

Present:	Councillor Adrianna McNulty (<i>in the Chair</i>)
Councillors:	Thomas Dyer, Geoff Ellis, Laura McWilliams, Ric Metcalfe, Christopher Reid, Hilton Spratt, Naomi Tweddle and Loraine Woolley
Independent Person(s):	None.
Apologies for Absence:	Councillor Edmund Strengiel and Councillor Gill Clayton-Hewson

28. Confirmation of Minutes - 15 October 2018

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2018 be confirmed.

29. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

30. Committee on Standards in Public Life

The Democratic Team Leader and Elections Manager:

- (a) Presented the findings of the Committee on Standards in Public Life's review of standards arrangements in local government which comprised 26 recommendations to the Government which it felt would enable councillors to be held account effectively and would enhance the fairness and transparency of the standards process.
- (b) Highlighted the main recommendations that could have an impact on the City of Lincoln Council, if supported and acted upon by the Government.
- (c) Set out considerations for the City of Lincoln Council regarding those recommendations which were considered to represent best practice and did not necessarily require a response from the Government in order for changes to be made locally. These included:
 - use of social media and the potential to introduce a social media policy as part of the Council's member Code of Conduct;
 - the inclusion of bullying and harassment in the member Code of Conduct;
 - a review of the member gifts and hospitality register;
 - a review of the publication of members' home addresses.
- (d) Invited members' questions and comments.

Discussion ensued on the Committee on Standards in Public Life's recommendations contained within the report regarding sanctions and the potential suspension of members. Some concerns were expressed that any panel associated with deciding upon the imposition of sanctions would be political balanced, so it could therefore be perceived that this was unfair. The Committee was reminded that the Council's Independent Person and Monitoring Officer would form an essential part of investigating any alleged breach of the Code of Conduct, ensuring that there

was impartiality associated with any case considered by a panel. It was also noted that a further recommendation put forward by the Committee on Standards in Public Life included reference to the right of appeal to the Local Government Ombudsman.

It was RESOLVED

- (1) That the report by the Committee on Standards in Public Life be noted and the Ethics and Engagement Committee awaits the Government's response to the recommendations contained within the report.
- (2) That a review of the member Code of Conduct be undertaken and that its scope be widened to include aspects such as harassment, examples of bullying, links to official capacity and social media use.
- (3) That, as part of a review of the member Code of Conduct, a social media policy for members be developed and appended to the revised member Code of Conduct, together with the Member/Officer Protocol.
- (4) That a review of the Gifts and Hospitality Policy and procedure for members be undertaken.
- (5) That consideration be given to the publication of members' addresses on their Register of Interests.

31. Start Time and Duration of Meetings

The Democratic Team Leader and Elections Manager:

- (a) Presented a report which provided the Ethics and Engagement Committee with an opportunity to consider amending the terms of reference of the Council's Scrutiny Committees to set an earlier start time for meetings and place a cap on the duration of meetings.
- (b) Provided a number of options for the Committee to consider, including:
 - setting a revised start time of 5.30pm for Scrutiny Committee meetings as opposed to 6pm;
 - agreeing that no Scrutiny Committee meeting should exceed a set duration, such as two hours for example;
 - agreeing that no Scrutiny Committee meeting should exceed a set duration, such as two hours for example, without agreement of at least the majority of voting members present;
 - an amalgamation of (i), (ii) and (iii) above in respect of Scrutiny Committee meetings;
 - setting a consistent start time for all of the Council's evening meetings;
 - making no changes to the existing arrangements.
- (c) Invited members' questions and comments.

Discussion ensued and the following points were noted:

- there had been instances at some meetings where there had been long agendas to get through and important issues towards the end of the agenda had not always had the full consideration they perhaps justified. There had also been occasions where some members had been unable to contribute as

they had left the meeting prior to its close due to the longer than anticipated duration. In order to address this agendas could be scheduled so that the more urgent, important or contentious items were listed first;

