

<b>Present:</b>	Councillor Geoff Ellis ( <i>in the Chair</i> )
<b>Councillors:</b>	Gill Clayton-Hewson, Tony Gray, Ronald Hills, Adrianna McNulty, Ralph Toofany (substituted for Ric Metcalfe) and Loraine Woolley
<b>Independent Person(s):</b>	Chris Elkington and Roger Vine
<b>Apologies for Absence:</b>	Councillor Katie Vause, Councillor Ric Metcalfe and Councillor Edmund Strengiel

**10. Confirmation of Minutes - 23 June 2014**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 June 2014 be confirmed.

**11. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

**12. 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.
- c) invited members' questions and comments.

The Reserve Independent Person questioned whether the Council trained its councillors in proper behaviour while conducting site visits.

Members:

- noted the questionable legality of a local authority removing a member's right to access exempt or confidential information based upon previous disclosures of such information.
- questioned whether the use of council stationery in itself represented sufficient grounds for censure, as suggested by one of the cases considered.

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

- all members of the Planning Committee received training regarding their conduct on site visits.
- advised that use of council stationery or position for personal benefit could represent a breach of a code of conduct depending upon the nature of the act.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

**13. Achieving Gender Equality in Local Government**

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- a) presented a report summarising recent research highlighting the significant disparity between the number of male and female councillors, which applied both on a national basis and within the Council.
- b) noted that the Council had a limited role to play in encouraging the equal representation of men and women. While a childcare allowance was available to members claims had very rarely been made.
- c) highlighted that a continuing theme within the independent reports brought to the Committee's attention was a recommendation that local authorities should move away from holding meetings in the evening, citing the apparent difficulties faced by female councillors in arranging childcare outside school hours.
- d) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- noted that any choice of meeting time was likely to be inconvenient for some councillors, including during daytime meetings.
- considered whether further research into local and comparator council meeting times and gender ratios could provide any useful data.
- stressed that childcare should be the responsibility of both the father and the mother, and that undue pressure often fell upon women to take an unreasonably high share of domestic responsibilities.
- noted that female councillors who wished to stand were likely to do so without regard to meeting timings.

The Independent Person noted that, based upon his professional experience, meetings in the early afternoon tended to be less convenient for women with childcare responsibilities.

The Reserve Independent Person advised that the most significant factor in a council's gender balance was likely to be the selection process of its political parties.

RESOLVED that a further report be requested providing a comparison of other local authorities' meeting times and their gender balance.

#### **14. Member Development Update**

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a) presented a report updating the Committee on member development.
- b) noted the member development events that had been undertaken since the previous update and those planned for the forthcoming year.
- c) outlined the options for training members using 'webinars' and invited members' views regarding the suitability of this format for member development.
- d) advised that officers were keen to receive any suggestions from members for future development areas.

- e) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- discussed the challenges faced in motivating more experienced councillors to attend training events.
- noted concern that any trial of webinars or recording training events would require an up-front investment which might not be justified by the level of member interest.

The Democratic Services Officer advised that while recording meetings would require an initial investment, it would be possible to trial live broadcasts using existing technology.

RESOLVED that officers be requested to trial the live broadcasting of a member development event.

## **15. Houses in Multiple Occupation Dispensation**

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- a) presented a report in relation to the forthcoming consideration of the Council's policy regarding houses in multiple occupancy, which would be undertaken in various committees.
- b) advised that, given the need to consider the impact of any changes upon the city as a whole rather than in one ward members should have regard to the potential for a large number of councillors being unable to participate in discussions if a dispensation were not made available.
- c) explained that she had granted Ethics and Engagement Committee members a limited dispensation in order to consider the granting of a wider dispensation applicable to all members, on the basis that so many members would otherwise have disclosable pecuniary interests that it would impede the transaction of the business through being in quorate.
- d) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- expressed concern that similar provisions had not been put forward in relation to the Western Growth Corridor which would also affect a number of councillors' capacity to take part in the decision-making process.
- noted the need to ensure the affected members were able to participate in such an important decision and to represent the views of residents.

The Independent Person noted that he had attended the Council meeting at which this matter had been raised and highlighted that it was clear consideration would be given to a city-wide policy which made a broader dispensation appropriate. The Reserve Independent Person agreed with this view.

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services responded that members' likely interests in the Western Growth Corridor were of a more limited

geographical nature and so affected considerably fewer members. In particular, any city-wide policy could affect every councillor with an interest in land within Lincoln.

RESOLVED that, in the interests of those living within any affected wards and in order to prevent any meetings becoming inquorate as a result of the number of affected councillors, a dispensation was agreed for a period of four years for all members who met the following criteria:

- a) the member had a disclosable pecuniary interest for a beneficial interest in land held in the area of the authority; and
- b) the nature of the business wholly related to the development or implementation of policies concerning houses in multiple occupation.

## **16. Open and Accountable Local Government**

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- a) presented a report regarding the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014.
- b) advised that the Council had already undertaken the work necessary to ensure its compliance with the regulations.
- c) highlighted that the Committee had been proactive in ensuring that the Council was open to the recording of its meetings.
- d) noted that the Council had been praised for its proactive work in relation to a number of local authorities in the region.
- e) invited members' questions and comments.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

## **17. Work Programme Update**

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented the current Ethics and Engagement Committee work programme for consideration by members.
- b. invited members' questions and comments.

RESOLVED that the work programme be approved.