c. emphasised that increasing awareness of the protocol would be advantageous.
- d. invited members' questions and comments.

RESOLVED that:

1. the Member-Officer Protocol be suitably publicised to increase awareness of the document within the Council.
2. the proposed revisions to the Member-Officer Protocol be recommended for incorporation into the Constitution.

9. Public Involvement at Committees and Webcasting

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented a report considering the level and quality of democratic engagement between the Council and the public.
- b. highlighted the work already undertaken to allow members of the public to engage with the Council's decision-making process through committees.
- c. noted a number of suggestions which could be investigated with regard to improving future engagement.
- d. drew members' attention to the advantages and disadvantages of webcasting of committee meetings, as well as the significant associated financial cost.
- e. invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- noted their experience of webcasting at other councils.
- accepted that finance was a likely stumbling block, and so suggested that consideration be given to working with students from the University of Lincoln in providing an alternative service.
- discussed the attempts which councils had made in the past when attempting to engage with communities, noting that people often considered that they exercised their democratic rights through voting for representatives, and that it was challenging to find people with the time and willingness to become more involved.
- welcomed the potential increase in transparency which webcasting could bring.
- discussed previous experience with changing the venue of committee meetings, including varying levels of interest from local communities.
- noted that other councils' webcasting schemes had differing experiences regarding the public appetite for viewing meetings.
- noted interest in viewing the arrangements made by other local councils for webcasting meetings.
- agreed that it was necessary to find new ways of engaging with the public and suggested that consideration be given to increasing engagement with local media outlets.
- noted that the voter turnout in local elections was often low, and suggested that councillors had been negatively associated with the allegations and convictions made in relation to MPs' conduct in recent years.
- noted the potential role of social media as a new way to engage with members of the public.
- noted that a large number of people did not have access to the internet, and so moving more meetings to different areas of the city would be more effective than webcasting in improving public engagement with those people.

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services responded that:

- members' comments regarding more cost effective methods for providing webcasting or a similar service would be investigated further.
- the Council had a clear duty continually to improve its engagement with the public, and work was required to ensure the Council did not fall behind the best practice in place.

RESOLVED that further investigation be carried out with regard to the matters raised, prior to reporting findings to the Committee at a future meeting.

10. **Work Programme Update**

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- a. presented the current Ethics and Engagement Committee work programme for consideration by members.
- b. noted the changes made to the work programme since it was last agreed by the

Committee, including the increased priority given to addressing social media.

c. highlighted that members were to be encouraged to raise any additional items.

d. invited members' questions and comments.

RESOLVED that the work programme be agreed.

SUBJECT:	CODE OF CONDUCT: CASES REVIEW
REPORT BY:	DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES
LEAD OFFICER:	CAROLYN WHEATER – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEGAL AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide information on recent cases relating to other local authorities' codes of conduct and consider their potential relevance to the Council.

2. National Cases Relating to Councillor Conduct

- 2.1 Since the removal of the Standards for England Board as part of the changes brought through the Localism Act 2011, the Council no longer receives a summary of cases reported from across the country. As a result, the cases chosen for consideration are drawn primarily from local government networks and media reports, and are summarised below.

- 2.2 The reports highlighted are gathered solely from information made available by the relevant local authorities. As cases are often considered to contain exempt information, there are potentially elements of the case which may not be publicly available. As such, members should be aware that the cases below are provided for the purpose of discussion and may not give the full picture in every regard.

2.3 Wigan Council

A councillor was accused by a taxi driver of telling him to 'go back to your country where you came from, or go to Bolton to live and work there, because you don't belong here.' The councillor defended her statement stating that it had been taken out of context and referred to the licensing of taxi drivers by other local authorities, rather than being racially motivated.

The report of an external consultant found that at the relevant times referred to in the complaint, the councillor was not acting in her official capacity and therefore the code of conduct did not apply to her conduct. The investigation reached no conclusion on the facts of the alleged incident. After consultation with the council's independent person, the monitoring officer accepted the report's findings.

2.4 Kirklees District Council

The responses to some freedom of information requests had been consulted upon with the leader of the council, who had instructed officers not to send responses as originally drafted. The leader did not have a formal role in the freedom of information process, and some emails he had sent to a junior officer

had been tersely worded. Following a reference to a First-tier Tribunal, a detailed report on the council's freedom of information processes and the conduct of its leader was produced.

The council was advised to revisit its freedom of information procedures with particular regard to the responsibilities set out for each individual involved with processing a request. The tribunal found that there was some merit to the complainant's view that the code of conduct had been breached, but that, ultimately, the leader of the council should not be found to have breached it. While the primary responsibility for ensuring suitable freedom of information procedures resided with officers, the tribunal did note that the leader 'did not cross that line [of bullying behaviour and failing to treat officers with respect but] he did step on it.'

2.5 Basildon District Council

Following the posting of offensive comments by a councillor on Facebook regarding the town's mayoress and a separate reference by another councillor to disabled protestors as a 'bunch of unwashed people' on Twitter, a guide for the proper use of social media was produced. Members will note that a document with a similar purpose has been provided as a separate item on this agenda.

