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To be sent via e-mail to: correspondence@communities.gov.uk

Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Dear Rt Hon Michael Gove

Recommendations arising from the report made by the Committee for Standards in Public Life in 2019 – Need for change

I write to you in my capacity as Leader of West Lindsey District Council, following a recent resolution passed by a Meeting of my Full Council.

My Council at its meeting on 1 November gave consideration to, and passed a resolution to adopt the new LGA Model Code of Conduct as the standard by which all Councillors across the District should be expected to adhere.

As part of that decision Full Council also asked that I write to you, to again highlight the concerns and weakness we consider exist within the current Regime, and which ultimately become the focus of the most recent debate had. (view minutes link)

My Council's Standards Sub-Committee has watched closely and actively engaged in the LGA's work in developing the new code and has written previously to Government Ministers both in an individual capacity and through regional and national organisations of which my Council is a Member, to highlight the need for change.

Whilst West Lindsey District Council welcomes one single national code to be adopted across all levels of Local Government and has demonstrated this with its adoption of the new model standard, unfortunately, those areas which would really see the standards regime re-invigorated and become fit for purpose are those areas which primarily involve a change in legislation.

Being able to apply meaningful sanctions when needed is an absolute must if adherence to the Code (any Code) is to be



maintained. We strongly advocate the return of sanctions including the power to suspend. We feel it imperative to mention this fact, and will continue to mention this fact at every opportunity. Any Code without sanctions we feel is a “tooth-less tiger”. Human nature expects actions to lead to consequences and the current arrangement offers no consequences, no deterrents.

The original notion that bad behaviour would be addressed through the ballot box simply does not work, particularly in rural areas with lots of parish councils, many of which never have a formal election. In small communities, it is difficult for residents to separate a Councillor in his/her official role, as opposed to when they are simply being a village resident, which they have the right to be. Clearly defining the scope and when the Code can be applied is something that needs to be addressed in order to manage if nothing more than the public’s expectations.

The criminalisation of pecuniary interests, we would suggest, is a step too far and results in fewer matters being addressed. Local Police forces do not have the resources to deal with arguably lower level breaches, and as such this erodes confidence in democracy. The most serious incidents could historically be referred to the Police and in our experience we would suggest this approach was more proportionate.

Many of these issues and concerns were recognised in the recommendations arising from the report made by the Committee for Standards in Public Life in 2019. My Council’s Standards Sub-Committee has been eagerly awaiting the Government’s wider response to the report, and to understanding whether there is willingness to review the legislation but to date the recommendations remain unresponded to.

I again encourage the Government to address the wider recommendations as a priority, many of which would address the concerns my Council have asked that I again bring to your attention.

Yours faithfully

Councillor Owen Bierley
Leader of West Lindsey District Council