

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

18. Confirmation of Minutes - 1 September 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 September 2014 be confirmed.

19. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

20. 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.
- c) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- stated that it should be irrelevant whether donations to a political party from a business were actually used on election expenses, but that the mere possibility of such use should be precluded.
- noted that while there was no scope for complacency, members of the Council had not previously erred regarding donations to political parties.
- discussed the risks surrounding the use of social media, including its immediacy and public visibility.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

21. Changing the Timing of Meetings

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager:

- a) presented a report in response to the Committee's prior request to consider whether there was any link between the start time of a council's meetings and the proportion of female councillors.

- b) drew members' attention to the statistics contained within the report, noting the limitations of the data and the need to consider a number of additional factors which could not be quantified in the report.
- c) questioned whether the discrepancies between the current start times for meetings would justify a standardisation in the start time of meetings wherever appropriate.
- d) highlighted the linked issue surrounding the attendance by officers at meetings, advising that, in order to maximise their efficiency, officers should seek to attend only the parts of a meeting which were relevant to their roles.
- e) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- noted that, regarding the standardisation of meeting start times, a start time of 17:30 appeared to work well for a number of committees, but that 17:00 was likely to be too early.
- stated that there did not appear to be a link between the start time of other councils' meetings and the ratio of male to female councillors.
- agreed that the varying start time of different meetings appeared idiosyncratic but that a change to these times was unlikely to influence the number of female councillors.
- discussed the start time of the City of Lincoln Council and Employee Joint Consultative Committee and questioned whether this should also be made an evening meeting.
- highlighted the need for any diabetic members to be afforded sufficient time before meetings to manage their diet in accordance with their medical needs.
- noted that it would be difficult to reach an agreement regarding any changes to the start times of meetings as each councillor would have individual preferences; the report should therefore be considered by the Council's political groups.
- noted that the Council no longer provided food before evening training sessions.

RESOLVED that the report be referred to the leaders of the Council's respective political groups for further consideration.

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

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager:

- a) presented a report regarding a proposed dispensation to allow members with a disclosable pecuniary interest in their right to occupy land for one month or longer to take part in items of business concerning the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, or a plan or strategy comprising part of the Policy or Financial Framework.
- b) advised that a recent meeting had become inquorate as a result of this matter.
- c) highlighted the potential rationale for any such decision.
- d) invited members' questions and comments.

Members questioned whether any such dispensation would be specific to Lincoln.

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager responded that a dispensation would only be available to councillors acting in their role of a member of the City of Lincoln Council.

Members:

- noted that the proposal appeared sensible and proportionate in relation to the nature of the affected interest and the scale of the decisions in which members holding allotments and garages would otherwise be unable to participate.
- discussed the potential for the increasing number of dispensations to have unforeseen consequences.
- considered whether the dispensation would be appropriate in view of the requirement for councillors holding an interest in nearby land to absent themselves from discussing the Western Growth Corridor.
- debated whether the dispensation was sufficiently clear in its proposed form.
- highlighted that licence holders would still be precluded from taking part in decisions solely relating to their licences to occupy land, as the affected policies or strategies proposed for inclusion did not specifically relate to any relevant areas.

RESOLVED that:

1. 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 be agreed for a period of four years for all members who met the following criteria:
 - a) the member had 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
 - b) the nature of the business specifically related to the consideration of Central Lincolnshire Local Plan, or a plan or strategy comprising part of the Policy or Financial Framework.
2. guidance be issued to members regarding the use of the dispensation.

Councillor Strengiel requested that his vote against the resolution be recorded.

23. Local Decision Making

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a) presented a report regarding the options available to the Council for taking decisions at a local level.
- b) summarised the process by which parish councils could be formed.
- c) highlighted the Council's existing neighbourhood boards which allowed local communities to communicate their views to Council representatives.

- d) drew members' attention to the opportunity to establish local area committees, to which powers could be delegated for exercising within specific geographical areas.
- e) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- noted their support for the role played by the neighbourhood teams within the city and the neighbourhood boards.
- suggested that neighbourhood boards should be available in as many wards as possible.
- discussed the advantages of parish councils, focussing upon the making of decisions at as local a level as possible, and the disadvantages, including the bureaucratic cost, delays to decision-making, and the additional officer support.
- noted that regular contact with and feedback to communities was of greater importance than devolving powers to highly local levels.

The Independent Person noted his role as the chair of his local parish council.

RESOLVED that:

1. the report be noted.
2. thanks be forwarded to the neighbourhood teams for their work in this area.

24. Local Democracy Week Review

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a) presented a report regarding the Council's approach to Local Democracy Week.
- b) explained that the Council's planned State of the City debate had been postponed.
- c) noted that no feedback had been received from schools in relation to the circulated local democracy lesson plans.
- d) requested guidance regarding the future approach towards engaging with local schools.
- e) invited members' questions and comments.

Members discussed the Rock Enrol programme, which was a scheme created to encourage young people to register to vote.

RESOLVED that:

1. the report be noted.
2. members be encouraged to make use of the Rock Enrol programme in engaging with young people.

25. Work Programme Update

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a. presented the current Ethics and Engagement Committee work programme for consideration by members.
- b. invited any suggested topics for the February 2015 meeting.
- c. invited members' questions and comments.

RESOLVED that the work programme be approved.