

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

26th June 2008

PROGRESS REPORT – ACTION PLAN FOR PROMOTING / ACHIEVING HIGH ETHICAL STANDARDS

1. Background

The ethical governance audit in 2006 led to an action plan being drawn up. This report constitutes a further update to Committee on continuing progress in delivering the actions. The last such update was on the 6th of February 2008. Later in 2008/9 a further ethical governance audit will be undertaken, which will provide the basis for a new action plan.

2. Summary of Progress

a. Overall Position

Good progress continues to be made on the action plan.

Overall the Council has an excellent standards regime in place. As previously reported the Use of Resources assessment constitutes external verification of this, with the overall score being the maximum possible of 4 out of 4. In particular, the Council also scored 4 out of 4 for the module relating to standards work. Indeed our work in the field of ethical governance is considered to be an area of notable practice, nationally.

To quote from the External Auditor's assessment: - "The Council has demonstrated that it has robust arrangements in place to promote and ensure probity and propriety with high ethical standards being one of the objectives included in the corporate plan".

During the course of the last 12 months (prior to the introduction of the Local Referral regime) no complaints about members of the Council or any of the Town/Parish councils in South Ribble have been investigated by the Standards Board or referred back to the Council for investigation.

There have been no findings of maladministration against the Council during the last 12 months.

b. Areas of Significant Progress / Achievement

- The introduction of the local referral regime for complaints has proceeded smoothly.
- We have publicised extensively the introduction of the new regime – in particular a press release has been issued, notices have been circulated to all Parish Clerks for public display, information has appeared on Connect and on the Web, and articles have appeared in *Member News*
- A new Independent Chair of Standards has been appointed.
- Another Parish Council Representative has also been appointed to Standards Committee
- Overall the membership of Standards Committee has been increased to 10 members – three independents, two parish council representatives and five borough councillors.
- Initial training is scheduled for the new Standards Committee for the 23rd June, 2008 and further more in-depth training for the Committee on the new role is planned.

- Effective Standards area maintained/updated on Connect (the Council's intranet system) and *Members Online*.
- Effective liaison with clerks of Town and Parish Councils.
- Prompt, effective advice continues to be given to Members on ethical issues.

c. Areas of Action

- Plain English guide to the Constitution is still outstanding, but a new summary to be inserted in the front of the latest version of the constitution is being worked on.
- Advice to contractors and suppliers on Standards / Ethics needs to be updated.

PROMOTING / ACHIEVING HIGH ETHICAL STANDARDS

OBJECTIVE	KEY ACTION	TARGET / PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	LEAD	POSITION AS 06 FEBRUARY 2008
1. To continue to raise awareness of members / officers, partners and the public of the Codes of Conduct, the role of Standards Committee, and the wider ethical framework and to promote high standards of conduct.	1.1 Include relevant information in members' induction pack on the Code and Conduct and Protocols etc.	Induction Pack included relevant information by 1 st May 2007.	CD (P & N)	Briefing notes were indeed included in packs for successful candidates in May 2007 elections.
	1.2 Monitoring Officer to hold one-to-one awareness raising session with every member elected in a By-Election.	Effective one to one awareness raising sessions held with all new members within 2 months of election.	CD (P & N)	No by-elections since Council elections in May 2007.
	1.3 Include regular items in <i>Member News</i> on ethical issues.	At least six effective articles per year in <i>Member News</i> .	H(CG)/ LSM	Several items have been included in <i>Member News</i> and this is now a regular feature. In particular, Members have been advised of the new local referral arrangements.
	1.4 Review and update the information in the Employee Induction Pack on ethical issues.	Employees' indication pack includes updated information by 30 th April 2007.	H(CG)/ LSM	The new Induction process includes a section on Standards in the Employee Welcome Handbook, and is covered in the Personnel Induction checklist / initial briefing.
	1.5 Include regular items on ethical issues in Insight / CMT core brief.	At least 4 articles per year in Insight / CMT Core Brief.	H(CG)/ LSM	Articles / items have indeed appeared. More are planned to advise further on the new local referral arrangements.
	1.6 Establish an effective Standards / Ethics area on Connect and <i>Members Online</i> , which is kept up to date.	Standards / Ethics area in place by 28 th February 2007 and always up to date.	H(CG)/ LSM	A Standards Area on both Connect and <i>Members Online</i> has been established and updated on several occasions. These have been updated further to reflect the new Standards arrangements.
	1.7 Establish an effective Standards / Ethics area on the web-site which is kept up to date.	Standards / Ethics area in place by 28 th February 2007 and always up to date.	H(CG)/ LSM	Achieved in January 2007 – similar updates to preceding paragraph are being made.
	1.8 Review the information on Standards / Ethics in information provided to contractors / suppliers and in the Procurement Code.	Review complied by 30 th April 2007 and always up to date.	P & PM	Procurement will be part of the Joint Services project with Chorley Borough Council. As part of this process the intention is that we will adopt Chorley's procurement code – subject to any changes that may be necessary or desirable. Work is ongoing in this regard.