2.6 Rossendale Borough Council

A former councillor was found to have breached the code of conduct after having made remarks regarding a fellow councillor on Twitter which had not treated her with due respect. In reaching its finding and the subsequent censure, consideration was given by the Standards Board Panel to the fact that the comments were posted on a public forum without any privacy settings and were political in content.

3. Potential Learning Points

- 3.1 Having regard to these complaints which have been investigated by other local authorities, members should consider whether any appropriate actions can be identified to ensure that the likelihood of any future breaches of the Member Code of Conduct by members representing the City of Lincoln Council is limited.
- 3.2 The Ethics and Engagement Committee may wish to consider the following actions if any learning points are identified:
- Issuing guidance to members and any other relevant parties on a general topic which presents a cause for concern with a view to potential future breaches of the Member Code of Conduct.
 - Requesting specific training for all members or members whose individual status would be relevant to the particular training.
 - Proposing amendments to the Member Code of Conduct and the procedure for considering complaints, if improvements can be identified.
 - Any other actions falling within the remit of the Committee which might aid the improvement of councillors' conduct.
- 3.3 If members are aware of further cases of broad interest from other local authorities in relation to ethical behaviour by councillors, details can be submitted via Democratic Services or raised at the meeting of the Committee for potential inclusion in a future report.

4. Strategic Priorities

- 4.1 The development of a fit-for-purpose council relies upon the proper conduct of officers and members. By considering the lessons learned from other local authorities the Council is better positioned to take preventative action to resolve any potential issues before they arise.

5. Finance Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 The Ethics and Engagement Committee's role includes the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct by councillors and co-opted members; this report forms a part of the work of the Committee in proactively addressing any matter that could detract from the reputation and behaviour of the Council or its councillors.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 That the Ethics and Engagement Committee note the contents of the report and recommend any suitable action arising from it.

SUBJECT:	E-DEMOCRACY
REPORT BY:	DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES
LEAD OFFICER:	CAROLYN WHEATER – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEGAL AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To provide information on the Council's current online democratic service provision and potential future ideas to improve democratic engagement.

2. Current Provision

- 2.1 As with all areas of the Council, the improvement of information technology and increased use of the internet have contributed to changing the ways in which democratic services engage with the public.
- 2.2 At a basic level, a number of simple form-filling services have been moved online for the convenience of the public; these include Ward Budgets applications, submitting questions for the Council Question Time, and creating online petitions.
- 2.3 For a number of years the Council has also offered access to public committee documents via the Council's website, including minutes and agendas.
- 2.4 Some moves in the direction of more interactive public consultation on decision-making have also been undertaken, including the 'You Choose' online budget consultation. This allowed members of the public to interact with the Council's budget for the following year, adjusting budgets for individual services and receiving feedback on the likely consequences related to their choices. People were then able to submit these responses to be taken into account by decision-makers when determining the budget.
- 2.5 In addition to these particular services, wider information relating to the democratic operations of the Council are provided on the website. This is under continual development, and features a significant amount of information relevant to the work of this Committee which could help the public or prospective councillors.

3. Future Changes

- 3.1 Paperless Committees
Democratic Services is currently in the process of transferring to new committee software, which will provide additional opportunities for members of the public to

- engage with the Council's committees. While providing similar levels of access to committee documents as the current system, a number of minor improvements will be made including allowing the public to sign up to personalised email alerts for business transacted by particular committees or different types of decision.
- 3.2 Of potentially greater significance is the new system's capacity for reading electronic agendas on tablet computers. By downloading a free application for Android or iPad devices, councillors and members of the public will be able to access automatically downloaded agendas. These agendas can then be annotated and highlighted by users in a similar manner as a paper document. This new feature, with the capacity for private business to be provided, subject to meeting the Council's internal security requirements, through a secure version of the application for councillors offers a new opportunity for the Council to move towards increasingly paperless meetings.
- 3.3 This technology evidently offers new opportunities for financial and environmental benefits. However, it also presents a challenge in terms of adapting councillors to a new way of interacting with agendas. Until councillors as a body are ready to move away from printed agendas, paper is likely to continue to be the default choice for the majority. The new system should allow those members who are willing to trial a new way of working to trial paperless committee documents on mobile devices already issued by the Council or owned personally.
- 3.4 The Committee may therefore wish to offer views on the following topics:
- The advantages and disadvantages of paperless working.
 - An achievable timescale for increasing the proportion of councillors using electronic agendas rather than printed papers.
 - The manner in which an initial trial could be implemented, i.e. whether a trial should be undertaken with all interested members or by working with an smaller individual group who could then offer more specific feedback.
- 3.5 Online Training for Members
Following member interest expressed in the Council providing an online training service, access to the Modern Councillor area on the Learning Pool website has been provided since 2010. This allows councillors to complete online training modules on topics specifically relating to their roles and a number of other broader skills. Councillors are able to use this service at <http://cityoflincoln.learningpool.com> using the log-in details previously provided and available through Democratic Services.
- 3.6 Usage of the online training service has been very low from its start, owing to a likely combination of a lack of awareness of the service and a preference for training undertaken in person. In the past year, a total of four councillors have logged onto the system, undertaking a maximum of two modules each. Efforts have been made to promote the system to elected members, although these have had little impact to date. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the service is relatively well-received by those who use it.
- 3.7 In addition to training modules for councillors, the Council also uses the Learning Pool service for wider training provision to officers, with a particular focus on apprentices. As such, the majority of the costs for the service are met by other

service areas, although a contribution from the member training budget of £2,000 is made every year towards the specific cost of Modern Councillor and the more general costs of the overall Learning Pool service. These costs consume a significant portion of the Council's member training budget.

