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NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

19 January 2023

Chairman: Councillor Neil Poole

Venue: Conference Room,
Church Square House

Time: 2.00 pm

E-Mail Address:
Dean.Gillon@northlincs.gov.uk

AGENDA

1. Substitutions (if any)
2. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Personal or Personal and Prejudicial Interests.
3. To take the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 9 November 2022 as a correct record and authorise the chairman to sign. (Pages 1 - 4)
4. Debate Not Hate Update - The Impact of Abuse on Local Democracy (Pages 5 - 8)
5. Complaints Schedule - Update. (Pages 9 - 12)
6. Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent by reason of special circumstances which must be specified.

Note: Reports are by the Director: Governance & Partnerships unless otherwise stated.

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NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

9 November 2022

PRESENT: - Cllr N Poole (Chairman)

Cllr J England (Vice-Chair), Cllr S Swift, Cllr C O'Sullivan and Cllr D Wells

Mr R Johnson (Independent Person)

The meeting was held at the Conference Room, Church Square House.

429 **SUBSTITUTIONS (IF ANY)**

Cllr Swift substituted for Cllr Ali.

430 **DECLARATIONS OF DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND PERSONAL OR PERSONAL AND PREJUDICIAL INTERESTS.**

Cllr Wells declared a personal interest as a member of ERNLLCA

431 **TO TAKE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE HELD ON 14 JULY 2022 AS A CORRECT RECORD AND AUTHORISE THE CHAIRMAN TO SIGN.**

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting of this committee held on 14 July 2022, having been printed and circulated amongst the members, be taken as read and correctly recorded and be signed by the Chairman

432 **ERNLLCA - INFORMAL UPDATE FROM THE EXECUTIVE OFFICER.**

Tom Clay, the Executive Officer - East Riding & Northern Lincolnshire Local Councils Association (ERNLLCA), introduced themselves to the Committee, and provided a short, verbal presentation on ERNLLCA's aims, services, team, and some ideas for how they worked in partnership with North Lincolnshire Council. Tom stated that they wished to build upon this relationship, strengthening local arrangements and services, and improving the governance of democratic institutions across the area.

Members discussed a number of issues with Tom, such as training and support for clerks, access to ERNLLCA's services, and inviting ERNLLCA to meetings such as the Town and Parish Liaison meeting. The Monitoring Officer identified several areas for further development, such as involving ERNLLCA in training and mediation.

Resolved – (a) That Tom Clay be thanked for their attendance and presentation, (b) that ERNLLCA receive an invitation to all future meetings of the Town and Parish Liaison Meeting; and (c) that discussions continue about mutually beneficial working arrangements between the Standards Committee

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
9 November 2022

and ERNLLCA in order to strengthen local democracy.

433 RENEWAL OF DISPENSATION - STEEL INDUSTRY

The Director: Governance & Communities submitted a report requesting that the Standards Committee consider renewing the dispensation granted to all elected members on 6 November 2015, and renewed each subsequent year, concerning motions related to British Steel (formerly Tata Steel).

The Monitoring Officer explained that this dispensation had been granted in November 2015, and renewed annually, in order to participate in any motion or discussion concerning British Steel and the steel industry. Further details, including the terms of the dispensation, were set out in the report.

As the dispensation was due to expire on 10 November 2022 the committee was asked to consider extending the dispensation for a further twelve months, taking into account the continued interest in the steel industry, and the likelihood that the council would wish to discuss related issues.

Resolved – That pursuant to section 33 (2) (c) of the Localism Act 2011, the dispensation granted by the committee on 6 November 2015, and subsequently renewed annually, be renewed for a further twelve month period.

434 DEBATE, NOT HATE - LGA PROJECT

The Director: Governance and Communities submitted a report informing the Standards Committee of the recent Local Government Association (LGA) publication “Debate Not Hate” on preventing abuse and intimidation in public and political settings. The report also invited the Committee to consider the relevant recommendations, and to implement any measures as deemed necessary.

