

- Present:** Councillor Geoff Ellis (*in the Chair*)
- Councillors:** Gill Clayton-Hewson (substituted for Ric Metcalfe), Ronald Hills, Jane Loffhagen, Liz Maxwell, Adrianna McNulty, Edmund Strenghel, Naomi Tweddle and Loraine Woolley
- Independent Person(s):** Chris Elkington and Roger Vine
- Apologies for Absence:** Councillor Ric Metcalfe

15. Confirmation of Minutes - 12 September 2016

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2016 be confirmed.

16. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

17. 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 potential difficulty in trying to establish whether a councillor was acting in a personal capacity or as a councillor.
- noted the importance of ensuring that elected members did not abuse their positions to gain a personal advantage and the Council's strong record in ensuring this.
- highlighted the challenge posed to councillors by people or groups who sought to provoke a negative reaction.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

18. Engagement with Lincoln's Communities

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager:

- a) presented a second report regarding the manner in which the Council engaged with members of the public.

- b) noted the areas which had been highlighted for further development when the last report had been considered by the Committee.
- c) invited members' questions and comments.

The Reserve Independent Person noted that public appetite for involvement with local councils was limited unless motivated by an issue directly relevant to particular residents. Equally, many prominent local services were offered by different bodies, which made engagement more challenging. The Council appeared to be doing everything it could to improve engagement and had faced similar challenges in improving engagement through Local Democracy Week activities with local schools.

The Independent Person highlighted the differences between attendance levels for city-wide meetings and parish-level meetings, with the possibility of higher attendance levels for meetings with a more local focus.

Members:

- discussed the considerable efforts made by the Council to engage with people.
- noted that there remained confusion about which councils were responsible for which services.
- agreed that people tended only to be interested in council services when a problem had been encountered.
- discussed how neighbourhood panels could feed into engagement.
- considered whether it was more appropriate for the Council or for political groups to take a lead on engaging with the public.
- highlighted the difficulty in ensuring that councillors did not divulge exempt or confidential information to people while engaging with the public.
- noted the varying attendance levels at local meetings across the city.
- questioned whether there was any evidence that the availability of neighbourhood working support made a difference to community participation levels.

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager advised that she would relay members' queries regarding neighbourhood working to the relevant team.

RESOLVED that members would continue to oversee the manner in which the Council engaged with local communities and highlight any potential future improvements.

19. Guidance for Councillors on Outside Bodies

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager:

- a) presented a guide intended to inform members about the implications of representing the Council on outside bodies.
- b) emphasised the particular duties that were owed by a trustee to a trust.
- c) highlighted the variety of outside bodies to which the Council appointed, some of which would be reviewed in due course to assess their continuing relevance.
- d) explained that it also was intended to circulate the proposed guidance to non-elected representatives.

- e) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- welcomed the proposed guidance which offered clarity on the potential impact of being appointed to certain roles.
- discussed the extent to which outside representatives were appointed for political reasons, including the appointment of non-councillors to roles.
- highlighted dissatisfaction with the requirement that members on outside bodies were considered to have personal and pecuniary interests in the consideration of financial issues relating to those bodies.
- recommended that the Corporate Management Team give consideration to the feasibility of requiring outside body representatives to provide an annual report to Council regarding their activities, noting that there could be practical difficulties in enforcing such a requirement.
- discussed the extent to which trustees were personally liable for any actions undertaken in that role.

The Reserve Independent Person supported the proposal for representatives to report regularly to the Council regarding their activities, in order to ensure effective oversight of their actions.

The Legal and Democratic Services Manager responded that:

- the Corporate Management Team was undertaking a review of the Council's representation on outside bodies.
- the risk of liability varied between trusts, and that it would be possible some trustees would be indemnified against personal liability.

RESOLVED that:

1. the guidance be circulated for the attention of all elected members and any lay representatives who represented the Council on external bodies.
2. the Corporate Management Team be requested to consider implementing a framework to allow the Council's representatives to report annually to Council regarding their activities.

20. Connecting Town Halls Consultation

The Democratic Services Officer:

- a) introduced a report seeking members' views regarding a consultation on the relaxation of rules restricting members from taking part in meetings via remote technology.
- b) explained that the proposed changes would only affect meetings of combined authorities or joint committees, rather than ordinary Council meetings.
- c) highlighted that equipment was already in place at City Hall which would allow members to take part in remote working.
- d) stated that it was unlikely that public attendance at these meetings was likely to be affected, while public access to both the meeting venue and the remote sites would be ensured.

e) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- noted that previous experiences with video conferencing had not been uniformly positive, although problems could be alleviated by improvements in technology.
- expressed the view that it would be sensible to make greater use of the technology although there was potentially little use for it in Lincolnshire.

The Independent Person shared his experiences of video conferencing, noting the need for strong chairing in order for the meetings to be productive.

RESOLVED that the relevant portfolio holder be recommended to express the Council's support for the proposed changes noting that the technology was not without flaws but did represent a valid alternative option in some circumstances.

21. 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.

RESOLVED that the work programme be approved.