- 3.8 The service does provide a potentially valuable backup for the training undertaken annually for Planning Committee and Licensing Sub-Committee members. If unable to attend a briefing with officers, councillors are able to complete the relevant online module as a refresher to enable them to take part in meetings. In practice, this has not been a widely-used feature with the majority of members preferring training in person.
- 3.9 In view of the factors outlined above, members are recommended to offer views on the following areas:
- Whether the principle of online training is supported.
 - Whether the cost of the current system can be justified in view of its current usage.
 - Whether officers should seek to apportion the money currently spent on online training for councillors towards more traditional training methods.
- 3.10 Online Information Provision
As highlighted above, officers have continued to improve the quality and quantity of information available on the areas of the website addressing democratic engagement, while also trying to maintain a balance that does not overwhelm visitors to the website with an excessive amount of detail.
- 3.11 As part of the forthcoming changes to the committee management software, the areas of the website relating to councillors and committees are likely to change significantly in the near future. However, the type of information made available will remain broadly the same.
- 3.12 Members are therefore recommended to offer any views on the current operation of the website, and any proposals for potential improvements.

4. Strategic Priorities

- 4.1 The Council's commitment to reducing the city's carbon footprint is potentially well-served by a move towards increased electronic provision of democratic services. While digital services have an environmental impact in the production of the devices and subsequent electricity use, limiting the production of physical agenda papers will have an undoubted benefit through saving hundreds of thousands of sheets of paper every year.
- 4.2 The Council's Strategic Plan also includes its intentions to increase democratic engagement and to ensure a fit for purpose council, both of which require services to be delivered in an efficient and customer-friendly manner.

5. Finance Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, although any changes to future service provision, with particular regard to paperless committee

documents, would be likely to have an effect on service costs. Any change in the provision of online training for councillors would increase the amount available for spending on other training, while increasing the relative cost of the Learning Pool service in other service areas' budgets.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 The move towards increased online provision of services and information is supported, and often required, by recent legislation. Some anomalies remain with regard to pre-internet legislation, including the requirement to physically serve a summons upon all members prior to meetings of the Council. However, it is likely that an explicit agreement with councillors to receive summons electronically would be sufficient in this regard.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 That the Ethics and Engagement Committee offer views and guidance on the topics put forward within the report, with particular regard to paperless committee documents and online training for councillors.

SUBJECT:	COUNCILLORS' USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA
REPORT BY:	DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES
LEAD OFFICER:	CAROLYN WHEATER – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEGAL AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To invite comments on proposed guidance for councillors on the use of social media.

2. Background

- 2.1 In recent years, an increasing number of people, including councillors, have begun to use online social media services. These services typically allow users to create their own public profiles which can then be used to post messages and create social links with other service users.
- 2.2 These services undoubtedly offer a great number of advantages, including allowing councillors to communicate easily with members of the public. However, this ease of contact presents a new set of challenges, including the appropriateness of the messages being sent and the use of technology within meetings.
- 2.3 The Council has received a number of requests from councillors, particularly those who have been recently elected, to provide specific guidance to supplement the broader provisions made in other documents regarding general member conduct.

3. Development of Guidance for Councillors

- 3.1 Following recent requests for guidance, councillors were alerted to the planned consideration of the matter by the Committee, and were invited to provide views on the use of social media. Member comments received by officers were broadly supportive of the changes which the technology offered and also highlighted the need for effective guidance to be offered to councillors who might otherwise be concerned about engaging in this manner.
- 3.2 As such, officers have given consideration to developing guidance which meets the particular requirements of the Council and our councillors. Having similar regard to policies already in place at other local authorities, draft guidance for the Council is attached as **Appendix A**.

- 3.3 As highlighted within the preamble to guidance, there remains an essential level of trust in councillors to behave in an appropriate manner. However, it is inevitable that councillors' use of social media must be more carefully considered than for a general member of the public.
- 3.4 Some other local authorities have specifically prohibited the use of mobile devices within meetings. This is not a feature of the proposed guidance, and any similar change would have to be agreed by Council. Having regard to the use of mobile devices in everyday life and, as referenced elsewhere in this agenda, the potential increase in the use of tablet computers for reading agendas, a blanket ban on mobile devices would appear to be somewhat draconian. This could also prevent any members from taking steps to balance their commitments to the Council with other areas of their life.
- 3.5 The guidance is separated into three sections covering behaviour at meetings, interactions with the public, and interactions with councillors and officers. There is inevitably the possibility of some interactions blending with others. As such, the guidance should be read as a whole, taking note of the general principles put forward.
- 3.6 Consideration was given to the provision of examples of potentially positive and negative use of social media. However, it was felt that this could be counter-productive, both in terms of removing some flexibility for any future consideration of the circumstances of an individual complaint and the likely speed with which any examples could become obsolete. Instead a focus is placed upon a broader set of principles which councillors can use to inform their conduct. Members should be aware that, as with any topic, Democratic Services and the Monitoring Officer will always try to assist members by being available to offer advice in relation to particular queries.
- 3.8 Members are recommended to offer comments on the following areas:
- Whether the proposed guidance on social media is appropriate and useful.
 - Whether any additional areas should be addressed within the guidance.
 - Whether any formal reference to the role of technology within meetings should be made within the constitution.

