

**PROGRESS AGAINST ACTION PLAN FOR PROMOTING AND ACHIEVING HIGH ETHICAL STANDARDS**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2009 Standards Committee approved an action plan for promoting and achieving high ethical standards.

This report informs Standards Committee of the considerable progress so far made against this action plan.

Members will no doubt recall that the action plan covers the period 2009 to 2011.

KEY ACTION	PROGRESS TO DATE
1. Continue to include relevant information in the members' induction pack on the Code of Conduct etc. (HCG)	Comprehensive induction pack issued following the by-elections on 04-06-09 and 15-10-09  The induction pack included : Code of Conduct for Elected Members, Code of Conduct Guide for Members, Forms for Register of Members Interests and Gifts & Hospitality, Anti-fraud and Corruption Strategy, Combating Benefit Fraud, Fraud Response Plan, Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure, Corporate Prosecutions Policy, Anti-money Laundering Policy, Constitution, Member Complaint form, Guidance on How to fill in a Complaint Form.
2. Continue to hold one-to-one awareness raising sessions with every member elected in a by-election. (HCG)	The Corporate Director (Policy and Neighbourhoods) and the Head of Corporate Governance met with Cllrs Nelson and C Tomlinson on 10 June 2009 following their election on 4 June 2009, and with Cllr Hamman on 4 November 2009 after his election on 15 October 2009.
3. Include regular items in Member News on ethical issues. (LSM)	This has suffered because of lack of available resource, however the Legal Services Manager has plans to promote the ethical agenda via member news on a more regular basis.  Several guidance papers and bulletins issued by Standards for England have also been circulated to provide members with the latest information.
4. Remind members and employees on an annual basis of the need to register/declare interests and gifts & hospitality.	Members confirmed commitment to the Code at first area committee meeting of the municipal year. Any members who were not present were contacted separately and asked to confirm in writing / by email and were reminded of their obligations -in particular with regard to updating the interests register and registering gifts and hospitality. All Council agendas now include, under Declaration of Interests

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(DSM)	<p>item, a reminder for members to notify the Monitoring Officer of any changes within 28 days of becoming aware of any changes. The registers are taken to all committee meetings to make it as convenient as possible for members to update their forms. Further development is planned for members Connect.</p> <p>With the launch of the new officers' Connect, the Democratic Services homepage includes information under Frequently Asked Questions on why and how to declare personal interests and gifts &amp; hospitality. E-forms are currently being developed with ICT and once they are fit for purpose an alert will be issued to all officers to make them aware. Additionally, all Heads of Service reviewed arrangements in their service areas and confirmed, as part of the Management Assurance Process last April that their officers were fulfilling the obligations on them. This annual exercise will be repeated as part of this year's Management Assurance process.</p> <p>Further reminders are sent to employees in December regarding the registering of gifts and hospitality.</p>
5. Continue to include ethical issues in relevant information in the Employees' Induction process, including with CMT. (HRM)	The Human Resources Manager continues to ensure that relevant information on ethical issues is indeed included in the induction process for employees
6. Continue to ensure Connect contains informative and up to date information on standards and ethics. (LSM)	Connect contains up to date information on all issues relating to standards and ethics.
7. Include regular items in Forward on ethical issues. (LSM)	<p>It is intended to have a suitable article for the next available edition of Forward. We are considering including an item providing information on the results of our recent Citizen's Panel Survey on Councillor behaviour.</p> <p>A number of press statements have been issued on standards issues within the last six months in response to media enquiries. Such statements have included comment on the appeal decisions of the Adjudication Panel as well as providing information relating to the costs of investigations that have been carried out.</p> <p>In addition public notices have been published advising the public on the outcome of Standards hearings.</p>

