

Present: Councillors Councillor Geoff Ellis (*in the Chair*), Gary Hewson (substituted for Loraine Woolley), Ronald Hills, Ric Metcalfe, Hilton Spratt, Ralph Toofany and Katie Vause

Apologies for Absence: Councillor David Jackson, Councillor Chris Burke and Councillor Loraine Woolley

Also in Attendance: Chris Elkington and Roger Vine

35. Confirmation of Minutes - 11 December 2013

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

36. Matters Arising

Minute No 30

Councillor Hills queried why after the Ethics and Engagement Committee had passed a resolution granting a dispensation to all members of Planning Committee to enable them to consider the Tank Memorial application it had been approved under Officer delegation arrangements. In addition he also referred to an application considered at the last Planning Committee which had been referred to the Committee because the applicant had a relative working at the Council. He considered that it was more appropriate for the Planning Committee to have considered the Tank Memorial application.

Carolyn Wheeler (Assistant Director – Legal and Democratic Services) advised that it had always been the intention to submit the application to Planning Committee and that was why the request for the dispensation had been made. This had been agreed with Officers in Planning but it would appear that it had not been communicated to the rest of the Team.

37. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

38. 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) invited members' questions and comments.

Members:

- In respect of the opposition groups on Hackney London Borough Council and Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council I think they have got it wrong. The committees are appointed proportionally and if we as an opposition did this we would be bringing the Council into disrepute.
- In respect of the Brighton and Hove Council I have some sympathy with the lady Councillor and consider that the decision is out of order. The committee have classed her as a racist.
- There is an expectation that all members undertake Equalities training to ensure all members know what is acceptable. Golliwogs were produced at a time when peoples attitudes to black people were poor. We need to ensure that we are clear on what is and is not acceptable.

The Assistant Director (Legal and Corporate Support Services) advised that it was important for all members to undertake equalities training as it is an important consideration when members are taking decisions on matters eg Disabled Parking. This was the subject of a judicial review. If training has not taken place the outcome of a judicial review could be affected.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

39. Standards Post-Implementation Review

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

- a) presented a report outlining the manner in which revisions made to the Council's standards regime have changed as a result of the Localism Act 2011 and the effectiveness of the Council's revised arrangements.
- b) Reminded members of the changes made as detailed in paragraph 2.1 of the report.
- c) Advised on how the Council had reacted to these changes and adopted a new Code of Conduct which was approved at the Council meeting held on the 7 August 2013.
- d) Advised that since the implementation of the new code only one complaint has been received and dealt with according to the new arrangements.
- e) Advised on the principal actions detailed in paragraph 3.4 of the report relating to the new standards regime which the Committee had taken on board.
- f) Suggested that as it appeared that some members still had difficulties understanding what the requirements were in respect of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests some form of refresher training be provided.

Members:

- Referred to the practice at the County Council that if an interest had been recorded it did not need to be declared at a meeting.

The Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services advised that the requirements of the County Council's Code of Conduct were different to the City Council's in the manner in which declarations had to be declared. This was a matter of choice for local authorities when adopting their individual codes of conduct.

RESOLVED that the report be noted and a briefing note be issued to all members on the “Do’s and Don’ts” in respect of declaring interests.

40. Increasing the Diversity of Electoral Candidates

Assistant Director of Legal and Corporate Support Services:

a). advised on options with regard to the Council taking a more pro-active role in encouraging people from a diverse range of backgrounds to consider standing for election as councillors.

b). advised that Ethics and Engagement Committee had a responsibility, as part of its work programme and terms of reference, for developing innovative and effective proposals to improve democratic engagement.

c). advised on options to improve accessibility including:-

- Improving Awareness
- Information Provided to Prospective Candidates
- Outreach to Key Groups
- Working with Employers
- Support for Parents and Carers

d). provided information on the makeup of the authority in respect of age and gender.

e). advised that whilst information was already available on the website on how to become a councillor this would be enhanced by providing information on what being a councillor entails supported by information detailing the experiences of newer councillors.

f). invited members’ comments and questions.

Members:

- Being a Councillor is not a job it is a role.
- This authority has evening meetings which may suit persons in daytime employment.
- Obtaining time off from work for council duties is difficult. The only time I got leave for council duties was when I was Mayor.

RESOLVED that

(1). the contents of the report be noted.

(2). The information on the website be enhanced to provide information on what is expected of somebody who is elected as a councillor and the experiences of newer elected councillors.

41. Work Programme Update

The Principal Democratic 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.