4. Strategic Priorities

- 4.1 Councillors should be open and accessible to the residents of their ward. The proper use of social media is a potentially valuable tool in forming links between councillors and the communities they serve, thereby improving the quality of democratic engagement.

5. Finance Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1 No changes to the Council's constitution are proposed within this report. Any future changes proposed in relation to the Council Procedure Rules would require

approval by Council.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 That the Ethics and Engagement Committee consider whether the proposed guidance on social media is appropriate for circulation to all councillors.

Social Media Guidance for Councillors

The City of Lincoln Council recognises that the use of online social media can be an excellent tool for engaging with residents and communities. A number of services give the public a direct communication channel to councillors, allowing ideas to be developed and problems to be solved. However, the increasing use of this technology poses a new set of challenges and opportunities in terms of the operation of the City of Lincoln Council and its councillors.

As such, this document has been produced to offer guidance to councillors on the manner in which the technology should be used when acting as a councillor or on Council business. It is not intended to be exhaustive, or to replace existing constitutional or legal provisions.

As the democratically-elected representatives of their wards, there should be an assumption that members will act in a responsible manner for the benefit of their ward and the city as a whole. To a large degree, members are responsible for their own conduct and ensuring that it is appropriate to the situation. Mobile devices are a fundamental feature of modern life and prohibiting their use in meetings is unworkable and could limit members in balancing the demands of their family and working life. However, as with any form of communication, it is possible for the technology to be used improperly; councillors should therefore always be conscious of their public role and profile.

Use of social media or technology within meetings

Public Perception

When sitting as a member of a committee, the first duty of the councillor is to ensure they are giving proper attention to the business being considered. This includes being aware of the public perception of his or her role. Even if a councillor is paying full attention to an item while using a mobile device, it is necessary to consider that it may not appear this way. If a councillor is clearly making excessive use of a mobile device, it may be appropriate for the chair of the meeting to raise this matter, particularly if it is disrupting the meeting.

Regulatory Committees

In particular, members of quasi-judicial committees such as the Licensing or Planning Committee should be especially mindful of the need to be seen to be paying full attention to items. This is particularly true in view of the personal importance attached by applicants and the public to these matters, and the increased likelihood of a procedural challenge to the decision being taken.

Declarations of Interest

It is recommended that if a committee member has declared an interest in an item and left the room, that wherever possible councillors should cease to use mobile devices for the duration of that item to preclude the possibility of any contact between the remaining committee members and those who have left the room.

Photographs and Recordings

Members should not take any photographs or recordings of meetings without the express permission of the meeting's chair.

Private Business

As a general rule, members should not transmit any information that is either exempt or confidential beyond the confines of the meeting. This also applies to exempt or confidential information received outside a meeting. If in any doubt regarding the status of information, members should consult with Democratic Services or the Monitoring Officer before disseminating it in any form.

Engaging with the public

Standards of Behaviour

As an elected representative, a councillor's standard of behaviour is under particular scrutiny. Members of the public who approach a councillor in relation to their role, either online or otherwise, should expect to be treated politely and to be helped as far as is practicable.

Confidentiality

Members of the public may have a reasonable expectation that certain comments made to a councillor will either be treated in confidence or shared solely with people who can reasonably be expected to assist with a person's request. This is particularly true of any personal information disclosed to a councillor, either in person or through social media.

Acting as a Councillor

If a complaint is made against a councillor, one relevant factor may be whether they were acting as a councillor at the time of any cause for complaint. Given the ease with which online comments can be replicated and removed from their original context or intent, members should consider whether they would be comfortable publicly defending anything which they have posted online. It is also worth considering the context in which any information is posted with regard to whether it would be considered that a councillor is acting in a private capacity at the time of posting.

Engaging with officers and councillors

Appropriate Behaviour towards Officers

Members should have regard to the Member-Officer Protocol, and the need to treat officers with respect. Councillors should be continually aware of the need for the officer to act in a professional capacity and should not act in a manner which would compromise this, either in appearance or in fact.

Appropriate Behaviour towards Councillors

The political nature of councillors' work means that debate and disagreement is often a fundamental and entirely proper part of their role. However, there is a line between passionate debate and personal attacks, regarding which members should be mindful. Comments made by councillors towards others, including those made under online pseudonyms, may be treated in the same manner as any similar comments made in person.

SUBJECT:	INDEPENDENT PERSON PROTOCOL
REPORT BY:	DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES
LEAD OFFICER:	CAROLYN WHEATER – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEGAL AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To propose the adoption of a protocol in relation to the Independent Person within the Council's structure for investigating complaints made against members.

