

STANDARDS COMMITTEE – 2 SEPTEMBER 2010

On the 3 September 2009 Standards Committee approved an action plan for promoting and achieving high ethical standards. On the 4 March 2010 Standards Committee considered a six monthly report on progress made against this action plan. This report provides Standards Committee with a further update of the considerable progress that has so far been made. Members will no doubt recall that the action plan covers the period 2009 to 2011.

KEY ACTION	PROGRESS TO DATE
<p>1. Continue to include relevant information in the members' induction pack on the Code of Conduct etc. (DCG)</p>	<p>Comprehensive induction pack issued following the by-elections on 4 June 2009 and 15 October 2009</p> <p>The induction pack included :</p> <p>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.</p> <p>A project has been initiated to look at the member induction programme for 2011. This will involve a comprehensive package for standards and ethics.</p> <p>It is proposed that Standards Committee will be given the opportunity to shape the member induction process at their meeting on the 2 December 2010.</p>
<p>2. Continue to hold one-to-one awareness raising sessions with every member elected in a by-election. (DCG)</p>	<p>The Legal Services Manager met with Cllr Mrs Caroline Moon on the 27 May 2010 after her election on the 6 May 2010.</p>
<p>3. Include regular items in Member News on ethical issues. (LSM)</p>	<p>Member News has been superseded now.</p> <p>Cllr Connect is now in operation. Members are encouraged to self serve. There is a dedicated page on Cllr Connect to Standards and Ethics.</p> <p>Feedback is sought from Committee as to what would be useful to include in Cllr Connect – for example annual report, improvement plan, an article from the Independent Chair, frequently asked questions, guidance on how to register/declare interests</p>

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<p>4. Remind members and employees on an annual basis of the need to register/declare interests and gifts & hospitality. (DSM)</p>	<p>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 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 & hospitality.</p> <p>ICT are currently finalising E-forms which will be launched shortly on the officer Connect Homepage. These will allow officers to make relevant declarations and alert their service manager and Democratic Services at the same time. Communication and awareness raising of this new process will take the form of a cascade downwards from the Senior Management Team to individual team briefings. Additionally an alert to all officers will be issued on officer Connect and the Frequently Asked Questions on the Democratic Service page will be updated. Annual reminders of the how and why to make declarations will be issued in the run-up to Christmas.</p>
<p>5. Continue to include ethical issues in relevant information in the Employees' Induction process, including with CMT. (HRM)</p>	<p>The Human Resources Manager continues to ensure that relevant information on ethical issues is indeed included in the induction process for employees</p> <p>This includes new employees and managers attending Equality and Diversity Training Courses.</p>
<p>6. Continue to ensure Connect contains informative and up to date information on standards and ethics. (LSM)</p>	<p>Please see update on items 3 and 4</p>
<p>7. Include regular items in Forward on ethical issues. (LSM)</p>	<p>An article will be appearing in the September edition of Forward dealing with the findings of our Citizen's Panel survey on Councillor behaviour. Members will recall that the results of this survey were very encouraging.</p> <p>There have not been any press releases on Standards matters recently primarily because we have not had a Hearing into a complaint about a councillor this calendar year.</p>
<p>8. Ensure the Standards and Ethics content on the website is informative and kept up-to-date. (LSM)</p>	<p>The content on the website about Standards and Ethics is kept up to date.</p> <p>It is clear from comments made in email correspondence by members of the public that this information is being accessed.</p>

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<p>9. Ensure that Town/Parish Councillors and Clerks have all relevant information on their responsibilities. (LSM)</p>	<p>On the 4 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.</p> <p>Another such training session took place on the 11 March 2010.</p> <p>The Council – in conjunction with its Town and Parish councils’ partners - is in the process of finalising a Town and Parish Council Charter. This Charter sets out how this Council and the seven parish and town councils in South Ribble will work together to deliver the best possible services to our residents. This charter includes provisions relating to Standards – in particular to the provision of mutual support.</p> <p>The Monitoring Officer and Legal Services Manager provide advice to Town and Parish Councils as and when required.</p> <p>Regular Parish Clerk Liaison meetings take place.</p>
<p>10. Carry out a review of all our existing protocols on ethical issues, identify any gaps and prepare appropriate updated/new documentation. (LSM)</p>	<p>The Governance Committee task group leads an annual review of the constitution.</p> <p>The 2009/10 review led to the introduction into the constitution of a protocol for a Petition Scheme in accordance with the requirements of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 and, as previously reported to Standards Committee, a protocol to guide members working in partnership is being developed. The intention is to refer this to both Standards Committee and Governance Committee. The 2010/11 review, which will be initiated at the Governance Committee meeting on 22 September, is likely to include the revision of the Protocol for Member Involvement in Planning Procedures.</p>
<p>11. Carry out a review of our approach to ethical issues in Partnerships/contracts. (LSM)</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> <p>An extensive review will be carried out within the course of the next twelve months of our current approach to ethical issues in partnerships. A group of relevant officers will be brought together to carry out this review. This will include representatives from a number of areas including Legal and Internal Audit.</p>
<p>12. Consider the feasibility of using social networking techniques to promote high ethical standards. (LSM)</p>	<p>A useful guidance document on this issue has been identified that has been published by the Improvement and Development Agency (I+DeA).</p> <p>Recourse will be had to this.</p> <p>Clearly this is an important issue – an assessment of the pitfalls as well as the advantages of this</p>

