

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Standards Sub-Committee held in the Via Ms Teams at <https://west-lindsey.public-i.tv/core/portal/home> on 24 November 2020 commencing at 6.30 pm.

Present: Councillor Mrs Anne Welburn (Chairman)

Councillor Robert Waller
Councillor Mrs Tracey Coulson
Councillor Mrs Diana Rodgers
Councillor Mrs Mandy Snee

**Independent Persons
(Non Voting)** Stephen Beard
Madge Marshall-Brown

**Parish Council Reps
(Non-Voting)** Liz Hillman
Bruce Allison

In Attendance:
Katie Storr Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager (Interim)
James O'Shaughnessy Head of Policy Strategy and Sustainable Environment /
Deputy Monitoring Officer
Alan Robinson Director of Corporate Services and Monitoring Officer

Apologies: Councillor David Cotton

1 REGISTER OF ATTENDANCE

The Monitoring Officer undertook the attendance roll-call, in line with the adopted virtual meeting procedure, during which apologies were noted from Councillor David Cotton.

The Independent People and Parish Council representatives were welcomed to the meeting and round table introductions were made.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

3 TO REVIEW THE NUMBER, NATURE AND OUTCOME OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED DURING THE CIVIC YEARS 2016/2017 - 2020/21 (TO-DATE 31 OCTOBER 2020)

The Committee gave consideration to the report giving statistics on the nature, number and outcome of complaints received during the civic years 2016/17 – 2020/21 (to-date 31 October 2020).

There was an acknowledgement that social media now played a part in the number of complaints and since the start of lockdown the number of complaints was rising.

There was long discussion around possible proactive work the Sub-Committee could undertake but Members were urged to remain cautious given the limited sanctions which could be imposed. Considering the likely outcome to be achieved was always an overriding consideration. Managing expectations was an important role and under the current regime results were only achievable if people were willing to work together.

Resources could only realistically be invested where people were prepared to work together, the Authority did not have the power to remove councillors from office and if this was the only desirable outcome it was quickly acknowledged that a satisfactory resolution was unlikely.

All were in agreement that training, guidance and repeated reminders for Members were key and lengthy discussion took place on the ways in which Members may be better engaged, the messages kept fresh and that they addressed emerging issues.

Suggestions made included:

- * Regular reminders be issued about adhering to the Code of Conduct.
- * A training session on social media be recorded – and this be rolled out by the Monitoring Officer to all Parish Councils asking that the video be included as a workshop session on their agenda.
- * Development of crib sheets giving phrases that could be used when in a confrontational situation.
- * Creation of a district wide campaign for when online, prompting the Member to pause and think before publishing - is it true/helpful/necessary. If it isn't, then just don't say anything, for example.
- * Do's and Don'ts sheets for particular areas.
- * Promoting and encouraging the use of Standing Orders to manage behaviour and protect Councillors.

Encouraging people to register a “concern” earlier, rather than wait for matters to worsen and culminate in a complaint, was discussed as being a possible avenue to explore. Both Officers and the IPs outlined the pragmatic approaches currently used. Considerable amounts of time were already spent dealing with concerns that were not complaints and this work was not captured within the report.

Trying to ensure communities understood we were here to help, but had limited powers was a key message and needed to be factored into any communications or video messages drafted.

Following lengthy discussion with a plethora of suggestions made it was

RESOLVED that : -

- (a) the statistical data presented within the report be received and noted; and
- (b) having given consideration as to whether there is proactive work that should be undertaken, Officers be requested to give further consideration to the creation of a host of fact sheets, campaign leaflets, videos, help sheets, in line with areas discussed, to form part of our “standards package” to parish Councillors, for consideration at a future meeting / workshop.

4 BRIEF UPDATE ON THE LGA'S NEW MODEL CODE CONDUCT

Officers had recently had attended a workshop on the consultation for the LGA’s new model Code of Conduct, and were pleased to note from the key findings, that other authorities were like-minded with West Lindsey.

The phrase civility had not been well received and it was likely the word “respect” would be introduced into the new Code.

Officers had also attended the Monitoring Officer conference and again the Sub-Committee’s feedback had been well aligned with most other Authorities’ views. The LGA had been made very much aware of our thoughts on sanctions and again these views were common across the sector.

Members were again reminded that those areas which would generate fundamental change still required legislation amendments and all things considered, this had not been a priority for the Government.

The Code was expected to be considered by the LGA Board prior to the end of the year.

Brief mention of the best practice recommendations was made, two remained outstanding namely : -

- * The creation of a Flow Chart – the Authority didn’t currently publish a flow chart for sifting cases, deciding whether to take a case forward for investigations. Whilst there was a clear, publicised process the best practice recommendations expected that this be accompanied by a simple flow chart. Officers undertook to progress this work over the coming months
- * An Annual Review of the Code – The Authority had last fundamentally reviewed its Code in 2017/18 however it was not common practice for it to be reviewed every year. Best practice recommended this should be case, and should the Authority choose in the future to adopt a new Code, an annual review process would be built in.

One best practice recommendation the Authority had chosen not to implement was the

recommendation that written details of the IPs advice should be included in decision notices. Until such time as the law required the Authority to do this, and that Independent Persons were given indemnity against any kind of legal action regarding their comments, as was the case with the post of Monitoring Officer, the Officer view was that this seemed unreasonable.

As previously reported to the Sub-Committee all the remaining best practice recommendations had been implemented by WLDC under its own volition prior to the Committee for Standards in Public Life being published.

The update was **NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 7.29 pm.

Chairman