

Present:	Councillor Geoff Ellis (<i>in the Chair</i>)
Councillors:	Chris Burke, Brent Charlesworth, Ronald Hills, David Jackson, Rosanne Kirk and Ralph Toofany
Independent Member(s):	Russell Pond
Also in Attendance:	Tallulah Carter-Kelly Douglas Franks Luke Gregory-Jones Jane Hancock
Apologies for Absence:	Councillors Hilton Spratt
Substitutes:	Jane Clark

18. Confirmation of Minutes - 31 January 2013

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2013 be confirmed.

19. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

20. The Promotion of Citizenship within Schools

The Chair welcomed student and teacher representatives from Lincoln Christ's Hospital School who had been invited to speak regarding their experience of citizenship lessons and more broadly regarding the relationship between local government and young people.

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented a report regarding the provision of citizenship lessons within Lincoln's schools.
- b. noted that members had expressed an interest in the item at a previous meeting and had requested that school representatives be invited to provide their views on the topic.

Question/Comment 1

Members requested details of pupils' experiences of citizenship lessons.

The student representatives (Tallulah Carter-Kelly, Douglas Franks, and Luke Gregory-Jones) responded that:

- citizenship lessons had not always formed a particularly prominent or memorable role in their education to date.
- the subject had been useful with particular regard to learning about the judicial system.

Question/Comment 2

Members questioned whether the Council could do more to encourage participation by young people.

The student representatives responded that council involvement, either by the city or county council, was minimal, and noted that there was scope for councils to take greater involvement with sixth-form pupils through General Studies lessons.

Question/Comment 3

Members and school representatives discussed the advantages and disadvantages of compulsory voting systems and lowering the voting age to allow 16 year olds to vote in local and national elections.

Question/Comment 4

The teacher representative (Jane Hancock) questioned the student representatives regarding the possible reasons for young people failing to engage with politics. The student representatives suggested a number of possible reasons for the lack of engagement including a failure to engage with pupils in lower years, a lack of emphasis on local government in schools, and a need for new methods of communication, such as social media, to be embraced.

Members noted the divide between younger people and older people in terms of the extent to which they made use of the internet to communicate; there was a further need to ensure inter-generational cooperation and a responsibility for younger people to look after older people.

Question/Comment 5

Members and school representatives discussed the historic power distribution between central and local government.

Question/Comment 6

The teacher representative noted the role of political parties in encouraging young people to engage with politics, noting one of the student representative's difficulty in taking a full role in a political party without meeting the minimum membership requirements.

Members discussed the manner in which political parties could work with young people, including through universities. The role of social media in encouraging new participation was further discussed, in addition to the under-representation of both women and young people as a whole throughout political parties.

Question/Comment 7

Members and student representatives discussed the relative benefits of young people

taking an active interest in politics, and the extent to which those who took an interest in politics formed a minority within their age group.

Question/Comment 8

Members questioned what single action the student representatives would want the Council to take in order to improve electoral turnout.

The student representatives responded that it was necessary to show people how significant an impact local politics could make to their lives. In particular, local government needed to be given the power to resist central government control in order to allow bridges to be formed between neighbourhoods and local politics.

Question/Comment 9

Members discussed the manner in which they could develop the contributions of the teacher and student representatives to improve the Council's democratic engagement with young people. Further work would need to be carried out to establish a suitable format for an initial trial, preferably continuing with the assistance already provided by those from Lincoln Christ's Hospital School.

RESOLVED that officers be requested to work with representatives from Lincoln Christ's Hospital School to establish an initial event allowing the Council to contribute towards aiding young people's engagement with democracy.

21. Code of Conduct: Cases Review

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager:

- 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:

- questioned whether the administering of medical advice fell within the remit of a standards committee.
- noted the seriousness of an executive member speaking to the council's planning committee regarding an application crossing over with his portfolio responsibilities.
- questioned what form the 'ethical training' prescribed in one judgment was likely to take.
- discussed the lack of effective sanctions now available to standards committees following the Localism Act 2011.

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager responded that:

- the reference to medical advice was likely to be particular to the facts of the individual case.
- 'ethical training' was likely to incorporate a discussion with the authority's monitoring officer.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

22. **Qualified Privilege**

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager:

- a. presented a report regarding the effect of qualified privilege with regard to potentially defamatory statements made by councillors.
- b. noted that the report and guidance had been provided in response to members' request at the previous meeting of the Committee.
- c. discussed the potential impact of the Defamation Bill and the likelihood of parliamentary delay in progressing the bill.
- d. highlighted the need for members continually to be aware of the consequences of their statements.
- e. invited members' questions and comments.

Members noted:

- that the guidance was useful and reinforced the divide between the specific protection afforded to Members of Parliament and the risks which councillors should have in mind regarding defamation.
- that the briefing note provided some reassurance regarding the extent to which councillors were able to speak in the public interest.
- the difficulty that a court would face in determining whether a councillor had made a statement as honest comment or with malice.

RESOLVED that the briefing notes regarding qualified privilege and the use of social media be circulated to all elected members.

23. **Member Development Review**

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented a report updating members on current progress with member development.
- b. emphasised the benefits associated with members taking an active role in guiding

the Council's approach to member development.

- c. questioned whether members were comfortable with publishing details of the courses and briefings which members had attended.
- d. highlighted the possible options for changing the delivery and selection process for future member development options, and invited members to provide feedback regarding this.
- e. invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- noted the need for members to take greater responsibility in guiding their own development.
- proposed that members should be issued with certificates for attending training events.
- discussed the publication of training attendance information for councillors, noting a willingness for the information to be made available to the public on the internet.
- suggested that greater priority should be given to assessing the IT skills of new councillors, and discussed the level of personal accountability councillors should have in declaring the level of their skills.
- stressed the need for any personal development plans to be completed on a confidential basis.

RESOLVED that:

1. officers continue to develop their approach to member development with input where appropriate from members.
2. reports regarding the progress of member development be regularly provided to future meetings.

24. Member Code of Conduct & Terms of Reference Revision: The Principles of Public Life

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager:

- a. presented a report proposing potential changes to the Member Code of Conduct and the Committee's terms of reference.
- b. advised that the Committee on Standards in Public Life had recently updated its principles of public life, and members were requested to consider whether the changes should be reflected in the Council's Member Code of Conduct.
- c. noted that the Committee's current terms of reference excluded the Leader of the Council from taking any part in meetings; as a result of the Committee's extended remit it was therefore proposed that the exclusion of the Leader be limited solely

to the consideration of complaints made against individual members of the Council.

- d. invited members' questions and comments.

RESOLVED that Council be recommended to:

1. approve revisions to the Member Code of Conduct, replacing the previous principles of public life with those included in the fourteenth report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.
2. approve revised terms of reference for the Ethics and Engagement Committee permitting the Leader to be appointed to take part in all matters other than those directly relating to complaints made against members of the Council.

25. **Work Programme Update**

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented the current Ethics and Engagement Committee work programme for consideration by members.
- b. noted the revision of wording associated with the item relating to the diversity of electoral candidates in order to clarify the distinction between the roles of political parties and the Council.
- c. requested guidance from members on the Committee's priorities for 2013/14.
- d. invited members' questions and comments.

RESOLVED that:

1. the work programme be approved.
2. officers, in consultation with the Chair, be requested to compile a suitable work programme for 2013/14.