

<b>Present:</b>	Councillor Geoff Ellis ( <i>in the Chair</i> )
<b>Councillors:</b>	Ronald Hills, Jane Loffhagen, Liz Maxwell, Adrianna McNulty, Ric Metcalfe, Naomi Tweddle and Lorraine Woolley
<b>Independent Person(s):</b>	Chris Elkington
<b>Apologies for Absence:</b>	Councillor Edmund Strengiel and Roger Vine

**22. Confirmation of Minutes - 5 December 2016**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2016 be confirmed.

**23. Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were received.

**24. 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' Code 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 lack of significant sanctions available to local authorities with regard to breaches of the Code of Conduct and questioned whether it was worth the expense of going through the process of a hearing;
- considered the three cases presented and agreed that they themselves demonstrated how unsatisfactory the current situation was in terms of sanctions.

One of the cases related to a member making negative comments about immigrants and multiculturalism in a private internet conversation. A question was raised as to how the authority in question would protect any members of staff who may be personally effected by such views. It was noted that all employees had rights under the Equalities Act 2010 and the human resources department for the respective authority would need to manage the situation and take any action as may be necessary.

The Independent Person agreed with members' comments and shared their frustration that there were no significant sanctions that could be put in place when members were found to have breached the Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

**25. Support to Elected Members**

The Principal Democratic Officer:

- a) presented a report which invited members to consider the manner in which support was offered to elected members by officers;
- b) outlined the support currently provided to members with regard to:
  - IT provision;
  - ward surgeries;
  - member enquiries and a protocol for response times;
  - member casework.
- c) highlighted that the budget associated with the provision of leaflets for members' ward surgeries was currently overspent and that this particular aspect of member support was under review.
- d) invited members' questions and comments.

In discussing the allocation of leaflets for members' ward surgeries, the following comments were noted:

- it would be useful to see a breakdown of how many leaflets were ordered for each particular ward or individual member;
- members who did not hold surgeries were still entitled to order leaflets to ensure that residents knew who they were and how they could contact them;
- leaflets, and surgeries, were a way of members publicising themselves and the authority. It was a members' duty to make themselves available to residents, with the provision of leaflets assisting them with this aspect of their role;
- in terms of printing, the current quality of paper used for leaflets was very good. Consideration should therefore be given to using a cheaper grade of paper which would probably reduce costs;
- it was noted that information relating to member surgeries was available on the Council's website, a link for which was included in the Council's magazine 'Your Lincoln', delivered to all residents of the city on a quarterly basis. The point was made that not all residents had access to the internet, so making use of leaflets was an important method of providing information on the dates, times and venues of upcoming surgeries;
- members of the public attending surgeries could be asked how they found out about the details of the surgery, which could be logged;
- consideration should be given to printing leaflets in black and white, rather than colour;
- consideration should be given to ordering leaflets in bulk at a certain time of the year, rather than on an ad-hoc basis, which should secure a reduced rate;
- each ward was different in the way in which surgeries were held and leaflets were used, particularly where wards consisted of members from different political groups;
- it was important to balance effectiveness with cost;
- there should be more use of social media to promote member surgeries.

A claim was made that some leaflets in the past had contained information within them that could be construed as political. It was emphasised that leaflets should contain factual information only regarding the individual member or the ward surgery. The Legal and Democratic Services Manager gave an assurance that any concerns in this respect would be highlighted by Democratic Services prior to the leaflets being ordered.

In discussing member enquiries and a protocol for response times, it was agreed that members consistently received answers to queries from officers in a timely manner and that no related problems had been reported.

RESOLVED that a further report setting out the options for the provision of leaflets to members, taking into account the comments raised at this meeting, be considered at the next meeting of the Ethics and Engagement Committee.

## **26. Minutes Relating to Exempt Information**

The Principal Democratic Officer:

- a) presented a report which set out a concern raised by a member that a set of minutes were insufficiently detailed to allow members to understand a decision without reference to the associated report, which contained exempt information;
- b) explained that the minute solely omitted the information included in the exempt report which could not be placed into the public domain;
- c) highlighted that all members of the Council had access to all reports for meetings, including those that contained exempt information;
- d) invited Councillor Ronald Hills, as the member who had raised this issue, to outline his concerns.

Councillor Hills reported that this issue related to the meeting of the Asset Management Group held on 15 December 2016 and the proposed sale of a property at Boutham Estate, Lincoln. He was unclear upon receipt of the minutes from that meeting which property this related to and as a result did not feel as though he had enough information to judge whether or not he should call the decision in. Councillors Hills was therefore of the view that an exempt set of minutes should be produced in order that members did not have to search for the associated report in such circumstances to ascertain those details not included in a public minute.

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager reiterated the point that all members of the Council had access to exempt information contained in reports and that the suggested approach of an exempt set of minutes would result in the duplication of work for officers.

Councillor Ric Metcalfe did not think that the current practice should be changed and that there were very few situations, if any, where members could not have absolute access to any information they required.

Councillor Hills, in addition to the points he had raised, was also concerned that some information could potentially be hidden away in exempt reports. Councillor Metcalfe responded by saying that this was not the case and that all members had access to all reports, including exempt reports. The Legal and Democratic Services

Manager reminded the Committee that the Council's Access to Information Procedure Rules set out a clear process of determining what information could be considered as exempt. She added that requests were sometimes received by officers for reports to be treated as exempt but had been refused by Democratic Services because the content of the report did not fall under any of the prescribed exemption categories.

RESOLVED that the current style of minuting business relating to exempt information be retained.

## **27. Funding for Individual Member Development**

The Principal Democratic Officer:

- a) presented a report which sought members' views on codifying arrangements for determining which individual development requests should be funded;
- b) outlined the principles and factors of a proposed protocol for funding individual member development activities, as set out in the report.
- c) invited members' questions and comments.

Reference was made to the mandatory training associated with the Planning Committee and Licensing Committee and a situation that occurred in the past whereby a member was unable to attend Licensing Committee training on the day prescribed, meaning that they were not be able to sit on the Committee. It had been necessary to send the member on externally facilitated training as a result, which was significantly more expensive, and a question was therefore raised as to how this could be prevented in the future. The Principal Democratic Officer informed the Committee that every effort would be made to ensure that training sessions were held around member availability and planned to occur in good time before meetings of the bodies concerned.

RESOLVED that the proposed individual member development protocol be approved.

## **28. Member Development Update**

The Principal Democratic Officer:

- a) presented a report which provided members with an update on the delivery of member development within the Council;
- b) reported member development activities undertaken during 2016/17;
- c) highlighted that no seats on the City of Lincoln Council were scheduled to be affected by the election on 4 May 2017 so the Council had additional flexibility to provide training in addition to the regular training usually offered;
- d) set out those areas where training had been specifically requested for 2017/18 and suggested other opportunities for training as set out in the report.
- e) invited members' questions and comments.

RESOLVED that the current status of member development be noted.

**29. 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.

It was noted that a report on member leaflets would be added to the work programme for consideration at the Committee's next meeting.

RESOLVED that the work programme be approved.