

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

4 October 2006

ETHICAL GOVERNANCE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides members of the committee with a progress report on the council's ethical governance improvement programme.

Background

2. In February 2006 the council commissioned the Audit Commission to conduct a survey of members and senior officers. Members were given a copy of the Audit Commission's report and recommendations.
3. The Audit Commission's recommendations have been incorporated into a wider ranging ethical governance improvement reporting and assessment structure which is based on the key lines of enquiry used in the ethical governance component of the Corporate Performance Assessment.

Member Training

4. The Audit Commission identified some areas in which it considered that members might benefit from further training.
 - Code of Conduct – training has been arranged to take place on the 13th October 2006. It will be lead by the IDeA, supported by a member peer and a monitoring officer peer.
 - Equality and Diversity – a suitable trainer has been identified. The corporate standards manager is working with the trainer to produce training specifically tailored to members' requirements, which will be delivered early in 2007.
 - Freedom of Information and Data Protection. The corporate standards manager has procured an on-line training package for Freedom of Information. This will be sent to members for complete in December 2006. Members will be sent an e-mail reminding them of their responsibilities under the Data Protection Act in November 2006. A risk assessment suggests that there is no need to invest in specific training in data protection for members.
 - Human rights – incorporated into standard working practices, and taken into account when developing and implementing policy and procedures. Human rights as a specific piece of legislation has little direct impact members' day to day constituency work. No complaint citing human rights has been upheld. This is not therefore considered to present a training need at this time.

- Complaints – this is addressed in the separate report on the Complaints BPR project which is being brought to this meeting
- Risk management – this is now within the remit of the Final Accounts and Audit Committee. See the separate report on Governance and Reporting Arrangements being brought to this meeting.

Whistleblowing

5. Members are referred to the separate report on whistleblowing which has been brought to this meeting.
6. It is hoped that the evidence of the existence of a sound ethical governance framework generated by the Audit Commission's survey will assist the Commission when making its next assessment, and be taken into consideration in that assessment. However, the report did highlight some areas for improvement, and in its recommendations asked the council to consider, in particular:
 - What action can be taken at both an officer and member level to raise the awareness of the Council's whistle-blowing and anti-fraud and corruption policies;
 - Promoting the use of the risk registers amongst members as a mechanism for capturing and managing risk;
 - Encouraging more members to attend training on risk management;
 - What action can be taken at a member level to raise the awareness and consistent use of the Council's complaints system;
 - Providing additional training or awareness material to members regarding human rights, data protection, sex discrimination, race relations, disability and freedom of information legislation;
 - Providing guidance to officers regarding personal conduct issues included within the officer code of conduct;
 - Making the member register of interests available on the web-site.
7. It is proposed to develop an ethical governance improvement programme which will incorporate the Audit Commission's recommendations. Since the survey results have only recently become available, there has not been adequate time for officers to work up detailed proposals, but the appendix to this report sets out the council's planned response in so far as it has been possible to provide details at this time.

Recommendations

8. That the corporate standards manager leads an ethical government improvement project based on the recommendations in the Audit Commission's report.
9. That the Standards Committee maintains oversight of progress on this project in the light of its constitutional responsibilities for ethical governance arrangements in the council.
10. That the Standards Committee appoints one of its members to the ethical governance improvement project's board.

11. That the corporate standards manager brings regular project progress reports to the Standards Committee.
12. That officers with particular responsibility for themes within the project (e.g., risk management, member training, equalities legislation) be asked by the Standards Committee to provide progress reports, if the Committee considers that to be necessary.

Risk Assessment

13. If the council does not address these recommendations, it is unlikely to improve its score on the ethics and probity element of the Use of Resources Corporate Performance Assessment.

Financial Implications

14. There will be a requirement for officers to devote time to ensuring this project has successful outcomes, which represents an opportunity cost to the council. There are no other costs associated with the recommendations in this report.

Environmental Impact of the Proposals

15. None.

Legal Considerations

14. Not applicable.

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report: None