



Report of Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance)

Standards Committee

Date: 1st July 2008

Subject: Members' Induction Period 2008

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Executive Summary

1. It is part of the Standards Committee's responsibilities to make arrangements for training in matters relating to the Code of Conduct and local codes and protocols. This report makes Members of the Committee aware of the following issues relating to the Members' induction period:
 - New Members' declaration of acceptance of office and undertaking to comply with the Code of Conduct;
 - Information on the Members' register of interests;
 - Training of Members; and
 - Parish and Town Councils.
2. Members of the Committee are asked to note the contents of this report.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the Committee of the following issues:

- New Members' declaration of acceptance of office and undertaking to comply with the Code of Conduct;
- Information on the Members' register of interests;
- Training of Members; and
- Parish and Town Councils.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 It is part of the Standards Committee's responsibilities to review and make arrangements for training in matters relating to the Code of Conduct and local codes and protocols. This report therefore provides information about the Members' induction period for 2008.

2.2 On 2nd May 2008, 29 Councillors were re-elected and five new Councillors were elected. All 34 Members were required to complete two pieces of paperwork within 28 days. These were:

- Their declaration of acceptance of office and undertaking to comply with the Code of Conduct; and
- Their register of interests entry.

2.3 These new Members were invited to attend a series of training sessions on a variety of issues. A copy of the induction leaflet detailing the courses available is attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

3.0 Main Issues

Declaration of acceptance of office

3.1 In Leeds, all 34 Members were required to complete the following pieces of paperwork within 28 days of their election or re-election:

- their declaration of acceptance of office and undertaking to comply with the Code of Conduct; and
- their register of interests entry.

3.2 Members were provided with all forms within their induction pack, which included instructions as to where documents should be handed in and the relevant deadlines for completion.

3.3 The completed declarations of acceptance of office and compliance with the Code of Conduct are retained by Democratic Services and stored in a book. Members were required to return their form by 22nd May 2008 (prior to taking part in the annual meeting). All Members complied with this deadline.

3.4 In accordance with the report presented to the Standards Committee on 26th July 2006, a system was used to control and monitor the completion of the declarations of acceptance of office in order to comply with the relevant deadlines.

- 3.5 Although completion of the form is required prior to attendance at the annual meeting, an initial risk assessment highlighted a number of other meetings, prior to the annual meeting, that returning Members would be attending for which they would also need to have completed the declaration of acceptance. A prioritised schedule was produced highlighting key dates and Councillor attendance. The Acting Democratic Services Officer coordinated the return of completed forms and was responsible for keeping all key stakeholders fully informed with an updated position statement.

Register of Interests

- 3.6 The completed register of interests forms are retained by Governance Services. Members were required to complete and return this form within 28 days of their election or re-election. All completed register of interests forms were received by the Corporate Governance Officer or Group Office staff within the deadline.
- 3.7 A system was used to ensure that Members complied with the deadline, as was used last year. The Group Support Managers and Group Whips were involved in the process of issuing reminders to Members, reminders were issued every week during the 28 days, and in the final week reminders were issued every day to those Members who still had not returned their completed forms. This system was successful in ensuring Members did not breach the Code of Conduct.

Training for Members

- 3.8 All newly elected and existing Members were invited to take part in a series of training courses during the induction period. This programme was heavily advertised both prior to the election as well as by individual invite to the new Members, once they were known.
- 3.9 All existing Members were invited to attend three sessions during the induction. These were Introduction to Performance Management, Leeds Local Area Agreement and Strategic Plan, and Media Skills. Existing Members were sent the induction programme leaflet as part of one of their usual weekend packages of papers, and information was available on the member development notice board. The programme also appeared on the Member Development intranet site.
- 3.10 All newly elected Members are taking part in the induction programme to varying degrees and a few existing Members have indicated that they will attend some courses. Initial feedback suggests that work commitments and childcare commitments are the most common reasons for new Members being unable to take part in the induction sessions. These Members acknowledge that they had received the information in good time, but that some previous commitments were unavoidable. As in previous years, one to one sessions will be arranged to cover any key aspects of induction that have been missed (finding your feet, scrutiny, code of conduct).
- 3.11 As in previous years, a questionnaire will be sent out to Members who participated in the induction period to seek their views on how the events could be improved for the next programme. As a result of last years' questionnaire, the induction sessions have been spread out over a longer time period, and the start of the induction period was delayed until a week after the elections. An extra line was also added to the letters sent to election candidates to resolve the poor attendance faced last year:

“Please remember that the induction programme forms a vital part of your early days as a councillor and has been endorsed by party Whips. Please make a note of the dates so that you are able to attend as many events as possible if elected next month. Don’t fall into the trap of assuming you won’t be elected!”

Parish and Town Councils

- 3.12 As Members may be aware, a new Parish Council in Alwoodley was created this year and held elections in May 2008. In order to assist these new Members with the induction process, in the absence of a Clerk, an induction pack was created for Parish and Town Councils. This included:
- Checklist of forms to return
 - Declaration of acceptance of office form
 - Copy of model Members’ Code of Conduct for Parish and Town Councils
 - Register of Interests form
 - Register of Interests guidance
 - Standards Board for England Guidance on the Code of Conduct
 - Copy of the ‘Cracking the Code’ e-learning module for Parish and Town Councils
- 3.13 In order to assist these Councillors during their first meeting, the Chief Officer (Legal, Licensing and Registration) and the Acting Democratic Services Officer attended the meeting to help them complete the relevant paperwork and ensure that the correct meeting procedure was followed.
- 3.14 All new Members completed the relevant paperwork within the deadlines, and these documents are currently being kept by the Acting Democratic Services Officer until a Parish Clerk is appointed.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 4.1 Ensuring that all Members are aware of their responsibilities as Councillors, such as complying with the Code of Conduct, is essential for good governance. By providing training and assistance to Members, officers within Democratic Services ensure that all Councillors comply with their legal duties.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal or resource implications to noting this report.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 It is part of the Standards Committee’s responsibilities to make arrangements for training in matters relating to codes of conduct and protocols. This report makes Members of the Committee aware of the several issues relating to the Members’ induction period.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 Members of the Committee are asked to note the contents of this report.