The report described how the publication was the latest to find that abuse and intimidation of councillors was commonplace, particularly amongst those with protected characteristics, and that this could act as a barrier to people engaging with local democratic institutions.

The Debate, Not Hate report made a series of recommendations, which included Councils and other relevant partners taking greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of councillors, and implementing a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation against councillors. The report also recommended that police should act more consistently, and on a risk-based approach, to such offences.

The Standards Committee, and the Independent Person, discussed this issue in some depth, highlighting the need for respect and courtesy in public dialogue and debate. A number of options to improve this issue were suggested by the Monitoring Officer, and members also contributed with ideas of their own. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that discussions had

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
9 November 2022

taken place with Humberside Police, and that a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) was now in place, and that assurance had been received that police take these matters very seriously. It was recognised that, given the LGA publication had only just been issued, agencies had not had time to respond and develop the guidance recommended and therefore it would be necessary to monitor and review the Council's response in light of any guidance issued.

Resolved – That the Monitoring Officer conduct research and draft a further report to the Committee, including options and best practice, to present to the Committee's next meeting.

435 **COMPLAINTS SCHEDULE 2021-22 - UPDATE.**

The Director: Governance & Communities submitted a report updating the Standards Committee on progress made on all outstanding complaints and investigations, and any relevant issues related to the Complaints Schedule.

Resolved – That the schedule be noted.

436 **ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH MUST BE SPECIFIED.**

There were no urgent or additional items for consideration at the meeting.

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Report of the Director:
Governance and Communities

Agenda Item No:
Meeting: 19 January 2023

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Debate Not Hate – The Impact of Abuse on Local Democracy

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Standards Committee on work arising from the recent Local Government Association (LGA) publication “Debate Not Hate” on preventing abuse and intimidation in public and political settings.
- 1.2 To inform the Standards Committee of the publication of the related LGA toolkit.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Standards Committee considered a report on the LGA “Debate Not Hate” publication and campaign on 9 November 2022 (minute 434 refers), following long-standing concerns nationally about rising levels of abuse and intimidation, both online and in person, of elected politicians. Members requested that officers explore a number of options to further support and protect elected members.
- 2.2 This arose following the following recommendation within the LGA’s report
 - **Recommendation 1:** Councils and other relevant partners should take greater responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of councillors and take a proactive approach to preventing and handling abuse and intimidation against councillors. This should include addressing the impacts of abuse on councillors’ mental health and wellbeing and working in partnership with other agencies and councils to ensure that threats and risks to councillors’ safety, and that of their families, are taken seriously.
- 2.3 Following internal discussions, the following actions have now been implemented or are planned.

- A Dedicated system has been established within the Group Offices to record abusive, intimidatory or threatening communications. There is an option to pass these communications to Humberside Police's Single Point of Contact (SPOC) where required.
- Discussions continue to explore the possibility of the Confidential Counselling and Welfare Service being made available to the council's elected members, in line with staff. Members would be able to self-refer or be referred via Group Secretaries.
- Discussions continue with Humberside Police to ascertain the Force's response to **Recommendation 3** of the LGAs report which requires: "Police forces should work to improve the consistency of responses to abuse and threats made against councillors and take a risk-based approach that accounts for the specific risks that councillors face, as they do with other high-risk individuals, such as MPs. This should include identifying best practice in relation to councillor support and safety and sharing it across the country." To this end, the Monitoring Officer has extended an invitation to the Police designated SPOC to attend the next Committee to provide an update on such matters.

2.4 Members may consider further options for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of elected councillors. Some further possibilities are included in the associated LGA Toolkit (see <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/debate-not-hate/debate-not-hate-campaign-toolkit>)

3. **OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

3.1 To note the steps taken, as set out in paragraph 2.3

3.2 To consider the LGA Toolkit, and further opportunities to support members.

4. **ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

4.1 Strengthening local arrangements to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all councillors would protect their wellbeing, as well as encourage respectful, inclusive local democracy and demonstrate compliance with the LGAs recommendations.

