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ETHICAL GOVERNANCE INDICATORS

Background

1.   In February 2004 the Standards Committee received a report on progress with the council's ethical governance framework. Members agreed that the Chief Auditor and the Corporate Standards Manager would draft a local Code of Corporate Governance, and that the Standards Committee would consider the draft Code at their meeting in September 2004.

Progress

2.   The Corporate Standards Manager has drafted a Code, which appears below. The Code is based on 9 nine characteristics of a fully effective ethical authority, as defined by the Improvement and Development Agency (I&DeA). The draft Code builds on those characteristics by proposing a number of measures and indicators that would demonstrate that the characteristics are operational within the authority.

Ethical Governance Indicators

Wiltshire County Council is committed to being an ethical authority. It will be transparent in its dealings, and fully accountable to its public. This means that principles of probity and good governance must underpin every aspect of the council's work. The council will ensure that systems and procedures are in place and in regular use across the entire authority, in order to deliver upon its commitment to the highest standards of probity and accountability.

The I&DeA has identified 9 characteristics of a fully effective ethical authority. They are:

1. That the authority is open and has good access to information;
2. it has clear lines of accountability and responsibility;
3. it has developed an ethical framework designed to promote high standards of conduct and to reduce/eliminate misconduct;
4. it encourages, develops and maintains high standards of conduct by communication, training, development of and support to staff and members;
5. it seeks to build a "bond of trust" between the council and the community;
6. it integrates the ethical framework into the design of its procedures and processes and into all the council's operations;
7. it considers ethical conduct and high standards as an important component fo the council's vision for the future and in achieving its aims and objectives;
8. it is not complacent, is committed to improving ethical practice and standards and monitors progress;
9. it can demonstrate positive outcomes in its implementation and application of the ethical framework.

In order for Wiltshire County Council to build on the District Audit's findings that the council has, overall, a robust ethical culture, Wiltshire County Council will adopt the following tools and indicators to improve and measure its ethical culture:

Evidence that the authority is open and has good access to information - this could be demonstrated by:

- The authority demonstrates a commitment to complying with the spirit of the access to information legislation, not relying extensively upon the exemptions available within the Act
- 100% of Freedom of Information and Data Protection requests responded to within the statutory deadlines, with few complaints to the Information Commissioner
- Staff surveys demonstrate an open approach to sharing information with the public
- Customer surveys demonstrate a high degree of satisfaction with the council's responsiveness to requests for information
- Underlying technical solutions to information management (electronic document management, customer relationship management) have been put in place, enabling swift and reliable access to information
- The council's web site receives high externally validated ratings for its content and interactive offerings, and meets the AA standard for accessibility
- Increased number of "hits" on the council's web-site, and increased duration of external visits to the site.

The council's lines of accountability and responsibility are clear:

- Staff understand the lines of accountability that are in place - core part of induction programme, clear information on the intranet, all staff attend a council meeting as part of the induction process
- The scheme of delegation is clearly drafted, easily accessible, and well publicised
- Members of the public are informed, by means of information campaigns, the council's web site, information in the council's offices and contact points, what the lines of accountability are and how to access decision makers and make representations
- Clear audit trail for all decision making in place, and publicly available within legal constraints.

Evidence that the corporate complaints procedure is understood and used by staff across the council - measures would be:

- Customer satisfaction with the procedures, measured by questionnaires, Peoples' Voice, user surveys, focus group work, MORI
- Increase in number of complaints logged on the Respond database, with a high proportion of complaints being dealt with at Stage 1 of the corporate complaints procedure
- Evidence that complaints training is in place as part of induction processes for all new staff, a core management competency, built into staff appraisal procedures, mystery shopping, senior managers' seminars.

Evidence that recommendations made by Ombudsman or Standards Committee are implemented and form opportunities for corporate learning by:

- Reports to Standards Committee demonstrate that recommendations have been implemented
- Reports to CMB demonstrate that where appropriate, wider lessons are learned from departmental complaints
- Evidence of changes to operating procedures demonstrates that learning and appropriate change/improvement has taken place as a result of complaints.