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	<p>approach needs to be carried out.</p> <p>More progress needs to take place on this issue – the Legal Services Manager will action this.</p>
<p>13. Undertake an annual Citizen's Panel survey on ethical issues. (DCG)</p>	<p>A Citizen's panel survey has been completed. Taken overall the results from this were very positive.</p> <p>An article will appear in September's edition of Forward – please see item 7 above.</p>
<p>14. Include standards and ethics related questions in the biennial Employee Survey. (HRM)</p>	<p>Relevant questions were indeed included in the most recent Employee survey in 2009.</p> <p>The results were very positive and encouraging – specific information on this was provided in our last six monthly report.</p> <p>The next Employee survey will be carried out in 2011. Again we will ensure that relevant standards and ethics related questions are included in that survey.</p>
<p>15. Centrally record all complaints about officer conduct. (HRM)</p>	<p>A record is kept by Human Resources of all substantiated complaints of misconduct.</p>
<p>16. Continue to submit an Annual Report from the Standards Committee to full Council on ethical standards in the authority. (LSM)</p>	<p>An annual report will be considered by Council on the 8 September 2010.</p>
<p>17. Include relevant questions on standards/ethics in the annual Member Survey. (DCG)</p>	<p>The last Member Survey was conducted in 2008 and included questions relating to standards and ethics with responses from 14 out of 55 members). However, whilst the last survey was carried out in 2008 it is not now proposed to carry out a further survey of members until after the next borough elections in May 2011 and is likely to be incorporated into the Members' Induction Programme.</p>
<p>18. Work with the Member Working Group and the Standards Committee to ensure that members' training and development needs are identified. (DCG)</p>	<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 newly elected members are 'targeted' through the one to one sessions with appropriate officers – eg Director of Corporate Governance, personnel officers.</p> <p>Individual training is also provided for every new member of Standards Committee (please see item 20 below). The Committee also advises on training requirements with regard to members involved in the complaints system.</p>

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19. Deliver the relevant elements of the annual Member Development Plan. (DCG)	<p>Progress is reported quarterly against the Member Development Plan.</p> <p>Standards training for non-standards members will be provided for members following the local elections in May 2011. The Chair of Standards Committee will be fully consulted in this regard.</p>
20. Provide short refresher training sessions on ethical issues for members. (LSM)	<p>Tailored parish and town council training was delivered 4 February 2010. A second session was delivered on the 11 March 2010.</p> <p>The Legal Services Manager provided the new members of Standards Committee with standards training on the 25 May 2010.</p> <p>Resources are now dedicated to developing the member induction programme for 2011.</p>
21. Plan and implement effective Member Induction for after the May 2011 elections. (DCG)	<p>Member induction for 2011 is identified as a key action in the Democratic Services plan for 2009/10, as it requires considerable planning and co-ordination prior to 2011.</p>
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>A corporate training and development plan is currently being prepared by the Human Resources Manager for 2010/2011.</p> <p>All training needs identified in individual staff appraisals will be 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.</p> <p>If there is no new Code then training on the existing Code of Conduct will be provided as part of more general 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. (PM)	<p>Please see response to key action 11.</p>
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>

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25. Continue to ensure that prompt, effective advice is provided to members on ethical issues. (LSM)	<p>It is considered that the Council has adopted good practice in this area for many years.</p> <p>Members continue to seek advice from the Monitoring Officer and members of Corporate Governance on a regular basis. In particular this includes seeking advice on questions as to whether they should declare an interest (personal or prejudicial) at committee meetings. The attitude that is encouraged and fostered is that if a member is in any doubt he/she should speak to an appropriate officer first before deciding how to proceed.</p>
26. Ensure that all investigations are undertaken promptly/effectively. (LSM)	<p>So far this calendar year we have not had cause to carry out any investigations into Members' conduct. This is very encouraging.</p> <p>Past experience has shown that the time from the date of complaint to a hearing date can sometimes seem excessive. However, It should be pointed out though that the statutory process we have to go through can sometimes be rather cumbersome.</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>
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)	<p>Again so far this calendar year there have not been any hearings into any alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct. Again this is very encouraging.</p> <p>It is considered that our procedures are sound and robust but as ever we shall keep them under constant review.</p>
28. Ensure that the Standards Committee procedures remain effective. (LSM)	<p>The effectiveness of our procedures is reviewed on a regular basis in the light of experience of dealing with particular complaints.</p> <p>The new Coalition Government announced shortly after taking power that it proposes to abolish Standards for England. Clearly we will need to review our policies and procedures once the new arrangements (whatever they may be) are in place. We will keep the situation under close review.</p>
29. Ensure effective liaison with and support to Town/Parish Councils. (LSM)	<p>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.</p>

Key to Lead Officers

- DCG – Director of Corporate Governance
- PM – Policy Manager
- DSM – Democratic Services Manager
- HRM – Human Resources Manager
- LSM – Legal Services Manager