2. Current Provisions for the Independent Person

- 2.1 Following the changes brought through the Localism Act 2011, the Council adopted a new code of conduct, which is supported by specific criteria, guidance, and procedure notes also agreed by Council.
- 2.2 In accordance with these provisions, the Council has also appointed an independent person and two reserve independent persons. Advertisements for the role of the Independent Person were made in advance of the appointment, with a role profiles and guidance circulated to the candidates for the post.
- 2.3 While the current provisions in relation to the Independent Person and the framework for considering any complaints made against members are sufficient for any complaints to be properly investigated, there remains scope for additional clarity with regard to the precise role of the Independent Person in the complaints process.

3. Independent Person Protocol

- 3.1 Having regard to documents recently produced by Standards Exchange, it is felt that there would be a benefit in adopting a protocol offering more detailed information on the role of the Independent Person.
- 3.2 Attached as **Appendix A** to this report is a proposed protocol giving finer detail on the role of the Independent Person, particularly in dealing with complaints made against members.
- 3.3 The protocol is put forward as a supplement to the criteria, guidance, and procedure already in place and attached as **Appendix B** for members' information. This guidance will remain as the primary document guiding the Council's response to any complaints received against members in relation to the Code of Conduct.

- 3.4 The following aspects of the proposed protocol are of particular note with regard to the Independent Person's role in the investigation of complaints:
- The capacity for the Independent Person to speak with a member about whom a complaint has been received.
 - The scope for consultation with the Independent Person by both the Monitoring Officer and the Ethics and Engagement Committee regarding individual complaints.
- 3.5 Members are recommended to consider the suitability of the protocol in relation to the Independent Person, taking into account any views expressed by the Independent Person or Reserve Independent Persons during the consideration of this item.
- 4. Strategic Priorities**
- 4.1 Ensuring high standards of behaviour by councillors is an important part of maintaining a fit for purpose council; the production of clear guidance for the Independent Person would clearly assist in the operation of a clear, open, and effective procedure for investigating any complaints made against members.
- 5. Finance Implications**
- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
- 6. Legal Implications**
- 6.1 The protocol offers effective guidance for the Independent Person and any people interacting with him or her; as such, the protocol will be followed whenever appropriate.
- 7. Recommendations**
- 7.1 That the Ethics and Engagement Committee consider and adopt the proposed Independent Person Protocol.

Independent Person Protocol

This protocol is intended to make clear the relationships between the Independent Person (IP) and the various parts of the local authority involved in the process of handling standards complaints and wider promotion of standards. Its aim is to ensure that responsibility is clear at each stage of the process and set out the expectations and rights of the IP.

Considering written allegations

1. The Monitoring Officer (MO) will seek the views of the Independent Person (IP) before reaching a decision on whether any further action should be taken on a written complaint
2. When issuing the decision letter, the MO will record that the IP has been consulted and that their views have been taken into account. Where the view of the MO and IP differ, the MO will record the reasons for following a particular course. The letter will make clear that it is the MO and not the IP who is the decision-maker.

Matters under investigation

3. A member who is the subject of a complaint may seek the views of the IP. A member wishing to contact the IP should do so via the MO who will arrange for a meeting to take place. These arrangements will be communicated to the subject member by the MO in the decision notice.
4. Where the IP has given views to the subject member, those views shall be put in writing and made available to all relevant parties in the case.
5. The IP will need to agree in advance with the subject member rules of confidentiality but it will be up to the IP to decide whether matters should remain confidential and, even where there is confidential information disclosed to the IP, there should be a public statement that confidential matters were discussed.
6. The MO may consult the IP at any stage during the process, particularly on matters which relate to the procedures for handling complaints.
7. Where a matter has been referred to the Ethics and Engagement Committee for determination, the committee must seek the views of the IP before reaching its conclusions. The IP's views should be recorded in any decision notice and, where those views do not reflect the final outcome reasons must be given for any differences. However, it must be clear that it is the Ethics and Engagement Committee and not the IP who is the decision-maker.

8. The IP shall not make any comments to the media on any matter without prior agreement of the MO. Any requests for comments from media shall be referred in the first instance to the MO who may refer these to the Chair of the Ethics and Engagement Committee as appropriate.
9. The IP may be requested by the MO or Ethics and Engagement Committee to assist in mediation or conciliation in order to resolve complaints where that is considered the most appropriate course of action.
10. The IP may be requested by the MO or Ethics and Engagement Committee to assist in any training on conduct issues as appropriate.
11. Where the IP is unable to act because of a conflict of interest or because they are otherwise unavailable their role will be carried out by a reserve IP.

Relationship with the Ethics and Engagement Committee

12. The IP and any reserves shall receive agendas and minutes of all meetings of the Ethics and Engagement Committee and shall be entitled to request for items to be added to the agenda with the agreement of the chair and to speak at the committee.
13. The IP and reserves are not members of the Ethics and Engagement Committee and as such are not part of the formal decision making process of the meeting and cannot vote on any matters put to the meeting, however the IP will be invited to attend the committee meetings and to contribute to matters under consideration and discussion. They may be invited to observe confidential matters with the agreement of the chair.

Other matters

14. The IP has the right to raise any concerns about standards issues or implementation of the process with the Chief Executive and Town Clerk and has the right to address a meeting of the full council about any concerns.
15. The council, through its Ethics and Engagement Committee and MO, is responsible for ensuring that the council meets its duty to promote and maintain high standards. However, the IP has the right to be consulted on any proposed changes to the Code of Conduct or procedures for handling allegations.
16. The IP has the right of access to any confidential information required to carry out their role. Access to such information and its storage shall be agreed with the MO.