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8. Ensure the Standards and Ethics content on the website is informative and kept up-to-date. (LSM)	The content on the website about Standards and Ethics is kept up to date and the public are directed to this when considering making a formal complaint. It is clear from comments made by the public that this information is being accessed.
9. Ensure that Town/Parish Councillors and Clerks have all relevant information on their responsibilities. (LSM)	<p>On the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 2010 the Monitoring Officer, Head of Corporate Governance and Legal Services Manager provided a training session on the Code of Conduct for Town/Parish Councillors and Clerks from the Lancashire area. The feedback received was very positive and people particularly enjoyed the “ethical dilemmas” exercise.</p> <p>Another such training session is scheduled for the 11<sup>th</sup> of March.</p> <p>The Monitoring Officer and Legal Services Manager provide advice to Town and Parish Councils as and when required.</p>
10. Carry out a review of all our existing protocols on ethical issues, identify any gaps and prepare appropriate updated/new documentation. (LSM)	The Governance Committee task group is leading on a review of the constitution, including all protocols and they will be reporting to Council on the 16 April.
11. Carry out a review of our approach to ethical issues in Partnerships/contracts. (LSM)	<p>The Corporate Director (Policy &amp; Neighbourhoods) is leading on a project to further strengthen the governance aspects of our key partnerships. An extensive review is planned next year that will include looking at the ethical arrangements of our key partners. A group of relevant officers will be brought together to carry out this review.</p> <p>The Legal Services Manager has been working on a detailed training programme to cover the wide ambit of ethical and standards issues. This programme is being developed in consultation with the Corporate Governance Group – a group of senior officers who take a lead (at officer level) on governance issues across the Council. As part of the training programme to be developed specific actions will be agreed of what we need to do to develop further our arrangements on ethical issues with our key partners.</p>
12. Consider the feasibility of using social networking techniques to promote high ethical standards. (LSM)	This is to be actioned by the Legal Services Manager within the next six months.
13. Undertake an annual Citizen’s Panel survey on ethical issues. (HCG)	A Citizen’s panel survey has recently been completed. Taken overall the results from this were very encouraging. This matter is reported on in detail elsewhere on the agenda.

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14. Include standards and ethics related questions in the biennial Employee Survey. (HRM)	<p>Relevant questions were indeed included in the most recent Employee survey.</p> <p>Of particular note are the following results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-99% of Council employees are aware of the standards of behaviour that are expected of them as a Council employee</li> <li>- 98% of Council employees are aware that there is a code of conduct of behaviour for council officers</li> <li>- 94% of Council employees believe that the Council has a high level of ethical standards and behaviour</li> <li>- 90% of Council employees believe that the Council does apply integrity in its dealings</li> </ul>
15. Centrally record all complaints about officer conduct. (HRM)	Due to work pressures no work on this action has commenced. Consideration is currently being given to rescheduling the necessary work.
16. Continue to submit an Annual Report from the Standards Committee to full Council on ethical standards in the authority. (LSM)	An annual report was considered at Council on the 29 <sup>th</sup> of July 2009. A further annual report is scheduled for the Council meeting on the 4 <sup>th</sup> of August 2010.
17. Include relevant questions on standards/ethics in the annual Member Survey. (HCG)	The last Member Survey was conducted in 2008 and included questions relating to standards and ethics. As part of the Csmart project for Democratic Services, consideration is being given to format and timing of the survey to guarantee a higher response rate from members in the next Member Survey scheduled for 2010/2011 (in 2008 we had a response from 14 out of 55 members).
18. Work with the Member Working Group and the Standards Committee to ensure that members' training and development needs are identified. (HCG)	<p>Training and development needs are kept under review on an ongoing basis through members individual personal development interviews.</p> <p>Complaints against members are analysed to identify where there may be training requirements.</p> <p>All members elected between "all out" elections are inducted through the one to one sessions with the Corporate Director (Policy and Neighbourhoods) and Head of Corporate Governance.</p> <p>Individual training is also provided for every new member of Standards Committee. The Committee also considers training requirements for individual members involved in the complaints system.</p>
19. Deliver the relevant elements of the annual Member Development Plan. (HCG)	Progress is reported quarterly against the Member Development Plan. A plan to deliver Standards training to non-standards members was recently deferred, but will be rescheduled following consultation with the Chair of the Standards Committee.

