



## **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**11<sup>th</sup> June 2009**

### **OUTTURN 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 26<sup>th</sup> of June 2008. A further ethical governance audit has now been undertaken, which will provide the basis for a new action plan.

## 2. Summary of Progress

### a. Overall Position

Considerable progress has been made against the action plan – indeed apart from a couple of issues which are referred further on in this report the necessary actions under this plan have now been completed.

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. The Council scored 3 out of 4 for the module relating to standards work. Further work of improvement has taken place since this assessment (i.e. improving our arrangements for dealing with the declaration of Officers' interests).

Since the introduction of the new arrangements relating to the local assessment of complaints in May 2008 seven complaints about members have been submitted. This has resulted in four separate investigations being ordered by Sub-committee. One complaint led to a finding by Standards Committee of a breach of the Code of Conduct for Elected Members – the member was censured and ordered to provide a written apology. Three complaints are subject to ongoing investigations.

As part of the lead in to the new arrangements for dealing with complaints about members an Independent Chair was appointed for the first time in 2008.

In terms of complaints to the Ombudsman there have yet again 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 was completed successfully
- The new regime was publicised extensively – it would appear to be the case that members and members of the public are now more aware and more willing to bring complaints
- Following the appointment of an Independent Chair another Independent Member was appointed in January 2009 following an interview process
- Various training events for Members of Standards Committee, and a 'bite-sized' Learning Hour session open to all members, have taken place which proved to be successful
- Assessment and Review Sub-committees have operated efficiently and effectively – all statutory deadlines have been met

- On the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2009 South Ribble's first Hearing under the new regime took place – overall it is considered that this hearing went well
- An effective Standards area is maintained/updated on the Council's website, 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.
- An ethical governance audit has recently been completed by officers – the conclusions of this audit are very positive overall
- Guidance has been prepared for contractors on equality issues (although it is accepted that more work is required – see below)

c. Areas of Action

- Plain English guide to the Constitution is still outstanding, but a new summary inserted in the front of the latest version of the constitution has now been completed
- More work is required in relation to improving the information on ethics that we provide contractors/suppliers with

**PROMOTING / ACHIEVING HIGH ETHICAL STANDARDS**

<b>OBJECTIVE</b>	<b>KEY ACTION</b>	<b>TARGET / PERFORMANCE INDICATOR</b>	<b>LEAD</b>	<b>POSITION AS 22 MAY 2009</b>
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 <sup>st</sup> May 2007.	CD (P & N)	Briefing notes were indeed included in packs for successful candidates in May 2007 elections. Content for the induction pack to be provided to the two members elected in the by-elections on 4 June has been updated to reflect the new regime.
	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. Two by-elections will take place on 4 June, following which the MO will hold one-to-one sessions.
	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 were advised of the new arrangements relating to the local assessment of complaints.
	1.4 Review and update the information in the Employee Induction Pack on ethical issues.	Employees' induction pack includes updated information by 30 <sup>th</sup> 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. These included information on the new standards regime, an invitation to officers to comment on core values, a reminder of the obligation on officers to register gifts & hospitality and declare personal interests and an invitation to comment on a number of corporate governance draft policies and strategies including anti-fraud. 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 <sup>th</sup> 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 <sup>th</sup> February 2007 and always up to date.	H(CG)/ LSM	Achieved in January 2007 – similar updates to preceding paragraph are being made. This area has been expanded quite considerably to encompass information on the Standards Committee, Codes of Conduct for members and officers, the Local Code of Governance, Annual Governance Statement and anti-fraud and corruption policies/strategies.
	1.8 Review the information on Standards / Ethics in information provided to contractors / suppliers and in the Procurement Code.	Review complied by 30 <sup>th</sup> April 2007 and always up to date.	P & PO	<p>Procurement is part of the Joint Services project with Chorley Borough Council. A number of significant improvements have been made recently in this regard.</p> <p>Of particular note is that there is now guidance on our website for contractors explaining what we expect from them when it comes to equalities issues. In addition template documents are also on our website to assist contractors with these issues. A pocket guide for procurement for staff has now been prepared and arrangements are currently been made for training for staff within the near future.</p> <p>It is accepted though that further work is required. In particular the intention is that a detailed “Selling to the Council” guide should be prepared for the assistance of all prospective contractors.</p>

OBJECTIVE	KEY ACTION	TARGET / PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	LEAD	POSITION AS 22 MAY 2009
	1.9 Include regular articles in Forward on ethical issues.	At least two effective articles per year included in Forward.	H(CG)/ LSM	Articles appeared in Forward to announce the new Code of Conduct for Members and 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 <sup>st</sup> March 2007.	H(PCE) / DSM / LSM	<p>Considerable training has been provided on the new Standards regime. Further training has been provided on Members' interests.</p> <p>The Member Development Working Group meets on a regular basis to assess the training and development needs of members.</p>
	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.
	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 2007/8 survey asked specifically about members' satisfaction with Help and advice in relation to the constitution, members' allowances, registration & declaration of interests and other standards/ethical issues. The average

				<p>response was 18 out of 20.</p> <p>In carrying out the recent ethical governance audit members' views were sought on a number of issues that are relevant to this. All members of Standards Committee who responded were satisfied with the guidance and advice available on ethical standards and practice. The vast majority (over 90%) of members who responded indicated that they knew where to obtain guidance and advice.</p>
	3.3 Ensure that any referrals from the SBE are dealt with effectively.	Positive SBE feedback for any cases referred.	CD (P & N)	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 ensure the highest possible standards.	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 has now been completed
	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	The annual report was delayed this year in order to follow on from the submission of the annual report to the Standards Board for England. Members will see this year's annual report elsewhere on the agenda. The report will be submitted to the next Council after this Committee.
	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. In December 2008 Standards Committee submitted a response to the Government on their latest proposals for a Government statutory Code.
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 <sup>th</sup> 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 plain English summary of the Council's Constitution.	Guide published by 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2007.	DSM	A plain English introduction to the Constitution has been prepared. However, we still need to produce a plain English 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.
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**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 & PO = Principal Procurement Officer
- SBE = Standards Board for England