17. The IP has the right of access to council buildings in order to carry out their role. Access should be agreed in advance with the MO.
18. The MO will meet at least quarterly with the IP and any reserves to review relevant matters.
19. The IP and reserves will agree to sign a code of conduct, including a register of interests to be held by the MO and will declare any relevant interests in relation to cases to the MO who will decide whether the interest conflicts them out of involvement in the matter.
20. The IP is to be considered an office-holder of the authority in accordance with the duty under s28(7) of the Localism Act 2011 and is therefore entitled to be covered by the Council's indemnity insurance provided they act reasonably and within the terms of this Protocol.

LOCAL ASSESSMENT AND REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS OF BREACHES OF THE MEMBER CODE OF CONDUCT

CRITERIA, GUIDANCE AND PROCEDURE

1.0 PRE- ASSESSMENT

- 1.1 When a written complaint has been received, the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the independent person, will;
- 1.2 Determine whether the complaint should be investigated; whether to refer the decision on investigation to the Assessment Sub-Committee; or whether another course of action is appropriate, including seeking local resolution or to take no action at all.
- 1.3 If a complaint is raised with the Monitoring Officer verbally, the Monitoring Officer should ask the complainant whether they want to formally put the matter in writing. If the complainant does not want to do this then the Monitoring Officer should consider options for informal resolution to satisfy the complaint.
- 1.4 Once the Monitoring Officer has determined that the complaint should be investigated, he/she will acknowledge receipt of the complaint and the member who the allegation is made against will be informed that a complaint has been made against them alleging a breach of the member code of conduct.
- 1.5 Before any investigation of the complaint begins, the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person/Assessment Sub-Committee must be satisfied that the complaint meets the following tests: -
 - **It is a complaint against a named member of the Council**
 - **The named member was in office at the time of the alleged conduct and acting in their official capacity**
 - **The complaint if substantiated would be a breach of the member code of conduct in force at the relevant time**
- 1.6 If the complaint fails one or more of these tests it cannot be investigated as a breach of the code and the complainant must be informed that no further action will be taken in respect of the complaint.

2.0 ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

2.1 The following criteria have been developed for the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person/Assessment Sub-Committee to assess new complaints against and decide what action, if any to take.

2.2 Information

Has the complainant submitted enough information to satisfy the Monitoring Officer that the complaint should be referred for investigation or other action?

The complainant must provide sufficient information to enable the Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person to decide whether or not there is prima facie evidence of a breach of the Member Code of Conduct. If insufficient information has been provided to make a decision, the matter will not normally be referred for investigation or other action.

2.3 Length of time

Is the complaint about something that happened so long ago that there would be little benefit in taking action now?

The Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person/Assessment Sub-Committee should have regard to the length of time that has elapsed since the alleged conduct occurred. It will not normally investigate or pursue other action where the alleged conduct took place more than 6 months prior to the date of the complaint. However if there are exceptional circumstances (e.g. where the conduct relates to a pattern of behaviour which has recently been repeated) events or incidents which are more than 6 months old could be considered.

2.4 Seriousness of the Complaint

Does the complaint appear to be simply malicious, politically motivated, a repeated complaint or 'tit-for-tat'?

The Monitoring Officer and Independent Person/Assessment Sub-Committee will not consider complaints or make a decision to refer matters for investigation, which they believe to be malicious, vexatious, trivial, politically motivated, a repeated complaint, or tit-for-tat.

2.5 Public Interest

Is it in the public interest to refer a matter for investigation?

The Monitoring Officer and the Independent Person/Assessment Sub-Committee will determine whether the public interest would be served by referring a complaint for investigation or for any other action in cases where the subject matter has died, resigned or is seriously ill. Similarly, if the

member has offered an apology or other remedial action the Monitoring Officer may decide that it is appropriate to take no further action. In making a decision to investigate, the Monitoring Officer should also consider whether the complaint is serious enough to justify the resources required to investigate.

2.6 Other Investigations

Has the complaint already been the subject of an investigation or other action relating to the Code of Conduct, or has the complaint been the subject of an investigation by other regulatory authorities?

If the complaint has already been the subject of an investigation or other action relating to the Member Code of Conduct, or the subject of investigation by another regulatory authority, it is unlikely that it will be referred for investigation by the Monitoring Officer.

2.7 Anonymous Complaints

Has the complaint been made anonymously?

The Monitoring Officer and Independent Person/ Assessment Sub-Committee will not normally make a decision to consider anonymous complaints unless there is additional independent documentary evidence to support the complaint.

2.8 Multiple Complaints

It is not uncommon for one event or incident to give rise to similar complaints from a number of different complainants. Wherever possible, these complaints will be considered at the same meeting by the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person/ Assessment Sub-Committee.

2.9 Criminal Investigations

If a complaint made against a member is also subject to a police investigation, the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person/Assessment Sub-Committee should still investigate the facts as far as they are able to ascertain whether there has been a breach of the code of conduct.