5. **FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g., LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)**

5.1 There may be some financial or other resource implications arising from this report. However, it is likely that these will be minimal.

6. **OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g., CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)**

6.1 Protecting and supporting councillors helps to strengthen local democracy and supports the Council's priority in enabling resilient and flourishing communities.

6.2 Abuse is often targeted at those with protected characteristics. Strengthening support enables the council to demonstrate and promote equality.

7. **OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

7.1 Not applicable.

8. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED**

8.1 The LGA consulted widely as part of their work. Details are included in the report. A previous report was considered by the Standards Committee on 9 November 2022.

8.2 No conflicts of interest have been identified arising from this report.

9. **RECOMMENDATION**

9.1 That the Standards Committee note the action taken in response to the LGAs publication "Debate not Hate".

9.2 That the Standards Committee consider the LGA Toolkit, making further recommendations as deemed appropriate.

DIRECTOR: GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNITIES

Church Square House
30-40 High Street
SCUNTHORPE
North Lincolnshire
DN16 5NL

Author: Will Bell / Dean Gillon

Date: 4 January 2023

Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

LGA – Hate not Debate - The Impact of Abuse on Local Democracy (2022) and Toolkit

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Complaint	Complainant	Complaint against	Received	Assessed	Outcome
SC/21/01	Member of Goxhill Parish Council	Member of Goxhill Parish Council	12 January 2021	16 February 2021	Breach found
SC/21/02	Officer of Epworth Town Council	Member of Epworth Town Council	10 February 2021	25 March 2021	None
SC/21/03	Member of the public	Member of Garthorpe & Fockerby Parish Council	16 February 2021	29 June 2021	None
SC/21/04	Member of the public	Two members of Haxey Parish Council	03 March 2021	15 April 2021	None
SC/21/05	Member of the public	Member of South Ferriby Parish Council	04 March 2021	29 June 2021	None
SC/21/06	Member of the public	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	19 March 2021	29 June 2021	None
SC/21/07	Member of the public	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	23 March 2021	8 July	None
SC/21/08	Member of the public	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	23 March 2021	8 July	None
SC/21/09	Member of Broughton Town Council	Member of Broughton Town Council	26 March 2021	29 June 2021	None
SC/21/10	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	Two members of North Lincolnshire Council	19 April 2021	8 July 2021	None
SC/21/11	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	Two members of North Lincolnshire Council	19 April 2021	8 July 2021	Breach found
SC/21/12	Member of the public	Member of Worlaby Parish Council	22 April 2021	8 July 2021	None
SC/21/13	Member of the public	Thirteen members of Haxey Parish Council	29 April 2021	8 July 2021	None
SC/21/14	Member of the public	Two members of Burton upon Stather Parish Council	12 May 2021	8 July 2021	None

