

LOCAL GOVERNMENT INFORMATION UNIT

NEWS RELEASE

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Restore the right to serve

Local democracy thinktank the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) has used its submission to the government's consultations on a Code of Conduct for local government officers, and on the political restrictions upon council staff, to renew the demand for modernisation of the legislation.

In August, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) launched parallel consultations on having a Code of Conduct for local authority staff in England and on the political restrictions affecting councils employees that were set out in the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act. The deadline for submissions to both consultations was 19 November.

The LGIU's two formal submissions to the ODPM can be found at <<http://www.lgiudocuments.info/LGIUCode.pdf>> and <<http://www.lgiudocuments.info/LGIusub.pdf>>.

Proposals for reforming the regime of political restrictions are included in the LGIU's Perilous Democracy campaign as one of the key measures needed to encourage more people to volunteer for local public service roles, such as councillors or school governors. So far, 135 Members of Parliament from across the main political parties have signed a Commons Early Day Motion (EDM) supporting the LGIU's campaign for public service (see <<http://edm.ais.co.uk/weblink/html/motion.html/ref=1666>>).

Dennis Reed, LGIU Chief Executive, said: "The LGIU is convinced that it is feasible to eliminate the potential for any of the abuses that happened in the past, without trampling on the democratic rights of local government staff who have reached a certain rung on the pay scale. The Widdicombe legislation has been a classic example of the baby being thrown out with the bathwater.

"These rules are ridiculously draconian and unfair. Ironically, the period since these rules were introduced has seen an explosion in public concern about standards in public life. These rules have become increasingly outdated and riddled with anomalies, while depriving communities of a pool of talent and experience that anyone serious about regenerating local democracy should be encouraging into public service roles.

"We hope that this consultation leads to a new and sensible framework of rules that follows the excellent lead given by Scotland in restoring democratic freedoms to many local government workers."