3.0 CONFIDENTIALITY

3.1 As a matter of fairness and natural justice, a member should normally be told that a complaint has been made against them alleging a breach of the code of conduct, who has made the complaint and what this relates to. However, there may be cases where the complainant requests that his or her identity is withheld from the member. Such requests should only be granted in exceptional circumstances, such as: -

- the complainant has reasonable grounds for believing that they or their family will be at risk of physical harm if their identity is revealed.
- The complainant is an officer who works with the member and they would have concerns of any consequence to their employment if their identity is revealed
- The complainant suffers from a serious health condition which might adversely be affected if their identity is revealed.

4.0 Withdrawing Complaints

4.1 A complainant may ask to withdraw their complaint before the Monitoring Officer and Independent Person/Assessment Sub-Committee has made a decision on it. The Monitoring Officer and Independent Person should consider the following when deciding whether to grant the request: -

- Does the public interest in pursuing the complaint outweigh the private interest of withdrawing it?
- Could action, such as an investigation, be properly carried out without the participation of the complainant?
- Is there a reason why the complainant has been asked to withdraw the complaint (e.g. is there any pressure/intimidation to withdraw the complaint from the member or any colleagues)?

5.0 ASSESSMENT DECISIONS

5.1 The Monitoring Officer or Assessment Sub-Committee should complete its initial assessment of an allegation within an average of 20 working days and to reach a decision on what should happen with the complaint.

5.2 The Monitoring Officer or Assessment Sub-Committee is required to reach one of the three following decisions on a complaint in relation to the Code of Conduct:

- **Refer the complaint for investigation**
- **Take 'other action' including seeking local resolution**
- **Take no action**

6.0 THE DECISION NOTICE

6.1 The Monitoring Officer/Assessment Sub – Committee is required to produce a Decision Notice which requires a written summary detailing: -

- **the main points considered during its deliberations**
- **its conclusions in respect of the complaint**
- **the reasons for its conclusions**

6.2 The Decision Notice should give the name of the member who is the subject of the allegation and details of the allegation unless doing so is not in

the public interest or would prejudice any separate or subsequent investigation.

6.3 The Decision Notice will be sent to the member and the complainant unless there is a significant risk that by sending it to the member the complainant or any potential witnesses will be intimidated by the subject member or any evidence will be compromised or destroyed.

6.4 The Decision Notice should be issued as soon as possible after the Monitoring Officer/ Assessment Sub-Committee meeting and ideally within 5 working days.

6.5 The Decision Notice shall be made publicly available (e.g. at Council offices and on the Council's website) for a period of 6 years.

7.0 DECISION TO TAKE NO ACTION

7.1 The Monitoring Officer/Assessment Sub-Committee can decide that no action is required in respect of a complaint. For example this could be because the Monitoring Officer/Assessment Sub-Committee does not consider that the complaint is sufficiently serious to warrant any action. Alternatively it could be because of the length of time that has elapsed since the allegation.

7.2 The decision reached by the Monitoring Officer/Assessment Sub-Committee and the reasons for it should adhere to the assessment criteria set out in this document. If the Monitoring Officer has made the decision this must be reported to the Standards Committee.

7.3 As soon as possible after making the decision, and ideally within 5 working days, the Monitoring Officer/Assessment Sub-Committee must give written notice of that decision to the complainant and the member, summarising the complaint and setting out clearly the reasons for the decision to take no action.

7.4 It is important to note that where no potential breach of the Code of Conduct is disclosed by the complaint, no matter what its source or whoever the member was, no action can be taken by the Standards Committee in respect of it. The matter of referral for investigation or other action does not arise.

SUBJECT:	WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE
REPORT BY:	DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES
LEAD OFFICER:	CAROLYN WHEATER – ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (LEGAL AND CORPORATE SUPPORT SERVICES)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To put forward the current Ethics and Engagement Committee work programme for consideration by members.

2. Work Programme Summary

- 2.1 The work programme is attached as **Appendix A**, and was agreed at the meeting of the Ethics and Engagement Committee on 12 December 2012.
- 2.2 A significant number of unscheduled items are contained within the work programme. These items are not currently scheduled owing either to a lack of capacity within the meetings available or because the timing at which key information will become available is unclear.
- 2.3 Members are encouraged to put forward any proposals for relevant matters of concern or interest to them or the residents of their ward which the Ethics and Engagement Committee may be able to consider.

3. Changes Made to the Work Programme

- 3.1 At the last meeting of the Committee on 12 December 2012, members discussed the provision of citizenship information to pupils in Lincoln's schools. This topic has been scheduled for the next meeting on 11 March 2013. Members are therefore requested to offer their thoughts on the following areas
- Inviting relevant representatives, potentially including teaching staff and pupils, to discuss the current situation and whether any improvements are feasible.
 - The likely areas for discussion, including any requests for further information.
 - The contribution that both members of the Committee and other elected members would be willing to make to any future additional input to this area.

4. Finance Implications

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

5. Legal Implications

- 5.1 Any additions to the work programme should be made in accordance with the scope of the Committee established within its terms of reference.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1 That the Committee consider the work programme and propose any suitable changes if necessary.
- 6.2 That the Committee consider items scheduled for the next meeting and any necessary arrangements relating to them.