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	1.9 Include regular articles in Forward on ethical issues.	At least two effective articles per year included in Forward.	H(CG)/ LSM	An article appeared in Forward to announce the new Code of Conduct for Members. A further item is planned for the September edition to advise on the new Standards regime.
2. To ensure that the members' / officers' training and development needs in relation to achieving high ethical standards are identified and met.	2.1 Work with member Champions and the Standards Committee to ensure that members' training and development needs are identified.	Needs assessment completed by 31 st March 2007.	H(PCE) / DSM / LSM	Further Corporate Governance training for members has been identified in the recent skills audit. Training on Standards for the new Standards Committee is scheduled for 23 rd June and further more in-depth training for the Committee on the new role is planned.
	2.2 Deliver effective Member Induction after the May 2007 elections.	Member feedback.	CD (P & N) / LSM	This was achieved. Member feedback was positive.
	2.3 Include relevant member training and development needs in annual corporate training and development plan and implement plan.	Agreed training and development undertaken effectively within agreed timescales.	H(PCE)	Appropriate training was and is included in the annual Corporate Training and Development Programme.
	2.4 Include relevant employee training and development in annual corporate training and development plan and implement plan.	Agreed training and development undertaken effectively within agreed timescales.	H(PCE)/ LSM	Appropriate training was and is included in the annual Corporate Training and Development Programme. Some training has been provided and more is scheduled.
3. To ensure effective procedures for seeking advice and reporting concerns on ethical issues and that any matters arising are dealt with effectively.	3.1 Review the existing procedures and implement the outcomes.	Effective review completed within 2 months of the receipt of the Government's revised Code of Conduct.	LSM	A thorough review of our procedures has taken place. Another report on the agenda provides draft new procedures.
	3.2 Ensure that prompt, effective advice is provided to members on ethical issues.	Member Feedback e.g. in the annual member survey.	CD (P & N) / LSM	The 2006/7 Member Survey indicated generally good and rising scores. No adverse feedback identified. The latest member survey contains a specific question on the provision of advice.
	3.3 Ensure that any referrals from the SBE are dealt with effectively.	Positive SBE feedback for any cases referred.	CD (P & N)	No referrals received since the action plan was agreed. Under the new regime complaints will generally speaking be dealt with locally. It is only in exceptional cases now that the SBE will be involved.
4. To monitor the operation of the Codes of Conduct and wider ethical issues to	4.1 Undertake bi-annual ethical governance audits and produce a report on the findings.	Next Audit due to be completed by Spring 2008.	LSM	The audit is currently being planned.

ensure the highest possible standards.	4.2 Submit an Annual Report from the Standards Committee to full Council on ethical standards in the authority.	Effective report submitted to Council in January each year.	LSM	Achieved in January 2008.
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	4.4 Update the officer Code of Conduct once the Government's statutory Code is received.	New Code agreed within 3 months of the receipt of statutory Code.	H(CG)/ LSM	No Statutory Code yet issued, nor any Government timeframe for publication announced.
5. To implement the other outcomes of the ethical governance audit effectively.	5.1 Review the approach to the Council's forward plan.	Effective review completed by 30 th April 2007.	DSM	As part of the introduction of the new committee management system E-GENDA a review of our general approach has been completed and new arrangements are in place.
	5.2 Produce Plan English summary of the Council's Constitution.	Guide published by 1 st April 2007.	DSM	Work will shortly be completed on the preparation of the Guide.
	5.3 Increase liaison with Clerks of Town / Parish Councils on ethical issues.	Feedback from Clerks.	DSM	The proposed Joint training on the New Code of Conduct took place in 2007. Positive feedback has been received on the support provided to Town / Parish Clerks by the Democratic Services Team.

KEY:

CD (P & N)	=	Corporate Director (Policy and Neighbourhoods)
H (CG)	=	Head of Corporate Governance
H (PCE)	=	Head of Policy and Community Engagement
DSM	=	Democratic Services Manager
LSM	=	Legal Services Manager
P & PM	=	Procurement and Partnerships Manager
SBE	=	Standards Board for England