

<b>Present</b>	Councillor Geoff Ellis ( <i>in the Chair</i> )
<b>Councillors:</b>	Sue Burke, Ronald Hills, Donald Nannestad, Fay Smith, Ralph Toofany and Loraine Woolley
<b>Independent Persons(s):</b>	Russell Pond, Rodney Booth and Chris Elkington
<b>Apologies for Absence:</b>	Councillor David Jackson, Councillor Chris Burke, Councillor Ric Metcalfe and Councillor Hilton Spratt

1. **Confirmation of Minutes - 11 March 2013**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2013 be confirmed.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

3. **Terms of Reference and Members' Code of Conduct**

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- a) presented the revised terms of reference for the Ethics and Engagement Committee and Member Code of Conduct.
- b) explained that the revisions proposed by the Committee to both documents had been agreed by Council in full.
- c) noted that the documents had been brought to the Committee's attention to confirm their current status.
- d) invited members' questions and comments.

RESOLVED that the revisions to the Ethics and Engagement Committee's terms of reference and the Member Code of Conduct be noted.

4. **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) noted that the case raised in relation to the right of a councillor to speak at a meeting in a role equivalent to that of a member of the public was likely to be differently decided at present; in particular, even when a councillor had a disclosable pecuniary interest he or she should be allowed to speak prior to

leaving the meeting if a member of the public would have had the same right to speak.

d) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- noted the advisability of any councillors taking part in planning decisions being seen to be entirely free of any personal interest in the matters being determined.
- discussed the serious reputational damage which could be caused by a breach of the code of conduct by a mayor.
- noted that the civic party as a whole, including non-councillors, were responsible for ensuring appropriate behaviour during their official duties.
- suggested that further consideration be given to the manner in which the Council guided its own civic party with regard to ensuring high standards of behaviour while in office.

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services responded that she would discuss the current arrangements regarding guidance offered to the Council's civic party.

RESOLVED that:

1. the report be noted.
2. a report regarding the guidance provided to the civic party be provided to a future meeting.

## **5. Hearing Sub-Committee Outcome**

The Assistant Director for Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- a) presented a report regarding a recent breach of the Member Code of Conduct by Councillor Gary Hewson.
- b) advised that the Hearing Sub-Committee had determined that the breach should be reported to the Committee before being referred to Council.
- c) invited members' questions and comments.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and referred to Council.

## **6. Paperless Meetings Trial**

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a) presented a report regarding the current status of the proposed trial of paperless working following discussions at a previous meeting.
- b) advised that, following the successful implementation of new committee management software, the trial could now proceed subject to members' willingness to temporarily switch from using paper agendas to a tablet computer for their committee papers.
- c) noted the potential benefits and limitations of paperless working.

d) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- discussed the practicality of using tablet computers for different types of agenda, including whether printing of the agendas would be possible from a tablet computer, and the battery life of devices.
- highlighted the positive aspects of paperless working, including the possible financial, environmental, and usability benefits.
- noted that a keyboard accessory could make the tablet computers sufficiently versatile for adding any detailed notes to agenda.
- stressed that the trial should begin as soon as possible.
- noted surprise at the requirement for Council summons to be physically issued to members.

The Democratic Services Officer responded that:

- the trial would not initially encompass any exempt information, while documents relating to the Personnel Appeals and Housing Appeals Panels were likely to continue to be provided on paper for the foreseeable future in view of their content.
- that while Council summons had to be physically issued to members, this could potentially be carried out at City Hall if members were willing to sign an agreement to this effect.

RESOLVED that all members of the Ethics and Engagement Committee be issued with a tablet computer for the duration of a paperless working trial, the outcome of which would be considered at a future meeting.

## **7. Work Programme Update**

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a) presented a report regarding the Committee's work programme for 2013/14.
- b) advised that following feedback from the Committee at its last meeting, a work programme had been compiled by officers in consultation with the Chair.
- c) drew members' attention to the topics highlighted within the report regarding increasing democratic engagement with young people, encouraging electoral engagement, and increasing the diversity of electoral candidates. These were noted to be areas potentially entailing significant amounts of work, and so clear priorities would need to be set by the Committee.
- d) invited members' questions and comments.

The Chair highlighted the current status regarding member panels in schools, noting that a response was currently awaited from Lincoln Christ's Hospital School, but that further work would potentially be carried out with other local schools in addition.

Members:

- noted that problems with turnout were often highly localised, with particular districts falling considerably below the average turnout for either a ward or

Lincoln as a whole. Individual problems including high levels of residential churn in rented housing were noted, which could make a bi-annual electoral canvass worthwhile.

- highlighted the barriers in place for working people with regard to finding time outside work to carry out duties as councillors.
- discussed the benefits associated with ensuring a diversity of backgrounds for councillors, particularly focussing upon the different perspectives which varying life experience brought to bear upon specific policy areas.
- noted that residents found the split between county and district councils confusing with regard to the duties carried out by each.
- considered the impact of broader reforms to voting which could be implemented by central government in order to improve voter engagement and turnout.
- discussed the potential for disparity between voting levels among home national voters and European Union voters in local government elections, and questioned whether any information was available on the relative electoral turnouts for these groups.

The Assistant Director Legal and Corporate Support Services responded that:

- the Council could seek to take a more active part in the annual Local Democracy Week which could help to improve residents' knowledge of councillors' roles and duties.
- officers would seek to establish individual breakdowns of different areas within the city and any relevant contextual information.

RESOLVED that:

1. the 2013/14 work programme be approved.
2. officers be requested to investigate the costs and benefits of increasing the Council's engagement with Local Democracy Week.
3. research be undertaken into the relative voter turnouts for home national and European Union voters.
4. further work be carried out with regarding to large employers' attitudes towards supporting their employees in becoming councillors.

## **8. Vote of Thanks**

The Chair noted that the terms of appointment for the Council's Independent and Reserve Independent Persons ended in June 2013. As this was the last scheduled meeting of the Committee during this time, a vote of thanks was proposed, particularly given that Russell Pond and Rodney Booth would be unable to renew their roles as a result of their previous positions as Independent Members.

Russell Pond, the Council's Independent Person, thanked the Committee on behalf of himself and Rodney Booth, the Council's Reserve Independent Person, for opportunity to serve in an enjoyable role. In particular, members were to be thanked for their polite and courteous attitude, along with the positive role played by the Assistant Director for Legal and Corporate Support Services.

RESOLVED that the Ethics and Engagement Committee's gratitude to the Independent and Reserve Independent Persons for their service to the Council be noted.