

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

**26. Confirmation of Minutes - 7 December 2015**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2016 be confirmed.

**27. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

**28. 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) summarised the cases within the report, noting the particular areas which members might wish to consider.
- c) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- discussed the rules surrounding councillors continuing in office after receiving non-custodial sentences, noting that a councillor had a moral duty to step down in some circumstances regardless of their legal rights to continue.
- questioned whether the formation of a wholly-owned housing company would cause issues with regard to the declaration of interests by members.
- noted that bias was a difficult concept to anticipate, particularly when councillors were adjudged not to have pecuniary interests in a matter.
- agreed that if members were in any doubt as to whether they had an interest which would preclude them from taking part in business, that the safest course of action was to excuse themselves from the meeting.

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager advised that officers were actively considering the implications for elected members' interests of operating a wholly-owned housing company. It was further noted that members needed to consider potential interests when acting on any body in their capacity as a councillor.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

**29. Members' IT Allowances**

## The Legal and Democratic Services Manager:

- a) presented a report requesting that members consider whether the current allocation of IT allowances to members remained fit-for-purpose.
- b) proposed a change from the current payment of IT allowances directly to members to a system which would allow an equivalent sum to be held in reserve in order to fund the future allocation of IT equipment to elected members.
- c) noted that the uptake of paperless working by councillors had proceeded quickly, which had facilitated savings for the Council at a time when budgets were under ever-increasing pressure.
- d) invited members' questions and comments.

## Members:

- noted the savings which had been made through paperless working and the general effectiveness of the devices provided to councillors. However, the overall effect of any proposal to withdraw IT allowances was unclear.
- questioned the need for members to claim IT allowances, noting that most would continue to subscribe to broadband internet regardless of receiving an allowance and so there was no justification for the Council to continue providing this money to members.
- noted that other councils, in particular the Lincolnshire County Council, appeared to be considerably more generous with regard to the provision to councillors of both a basic allowance and additional allowances relating to mileage and IT.
- discussed the changed provision of IT equipment in recent years, stating that the Council should pay for councillors' broadband if councillors were using Council devices at home. However, it was possible that the amount which was paid should be reviewed.
- suggested that the Council should provide tablet computers in meetings for use by members of the public in order to reduce the need for printed agendas.
- expressed concerns that the Council could not know councillor's individual financial circumstances and so it could not be assumed that councillors would be able to afford broadband internet.
- noted that the downloading of emails and agendas would not constitute a significant proportion of a councillor's home broadband usage and that these could also be downloaded at City Hall. Given the provision of tablet computers by the Council to members, the re-allocation of IT allowances to fund the future provision of these devices would represent good value.
- emphasised that councillors provided good value for money with regard to the hours of work put into Council business for a relatively low allowance. The provision of IT allowances by the Council was considered to be analogous to providing some staff with work-related clothing.
- stated that IT allowances were provided to defray costs incurred by members directly and that if members felt they were not adequately compensated for their general duties, it would be more transparent to increase the basic allowance rather than to continue providing IT allowances which were not actually required.
- commented that the savings made through paperless working should have been ring-fenced for use on members' IT equipment.

RESOLVED that the report be provided for the consideration of the respective political groups after the election on 5 May 2016.

**30. Member Development Update**

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a) presented a report outlining the delivery of member development events in the previous year and plans for the forthcoming year.
- b) drew members' attention to the proposed member development events to be provided as part of the member induction and in the new electoral year.
- c) highlighted events suggested by members in response to a request from officers for potential training activities in the coming year and invited the views of the Committee regarding their suitability for implementation.
- d) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- discussed the length of the induction programme, noting that an intensive two-day programme hindered members' ability to absorb the information being provided to them.
- expressed doubts regarding the need for training regarding public speaking, establishing personality types, and improving writing skills.
- welcomed the suggested training with regard to councillor casework and providing a general introduction to local government.
- noted that a previous training session regarding engaging with the public had encompassed dealing with different personality types and that this had been very useful.
- questioned which of the proposed training events would be mandatory for members to attend.
- noted approval for the proposals to reduce the number of events held during the induction days, with some events being held over the course of the proceeding weeks.
- suggested that the training in relation to writing skills be merged into one session.
- discussed the problems faced by members in receiving responses from officers to customer service enquiries and requested that this be addressed as part of any training on ward councillor casework management.
- noted that all members should seek to attend Planning Committee training as a result of the potential consideration of planning applications by Full Council.

The Democratic Services Officer responded that:

- the induction programme had been reduced in length but that two days were still allocated to the programme so that new members were able to be active councillors from as early a stage as possible.
- only a limited number of training events were considered to be mandatory, including those relating to the Planning Committee and Licensing Committee. In addition, the Council has particular duties to ensure councillors were aware of issues relating to safeguarding vulnerable people and preventing terrorism.

RESOLVED that the plans for the member development programme in 2016/17 be noted and that officers be requested to:

1. proceed with the delivery of additional training in relation to managing casework and the structure of local government.
2. offer the remaining training which had been proposed by elected members only if specifically requested.

**31. Proposed Amendments to the Constitution**

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a) presented a report outlining proposed changes to the Council's Constitution.
- b) advised that the changes had been compiled by officers where it was considered that elements of the Constitution could be made clearer, updated, or had fallen into desuetude.
- c) drew particular attention to the proposed change to remove the Equality Objectives Action Plan from the Policy Framework.
- d) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- expressed uneasiness regarding the removal of powers from Council to the Executive regarding the Equality Objectives Action Plan.
- discussed the wording of the proposed change to the deadlines for motions and public questions.
- agreed that the Council should seek to provide documents in electronic form by default wherever possible.

The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that under the proposed changes Council would retain its power to set the Council's Equality Objectives. However, the associated action plan was regularly updated and involved the allocation of staff and financial resources, which appeared to be more appropriately delivered under Executive powers. However, members would retain their right to scrutinise the delivery of the Equality Objectives and to call-in any decisions taken by the Executive which were contrary to them.

RESOLVED that the proposed changes to the Constitution be recommended to Council.

**32. Work Programme 2016-17**

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a) presented the proposed Ethics and Engagement Committee work programme for consideration by members.
- b) noted that the Chair had expressed an interest in seeking to engage with local schools in both Local Democracy Week and potentially with regard to the forthcoming referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the

European Union.

c) invited members' questions and comments.

RESOLVED that:

1. the work programme be approved.
2. officers be requested to write to local schools to encourage further work on the Committee's objective to increase democratic engagement among young people.