SC/21/15	Member of the public	Member of Burton upon Stather Parish Council	9 June 2021	8 July 2021	None
SC/21/16	Member of Goxhill Parish Council	Member of Goxhill Parish Council	9 July 2021	1 September 2021	None
SC/21/17	Member of Kirton upon Lindsey Town Council	Member of Kirton upon Lindsey Town Council	9 July 2021	1 September 2021	None
SC/21/18	Member of Kirton upon Lindsey Town Council	Member of Kirton upon Lindsey Town Council	9 July 2021	1 September 2021	Breach found
SC/21/19	Member of the public	Member of Kirton upon Lindsey Town Council	9 July 2021	1 September 2021	None
SC/21/20	Member of Kirton upon Lindsey Town Council	Member of Kirton upon Lindsey Town Council	13 July 2021	1 September 2021	None
SC/21/21	Member of Belton Parish Council	Three Members of Belton Parish Council	15 July 2021	1 September 2021	None
SC/21/22	Member of Belton Parish Council	Three Members of Belton Parish Council	15 July 2021	1 September 2021	None
SC/21/23	Member of Belton Parish Council	Member of Belton Parish Council	19 August 2021	1 September 2021	None
SC/21/24	Member of Belton Parish Council	Three Members of Belton Parish Council	19 August 2021	27 September 2021	Recommendation of mediation
SC/21/25	Member of the public	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	23 August 2021	1 September 2021	None
SC/21/26	Member of Belton Parish Council	Three Member of Belton Parish Council	16 September 2021	14 October 2021	Resolved
SC/21/27	Member of Owston Ferry Parish Council	Member of Owston Ferry Parish Council	13 October 2021	15 December 2021	No breach found
SC/21/28	Member of Burringham Parish Council	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	25 October 2021	15 December 2021	None
SC/21/29	Member of Belton Parish Council	Member of Belton Parish Council	25 October 2021	15 December 2021	Resolved
SC/21/30	Member of the public	Member of Burton upon Stather Parish Council	25 October 2021	15 December 2021	Investigation, hearing planned
SC/21/31	Member of Burton upon Stather Parish	Member of Burton upon Stather Parish Council	9 November 2021	15 December 2021	Investigation, hearing planned

	Council				
SC/21/32	Member of the public	Member of Flixborough Parish Council	11 November 2021	15 December 2021	None
SC/21/33	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	11 November 2021	15 December 2021	No breach found
SC/21/34	Member of the public	Member of Belton Parish Council	16 November 2021	15 December 2021	None
SC/21/35	Member of Epworth Town Council	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	18 November 2021	15 December 2021	None
SC/21/36	Member of the public	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	22 November 2021	16 March 2022	None
SC/21/37	Member of the public	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	6 December 2021	16 March 2022	None
SC/22/01	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	Five Members of North Lincolnshire Council	13 January 2022	16 March 2022	None
SC/22/02	Member of the public	Member of Goxhill Parish Council	18 January 2022	16 March 2022	None
SC/22/03	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	19 January 2022	16 March 2022	None
SC/22/04	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	19 January 2022	16 March 2022	None
SC/22/05	Member of the public	Member of Worlaby Parish Council	2 February 2022	16 March 2022	None
SC/22/06	Officer of Brigg Town Council	Member of Brigg Town Council	23 March 2022	20 April 2022	Recommendation of mediation
SC/22/07	Member of Owston Ferry Parish Council	Member of Owston Ferry Parish Council	4 April 2022	27 April 2022	None
SC/22/08	Member of Owston Ferry Parish Council	Member of Owston Ferry Parish Council	20 April	20 May 2022	None
SC/22/09	Monitoring Officer	Member of Goxhill Parish Council	20 May 2022	-	Withdrawn
SC/22/10	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	Member of Epworth Town Council	25 May 2022	14 July 2022	None

SC/22/11	Member of the public	Six Members of South Ferriby Parish Council	6 June 2022	8 August 2022	None
SC/22/12	Member of the public	Member of Crowle Town Council	30 June 2022	14 July 2022	None
SC/22/13	Member of the public	Member of Epworth Town Council	8 September 2022	12 December 2022	Investigation ongoing
SC/22/14	Member of the public	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	13 September 2022	25 October 2022	None
SC/22/15	Member of the public	Member of North Lincolnshire Council	20 September 2022	25 October 2022	None
SC/22/16	Member of the public	Member of Epworth Town Council	23 September 2022	12 December 2022	Investigation ongoing
SC/22/17	Member of the public	Member of Barnetby Parish Council	29 September 2022	25 October 2022	None
SC/22/18	Member of the public	Member of Barnetby Parish Council	3 October 2022	25 October 2022	None
SC/22/19	Member of Owston Ferry Parish Council	Member of Owston Ferry Parish Council	15 November 2022		Assessment ongoing
SC/22/20	Member of Goxhill Parish Council	Member of Goxhill Parish Council	19 December 2022		Assessment ongoing