

REPORT TO	DATE OF MEETING
Governance Committee	1 February 2012

Report template revised June 2008



SUBJECT	PORTFOLIO	AUTHOR	ITEM
Action Plan on Transparency	Leader of the Council	David Whelan & Maureen Wood	11

SUMMARY AND LINK TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES

The aims of this report are to:

- Advise members of the implications of the Government’s “Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency” (see Appendix 1)
- Seek the approval of members for the adoption of the attached Action Plan on Transparency (see Appendix 2).

The Council is fully committed to acting in an open, transparent and publicly accountable fashion.

The action outlined in this plan will further strengthen the transparency of information and supports the achievement of the Council’s key objective in making South Ribble an efficient, effective & exceptional council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That members note the contents of this report and support and approve the adoption of the Action Plan on Transparency
2. That members approve that these actions are integrated with the Corporate Governance Improvement Plan and reported accordingly.

BACKGROUND

As members will be aware the government is keen to promote and encourage local authorities to be as transparent as possible.

In this regard in September 2011 the Government published “The Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency.” The Code sets out key principles for local authorities to have regard to in order to achieve the goal of greater transparency through the publication of public data.

In addition in December 2011 the Localism Act made it to the statue book. There are provisions in that Act which will also require local authorities to make more information publicly available – most pertinently there are provisions relating to the publication of the Council’s Pay Policy.

Members will appreciate that the Code of Recommended Practice recommends best practice but it is not a legislative requirement. Nevertheless, the Council should give serious consideration to the advice and recommendations in the Code. Those provisions contained in the Localism Act (e.g. Pay Policy, List of Community Assets) will of course have binding legal effect.

DETAILS AND REASONING

Members will find attached a draft Transparency Action Plan that has been prepared which highlights both the areas of compliance and action that we still need to take. Members will note that considerable progress has been made by this Council in publishing information to the public prior to the code of practice being published.

This Action Plan aims to address all of the key issues arising from the Code of Recommended Practice as well as addressing some important provisions in the Localism Act.

Members will note that this Action Plan impacts on many areas of the Council and therefore owners have been assigned to drive forward these improvements.

The Council is already meeting a number of the key requirements – for example we already publish details of all Council expenditure of over £500. We also publish senior managers' salaries and much of the requisite information relating to the democratic running of the Council (e.g. the Constitution) is already published on line.

One of the key actions that we have to address is to determine and publish a Pay Policy by the 31st of March 2012 (please see action 5 in the Action Plan). This is a requirement of the Localism Act. The Head of Human Resources is already working on this and will be reporting to both Cabinet and Council on this matter.

Members will note that the Government recommends that a local authority should publish copies of all contracts and tenders to businesses and to the voluntary community and social enterprise sector. It should be pointed out that the Council already publishes a contract register which contains the most important contractual information (e.g. contractor's name, price, contract term). Officers are concerned about publishing all information contained in contracts as a number of contracts do contain commercially confidential information. Therefore the recommendation on this action is that we should continue with our current practice.

There will be a continuing role for Governance Committee in ensuring that the Action Plan is fully delivered. In this regard it is proposed that these actions should be integrated with the Council's Governance Improvement Plan and reported accordingly.

WIDER IMPLICATIONS

In the preparation of this report, consideration has been given to the impact of its proposals in all the areas listed below, and the table shows any implications in respect of each of these.

FINANCIAL	There are no financial implications arising directly from this report		
LEGAL	<p>The Council is required to consider carefully the contents of the Government's Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency.</p> <p>Further we must comply with any statutory duties set out in the Localism Act 2011.</p> <p>In any event this Council is fully committed to conducting its business in an open, transparent and accountable manner. It is expected that the adoption of the Action Plan will help further in this regard.</p>		
RISK	<p>Clearly it is imperative that the Council should act in an open and accountable way. A failure to act in a transparent fashion can reduce public confidence in a local authority.</p> <p>This Council is fully committed to being as open as possible in all of its dealings.</p>		
OTHER (see below)			
<i>Asset Management</i>	<i>Corporate Plans and Policies</i>	<i>Crime and Disorder</i>	<i>Efficiency Savings/Value for Money</i>
<i>Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion</i>	<i>Freedom of Information/ Data Protection</i>	<i>Health and Safety</i>	<i>Health Inequalities</i>
<i>Human Rights Act 1998</i>	<i>Implementing Electronic Government</i>	<i>Staffing, Training and Development</i>	<i>Sustainability</i>

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None