- meetings should start at 6pm and aim to conclude by 8pm. The majority of members in attendance should be in agreement to proceed beyond 8pm although it was acknowledged that this could not apply to the Executive or regulatory bodies such as the Planning Committee;
- if an agenda included a significant number of items, the Chair, Vice-Chair and officers should highlight this at pre-meetings and make provision for an additional meeting in order that all items could be properly considered;
- meetings at 5.30pm made it especially difficult for those members who worked and could potentially put people off standing for election in the future. The minimum start time for meetings should be 6pm to allow those members who worked sufficient time to travel to City Hall;
- there should be more training for Chairs and Vice-Chairs with regard to agenda management in order that meetings ran smoother in the first instance. This should be mandatory for any Chair at the Council;
- there were not that many meetings held in the last year that had exceeded three hours in duration;
- it was a good thing that members were able to contribute and challenge at meetings such as Scrutiny Committees, irrespective of how long meetings took to reach a conclusion. If meetings needed to take a certain amount of time then they should be allowed to take that long;
- the Performance Scrutiny Committee was the main meeting which tended to overrun and which normally had a significant amount of business on its agendas. A proposal was put forward to set up a new committee or sub-committee solely responsible for holding Portfolio Holders to account, leaving the Performance Scrutiny Committee to continue monitoring the performance of the Council's services. It was suggested that the new Committee could replace the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee;
- all meetings were politically balanced, so the suggestion of capping the length of meetings could be perceived as delaying opportunities to challenge or contribute, especially in relation to any contentious items that may be under scrutiny;
- the length of time it sometimes took officers to present reports or deliver presentations also prolonged meetings. Information should be circulated and read in advance, reducing the need for officers to spend lots of time presenting their items;
- the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee was another body where its meetings had lasted longer than three hours. The difficulty with this meeting was the fact that external representatives were invited to attend and provide evidence. It should therefore be made clearer to external representatives that they had limited time to make their initial address to the Committee in order that the agenda could be more effectively managed.

The Leader of the Council made the point that the purpose of this report was to take stock of how efficient and effective the management of the Council's business was from the perspective of elected members, as well as officers and members of the public. He emphasised that it in no way sought to change or interfere with the integrity of the Council's scrutiny function and was not about curtailing discussion, indicating that he would like to see a consensus of opinion in relation to any change to the way in which the Council's meetings operated.

RESOLVED that the Council's administration be asked to note the comments made at this meeting and give due consideration in particular to the following:

- a proposal to commence all of the Council's evening meetings at 6pm;
- a proposal to change the format of the Performance Scrutiny Committee in that a new Committee or Sub-Committee be established to scrutinise Portfolio Holders, with the Performance Scrutiny Committee retaining its role of scrutinising the performance of the Council's services;
- a proposal to ensure that a vote of unanimous support is achieved prior to any meeting closing before all business having been adequately considered, should a cap be introduced on the duration of meetings.

32. Democratic Engagement (Verbal Report)

The Democratic Team Leader and Elections Manager reported that the Performance Scrutiny Committee in considering a report on electoral registration at its meeting on 24 January 2019 had referred this item to the Ethics and Engagement Committee following discussion on member engagement and raising the profile of members, the Council's public meetings and the City Council as a whole. The Ethics and Engagement Committee was therefore invited to discuss such matters of democratic engagement, during which the following points were noted:

- people did not understand the difference between the City Council and the County Council and had no idea what elected members did;
- people may feel more motivated to use their democratic right and vote if they had more understanding;
- more could be done via social media to promote the role of members, as well as focus on the work of specific committees;
- the event held by this Committee at the Guildhall celebrating the centenary of women's right to vote was a good example of successful engagement with a range of community groups and school children;
- some Council's recorded their meetings, although this was not necessarily the type of engagement that members were keen to achieve;
- members did engage with residents at ward level and whilst this was engagement activity, it did not necessarily cover all dimensions of what the Council did;
- the member area of the website, including member profiles and photographs, should be updated and refreshed;
- consideration should be given to promoting the Council's meetings on social media, highlighting when agendas were published and reminding people that meetings were open to the public. Alerts via social media prior to or during meetings would also be beneficial, ensuring that people had the opportunity to be informed or know more about items of business or issues being considered;
- consideration should be given to holding meetings off-site and rolling meetings out across the city. It was acknowledged that this had been attempted before and that, unfortunately, it made no difference to the number of public attendees;
- there was a perception of disconnect between local people and the Council, which demonstrated that there must be an issue to address with regard to how the authority engaged with its residents.

The Council's Communications Manager welcomed the comments made but highlighted, in his experience, that this was not a problem unique to Lincoln. He added that one of the most successful promotional pieces carried out recently was a document setting out the different responsibilities of the City Council and the County Council, which received a significant number of 'hits', 'likes' and 'shares' via social media. It was noted that work would take place to improve the member section of the Council's website in due course.

It was agreed that members of the Ethics and Engagement Committee should email the Democratic Team Leader and Elections Manager with any suggestions as to how the Council could better engage with residents. In addition, it was agreed that an all-member development session on improving community engagement would be held after the City Council elections in May 2019.

33. Code of Conduct: National Cases (Verbal Report)

The Democratic Team Leader and Elections Manager provided an update on recent national cases whereby breaches of the Code of Conduct had been confirmed, setting out any sanctions that had been imposed.