Evidence that the whistle-blowing procedure is widely understood and used:

- Creation of a central database to record all incidences of whistleblowing and monitor outcomes, to ensure consistency of approach and fair treatment of whistle blowers
- Mystery shopping to test staff awareness of the policy
- Active promotion of the policy in staff magazine and team briefings
- All partner agency staff aware of whistle blowing procedure, and whistleblowing policy built into external contracts.

Evidence that all elected members and co-opted members are aware of their responsibilities under the Code of Conduct for Members:

- Few complaints of breach of Code of Conduct upheld;
- Code is publicised in local press and prominently on the council's web site, with information about how to make a complaint about an alleged breach;
- Central register held confirming that all members have received training on the application of the Code
- Training available as required, and after all council elections.

Equality and diversity strategy in place and functioning effectively:

- Reliable records of numbers of staff employed, including gender, ethnic origin, disability and other indicators - evidence that numbers are representative of the population of the county, and that promotion and training opportunities are available to those groups that might have difficulty in obtaining appropriate employment, training and promotion
- Respond database demonstrates that racist incidents are recorded and responded to appropriately
- Departmental plans demonstrate clear, measurable action planning in relation to equality and diversity and to social inclusion issues.

Evidence that the Staff Code of Conduct is clearly articulated to and understood by all staff:

- Central database of disciplinary investigations and outcomes, including instances of breaches of e-mail and internet codes of use
- Code of conduct forms compulsory part of induction processes
- Code of conduct forms part of management induction

- Evidence of understanding of code of conduct built into staff appraisals and recruitment and selection procedures
- Articles relating to conduct and ethical matters appear in staff magazine and team briefings, including FAQ's and staff questions.

Staff welfare policies in place and being used:

- Staff aware of appropriate response and recourse in the event of threats/bullying by colleagues at any level of seniority, or by customers;
- Evidence of take up of staff counselling service;
- Training for managers includes staff welfare issues
- Evidence of take up of flexible working and job share opportunities
- Few Employment Tribunals find against council - database of grievances and ET's kept, with outcomes to ensure fairness for all staff involved
- Appraisal and personal development plans in place and used for all staff, and built into departmental PI's
- Staff welfare a core management competency, with necessary training available.

Anti-fraud and corruption policy in place and publicised:

- Mystery shopping
- Publicity campaign conducted in local press
- Partner agencies aware of the new policy
- Policy promoted in staff magazine and team briefings, with FAQ's and staff questions
- All members have received training on the policy.

Procedures for declaring interests, claiming expenses and offers/receipt of gifts and hospitality received and understood:

- Logs kept of training received by members and staff
- Evidence that registers are kept in each department and by Member & Democratic Services (for members), and that the registers both of interests and of gifts and hospitality are used
- Articles in staff magazine and team briefing about registering gifts and hospitality
- All contractors and potential contractors aware of council's position on offers of gifts/hospitality, with a clear statement on council's website
- Spot checks in operation.

Evidence that the council seeks to build a bond of trust between itself and the community it serves by:

- regular officer and member attendance at community meetings
- increased public attendance at community meetings and council meetings
- surveys demonstrate an increase in public trust and confidence in the council
- the existence of detailed, achievable community plans based on needs expressed by the communities themselves, with evidenced results based on community priorities

- increase in voter turn out at local elections.

3.   The draft Code has been approved by the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive. The District Auditor and the Chief Auditor were involved in the draft from an early stage.

Recommendation

4.   That the Standards Committee recommends the adoption of the draft Code of Corporate Governance.

5.   That the Corporate Standards Manager brings an implementation plan to the next meeting of the Standards Committee.

Risks associated with the recommendations in this report

6.   There are no risks associated with these recommendations.

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Unpublished documents relied upon in the production of this report: None
Environmental impact of the recommendations contained in this report: None