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20. Provide short refresher training sessions on ethical issues for members. (LSM)	<p>Learning Hour held for all members 03-09-09 on Standards / Declarations of Interest Update.</p> <p>Tailored parish and town council training was delivered 04-02-10. A second session is planned for 11-03-10.</p>
21. Plan and implement effective Member Induction for after the May 2011 elections. (HCG)	Member induction for 2011 is identified as a key action in the Corporate Governance Services Plan for 2009/10, as it requires considerable planning and co-ordination prior to 2011.
22. Include relevant employee training and development in annual corporate training and development plan and implement plan, including on the Officer Code of Conduct. (HRM)	<p>The corporate training and development plan for 2009/10 is being delivered. All training needs identified in individual staff appraisals were used to inform and populate this plan.</p> <p>If a new national Officer Code of Conduct is introduced then appropriate training will be provided. Otherwise training on the existing Code of Conduct will be provided as part of more general governance training. As stated elsewhere the Legal Services Manager is developing a Corporate Governance training programme to cover all relevant standards and ethical issues.</p>
23. Ensure that all our key partners are aware of the ethical standards that we expect and that they are fully aware of the requirements of our Whistle Blowing Policy. (HPCE)	Please see response to key action 11.
24. To identify and implement the most effective way of providing our key partners with training on ethical issues. (LSM)	<p>Please see the response to key action 11.</p> <p>Of particular importance here is to ensure that all key partners are fully informed and updated on the requirements of our Whistle blowing policy.</p>
25. Continue to ensure that prompt, effective advice is provided to members on ethical issues. (LSM)	<p>Members seek advice from the Monitoring Officer and members of the Legal and Democratic services teams on a regular basis. This includes seeking advice on questions as to whether they should declare an interest (personal or prejudicial) at committee meetings.</p> <p>The culture that exists in this Council is a very healthy one. When in doubt members tend to seek guidance.</p>
26. Ensure that all investigations are undertaken promptly/effectively. (LSM)	<p>Experience to date has been that the time from the date of complaint to the hearing can sometimes seem excessive. It should be pointed out though, that the statutory process we have to go through is rather cumbersome – particularly in relation to clearance of investigation reports.</p> <p>We will continue to review how we carry out investigations. Generally speaking it is felt that there are some distinct advantages to using an external investigator.</p>

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	The external investigator we have used for several investigations (Mr Stone) has proved to be cost effective. We are aware of a couple of other external investigators who carry out this work. If any further complaints require an investigation the Monitoring Officer would continue to carefully consider who would be best to carry out this work.
27. Ensure that all hearings into alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct are dealt with expeditiously, effectively and in accordance with natural justice. (LSM)	Learning from past experience is an integral part of the overall process. Accordingly changes to the procedures are considered as part of the learning process. Our procedures remain sound and robust and comply with legislation and national guidance.
28. Ensure that the Standards Committee procedures remain effective. (LSM)	<p>We continue to monitor the effectiveness of our procedures on a regular basis.</p> <p>On the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 2010 a workshop was held with the members of Standards Committee to discuss the outcome of the two recent Adjudication Panel appeal decisions and to establish if the Committee's procedures remain "fit for purpose". The unanimous view of the committee members was that we should not lower or dilute the high standards that we expect from elected councillors. Following on from this workshop the Monitoring Officer has written to the Standards Board seeking guidance/clarification on a couple of issues.</p>
29. Ensure effective liaison with and support to Town/Parish Councils. (LSM)	Effective liaison takes place in part through the Lancashire Association of Local Councils(LALC). Parish clerks regularly seek advice from officers on code of conduct matters and keep officers up to date with changes to parish / town council membership.

### Key to Lead Officers

HCG – Head of Corporate Governance

HPCE – Head of Policy and Community Engagement

DSM – Democratic Services Manager

HRM – Human Resources Manager

LSM – Legal Services Manager