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## Report of Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance)

### Standards Committee

Date: 12<sup>th</sup> July 2007

Subject: Standards Committee Training Plan

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#### Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

#### Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

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### Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Members' comments on the current Standards Committee training plan, and to inform the Committee of what progress has been achieved against the plan since January 2006.
2. Members of the Committee approved the draft training plan at their meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2006. This training plan (attached as Appendix 1) contained details of training to be provided to new Members of the Committee as well as regular training for all Members.
3. Members of the Committee are asked to consider the updated training plan (Appendix 2) and offer any suggestions for additions or amendments, particularly in view of the changes outlined in the Local Government and Public Health Bill regarding local filtering of complaints.

## **1.0 Purpose Of This Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members' comments on an updated version of the Standards Committee training plan, and to inform the Committee of what progress has been achieved against the existing plan since January 2006.

## **2.0 Background Information**

- 2.1 The Ethical Audit undertaken by the Audit Commission in 2004<sup>1</sup> recommended that the Council improve learning and development opportunities for Members in relation to governance issues.
- 2.2 When the Committee approved and adopted their training plan in January 2006, it was also agreed that the plan be periodically reviewed, especially with reference to any future developments in role or functions of the Standards Committee.
- 2.3 At the Council's annual meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2007, two additional City Councillors were appointed to the Standards Committee. In addition, both the former reserve members of the Committee were appointed as full members (able to vote).
- 2.4 Furthermore, the Council also adopted a new Code of Conduct for Members at the annual meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2007. Therefore all Members of Standards Committee are in need of training on the provisions of the new Code.

## **3.0 Main Issues**

### Progress against the training plan since January 2006

### Understanding of the Code of Conduct and protocols governing member and officer relations

- 3.1 As the new Code of Conduct is now in force, all Members of the Standards Committee required training, other than the training they received during their induction or through their briefing sessions on their appointment to the Committee.
- 3.2 All elected Members and Co-opted Members of the Committee were invited to attend any of the six update sessions held at Civic Hall in June. The Parish Members of the Committee were also invited to attend these sessions, along with one of the five local sessions held around Leeds.
- 3.3 All Members of the Committee have also been provided with updated guidance materials on the new Code of Conduct from the Standards Board for England, and a plain English guide to the local codes and protocols created by Leeds City Council.
- 3.4 Other training materials are also due to be released soon, and will be offered to Members of the Committee. These include a new e-learning module on the new Code and a Standards Board DVD.

### To ensure all Members have the necessary skills to conduct a local hearing

- 3.5 On 16<sup>th</sup> February 2006, two representatives from the CIPFA Better Governance Forum provided a training course for the Standards Committee on how to conduct a

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<sup>1</sup> Audit Commission report, "Setting High Ethical Standards: Leeds City Council".

local hearing, including a role play exercise. It is stated in the training plan that this exercise would be repeated every 6 months. However, as the cost of the training was £2038 this has not been carried out.

- 3.6 Since the expansion of the Committee membership, another session with the same external facilitators has been planned. This will take place in late July.
- 3.7 All Members of the Committee have watched the Standards Board DVD “Going Local: Investigations and Hearings” and the new Members will also been given the opportunity to do so.
- 3.8 The manuals of guidance referred to in the training plan were produced and used both in the role play exercise and in the real hearing carried out in May 2006. Extra copies will be made for the additional Members of the Committee, however as previously explained the manuals are to be retained in Civic Hall so that they can be updated easily.
- 3.9 Reports on notable cases and Adjudication Panel case tribunal decisions are brought to every Committee meeting for consideration, as stated in the training plan.
- 3.10 Finally, the briefing session referred to on the Standards Committee Procedure Rules is currently being organised with the new Members of the Committee.

To ensure all Members understand the Committee’s relationship with external bodies/agencies

- 3.11 All Bulletins issued by the Standards Board for England are sent to Members of the Committee as soon as they are released, along with a covering email or letter to summarise the main points of interest.
- 3.12 Members of the Committee have attended the Standards Board for England Annual Assembly, and the Standards Board for England Roadshow in Leeds (details in a separate agenda item). This year places at the Annual Assembly have already been booked by Members and three Members of the Committee will be attending.
- 3.13 The briefing session referred to on the overall relationship with outside bodies is currently being organised with the new Members of the Committee.

To ensure all Members of the Committee are aware of the role and function of the Monitoring Officer

- 3.14 The Monitoring Officer continues to attend every meeting of the Standards Committee, and is able to send the Deputy Monitoring Officer as a substitute should the need arise.
- 3.15 The briefing session referred to on the role of the Monitoring Officer is currently being organised with the new Members of the Committee. It is planned that all the briefing sessions for new Members referred to in the training plan are delivered in one session.

Possible amendments to the training plan

- 3.16 Members of the Committee are asked to review the training plan and consider whether any amendments or additions need to be made. A draft updated version of the Standards Committee training plan is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

- 3.17 In relation to the Code of Conduct and local protocols, Members may wish to consider the addition of several other training methods, including the forthcoming Standards Board for England DVD on the provisions of the new Code of Conduct, the e-learning modules on the Code of Conduct and their relation to local codes and protocols issued by Leeds City Council, and the plain English guide to the local codes and protocols.
- 3.18 With regard to the local hearing skills, Members may wish to consider amending the timescales for repeating the training provided by an external facilitator to once every municipal year, or when necessary (for example if a hearing is imminent or there are new Members of the Committee).
- 3.19 Members of the Committee will note that further categories of skills have also been added to the training plan at Appendix 2. In anticipation of the changes in the Local Government and Public Health Bill due for implementation in April 2008, Members need to develop their skills in the area of filtering complaints. One of the methods through which this has been achieved is the Standards Board for England pilot project which provided Members of the Committee with real cases to work through and decide. As the timescales for completing this exercise were rather short, only a limited number of the Committee could attend. It is proposed therefore in the training plan that the exercise is repeated at a later date with similar cases for the remaining Members of the Committee. Another method will be the consideration of the complaints received at a local level and the decision of the Standards Board for England as to whether these should be referred for further investigation.
- 3.20 Finally, Members may wish to consider amending the training plan even further to include a category of skills relating to the conduct of meetings as a result of the BMG research report (detailed in a separate item on this agenda). The results of this research stated that members of standards committees considered training on the holding and chairing of meetings and the role of members on standards committees to be important in their role. It is possible that a briefing session on the role of the Committee and its terms of reference provided to Members on their appointment to the Committee may be a useful tool to address this issue. Also an e-learning module created by the IDeA Learning Pool is due to be released in October 2007 on the subject of meeting skills, which could be utilised as a method of addressing this training need.

#### **4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance**

- 4.1 Ensuring that the Committee is fully competent to carry out all of its activities supports the Council's governance arrangements, and is in line with the principles of the Member Development Strategy.

#### **5.0 Legal And Resource Implications**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications to this report.
- 5.2 There are resource implications to training carried out by external facilitators, however it is felt that these can be met from within existing budgets.

## **6.0 Conclusions**

- 6.1 This report summarises progress against the Standards Committee Training Plan adopted in January 2006 (Appendix 1), and makes proposals for amendment to the Training Plan to incorporate new training needs and new training methods.
- 6.2 The proposed updated version of the training method with the additions listed above is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

## **7.0 Recommendations**

- 7.1 Members of the Committee are asked to consider the updated training plan (Appendix 2) and offer any suggestions for further additions or amendments, particularly in view of the changes outlined in the Local Government and Public Health Bill regarding local filtering of complaints.