Ethics and Engagement Committee Work Programme 2012/13

12 December 2012

Topic	Matter for Consideration	Outcome
Revised Terms of Reference	To highlight the terms of reference agreed by Council on 27 November 2012.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To note the changes to the operation of the Committee.
Dispensations for Members Holding Licences to Occupy Land within the City	To consider the granting of dispensations for members in accordance with the Committee's terms of reference.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider the proposed dispensation.
Code of Conduct: Cases Review	To examine national developments of relevance to the Members' Code of Conduct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To note the issues raised and consider suitable a suitable response if required.
Member Role Descriptions	Clarifying the role of councillors could potentially be of benefit to both councillors, prospective councillors, and the public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider proposals for member role descriptions and to recommend alterations or approval as required.
Public Involvement at Committees and Webcasting	The Council does not regularly record or broadcast its meetings, but does allow public participation in a variety of meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider whether webcasting of committee meetings would be beneficial and good value for money. To examine current arrangements for public participation in meetings.
Member-Officer Protocol	The Member-Officer Protocol forms part of the Council's Constitution and governs the relationship between councillors and officers. The protocol has been in place for a number of years without review.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To assess the ongoing suitability of the Member-Officer Protocol.
Work Programme Update	The Committee's work programme is agreed on an ongoing basis in consultation with the Chair and the Committee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To agree the work programme. To consider the arrangements for the next meeting.

21 January 2013

Topic	Matter for Consideration	Outcome
Code of Conduct: Cases Review	To examine national developments of relevance to the Members' Code of Conduct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To note the issues raised and consider suitable a suitable response if required.
E-Democracy	The Council provides a number of online democratic functions for both councillors and the public. The nature and extent of these services is an area for continued consideration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider the effectiveness of current online democratic functions and to offer views on future provision.
Councillors' Use of Social Media	Members have access to an increasing number of online tools for communicating with each other, officers and the public. In particular, councillors' use of Twitter, Facebook, and blogging provides a new set of opportunities and challenges, offering new ways to engage with people but also changing the manner and means by which information can be communicated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider the current and future impact of social media upon councillors and whether any guidance or revision to existing procedures is necessary.
Independent Person Protocol	Following the approval of the Localism Act 2011, a role for an independent person was created; the Committee is therefore recommended to consider the adoption of a protocol covering the working relationship with the Council's Independent Person.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider the adoption of a protocol relating to the role of the Independent Person.
Work Programme Update	The Committee's work programme is agreed on an ongoing basis in consultation with the Chair and the Committee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To agree the work programme. To consider the arrangements for the next meeting.

11 March 2013

Topic	Matter for Consideration	Outcome
Code of Conduct: Cases Review	To examine national developments of relevance to the Members' Code of Conduct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To note the issues raised and consider suitable a suitable response if required.
Member Development Review	Member development has become increasingly important in recent years as the Council seeks to ensure elected members have the skills and knowledge to perform their roles as effectively as possible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider the current operation of member development.
The Promotion of Citizenship within Schools	Following consideration of related topics at the meeting of 12 December 2012, members requested that the Committee consider the provision of citizenship lessons within schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider the status of citizenship within schools and whether the Committee can contribute towards this locally.
Work Programme Update	The Committee's work programme is agreed on an ongoing basis in consultation with the Chair and the Committee.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To agree the work programme. To consider the arrangements for the next meeting.

Unscheduled Topics

Topic	Matter for Consideration	Outcome
Assistant Portfolio Holders	Currently, the Executive comprises six portfolio holders. In order to encourage greater links with the scrutiny process and to develop non-Executive members' experience, it would be possible to create assistant portfolio holder roles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To assess the potential advantages and disadvantages of introducing the role of assistant portfolio holder.
Encouraging Electoral Engagement	Turnout in Lincoln's local government elections, in common with many other areas of the country, is often below 30%, meaning that the majority of electors are choosing not to exercise their right to vote, while others entitled to vote may not even be registering to do so.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To examine voter registration and electoral turnout, and to discuss the manner in which this can be improved.

Topic	Matter for Consideration	Outcome
Increasing the Diversity of Electoral Candidates	Across the United Kingdom, elected members in local government are often disproportionately drawn from certain sections of the population, with significant disparities existing in areas such as race, gender, and age.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To determine whether any barriers to a broader range of electoral candidates exist that the Council could reasonably address.
Promoting Constructive Debate Within Meetings	The manner in which debate is conducted at meetings has a significant bearing on the quality of outcomes and the working relationships between members and officers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To review the Council's standing orders and to consider the manner in which a high standard of debate can be secured.
Standards Post-Implementation Review	The Localism Act 2011 provided for a considerable revision of arrangements for member standards, including changes to members' declarations of interests and the Members' Code of Conduct.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider the impact of changes to the standards regime introduced through the Localism Act 2011.
Ward Budgets	The Ward Budgets scheme, allowing councillors to offer financial support to projects benefitting their wards, has been operating since 2009/10.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To assess the operation of the Ward Budgets scheme.
Whistle-Blowing Policy	The Council's Whistle-Blowing Policy seeks to ensure that legitimate concerns regarding the operation of the Council can be raised in a confidential and effective manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To assess the Whistle-Blowing Policy with particular regard to its impact upon councillors.