



Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance)

Standards Committee

Date: 16th October 2008

Subject: Review of the Standards Committee Communications Plan

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to review the Standards Committee's Communications Plan and to seek approval of any proposed amendments.
2. In order to address the lack of awareness and understanding of the Standards Committee and its role, Corporate Communications were asked to prepare a communications plan for the Standards Committee through the Ethical Audit Action Plan. However, as the Committee already had an approved communications plan, the existing plan was instead updated to take account of new media for communication and timescales. The updated communications plan was approved on 10th October 2007.
3. The communications plan has been reviewed to ascertain whether it has been complied with and whether any amendments to the plan are required. The amended communications plan is attached as Appendix 1.
4. Members of the Committee are asked to comment on and approve the communications plan attached at Appendix 1.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to review the Standards Committee's Communications Plan and to seek approval of any proposed amendments.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 Members of the Committee first approved a communications plan for the Standards Committee and conduct issues in January 2006.

2.2 During the discussions concerning the results of the Ethical Audit 2006, several areas of concern were identified. These included:

- That a high proportion of officers don't know that the Council has a Code of Conduct for Members, meaning complaints may not get forwarded due to lack of awareness;
- A significant proportion of officers and Members are unsure whether the Council's approach encourages appropriate behaviour or is building public confidence in local democracy;
- A small proportion of Members, and a larger proportion of officers are unaware of the existence and role of Standards Committee; and
- Large numbers of Members and officers don't agree or don't know that the Standards Committee makes a positive difference to the ethical environment.

2.3 The Standards Committee chose to request that a communications plan was created for the Standards Committee to identify and segment audiences and objectives, to identify appropriate media for communication and allocate timescales (Ethical Audit Action 10a).

2.4 Following this update in October 2007, the Standards Committee has taken on its new local assessment role and it is proposed that the communications plan is updated to take account of this. This is especially important as it was revealed at the Annual Assembly last year, that the steps taken by an authority to publicise the local assessment process are likely to be something that will be considered by the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Area Assessment key lines of enquiry.

3.0 Main Issues

3.1 The Standards Committee has complied with the communications plan adopted in October 2007 overall, although the need for some specific actions, such as press releases following a Standards Committee Hearing, has not arisen.

3.2 Information regarding whether key messages have been delivered to staff through the induction process, appraisals and training will be covered in a separate report on this agenda regarding the progress of the Ethical Framework Training and Awareness Programme for officers.

3.3 It is proposed that the specific 'rough guide' for members of the public proposed in the previous action plan is abandoned because the key messages it was proposed to address are adequately communicated by other methods. If, following the public focus groups and survey conducted by Cardiff University as part of their research

project, it becomes apparent that there is low awareness of the ethical framework amongst the public in Leeds, further actions to address this could be considered.

- 3.4 Since 8th May 2008 the Standards Committee has also been responsible for the local assessment of complaints. In order that potential complainants and subject Members are aware of the new process, the Standards Committee will have to advertise it in various ways. It is therefore proposed that information relating to local assessment is added as a key message for all four audiences covered by the plan. The amendments to the communications plan are shown in bold.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 4.1 Communicating messages about the ethical agenda and the work of the Standards Committee more widely supports good governance by ensuring that all Members and officers are aware of their responsibilities.
- 4.2 Raising the profile of the ethical agenda and the Standards Committee will also contribute to the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, as it will contribute to the following key line of enquiry: "The council is proactive in raising the standards of ethical conduct among members and staff, including the provision of ethics training".

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1 There are no legal implications to this report.
- 5.2 There are resource implications to some of the communications actions listed in the report, particular with regard to press notices. However it is anticipated that these can be met from within existing resources.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 The communications plan has been reviewed to ascertain whether it has been complied with and whether any amendments to the plan are required. The amended communications plan is attached as Appendix 1 and the amendments are shown in bold type.
- 6.2 Since 8th May 2008 the Standards Committee has also been responsible for the local assessment of complaints. In order that potential complainants and subject Members are aware of the new process, the Standards Committee will have to advertise it in various ways. It is therefore proposed that information relating to local assessment is added as a key message for all four audiences covered by the plan.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 Members of the Standards Committee are asked to comment on and approve the communications plan attached at Appendix 1.

Background documents referred to in this report

"Local Filter: Countdown to 2008" speech by Patricia Hughes, Deputy Chair of the Standards Board for England at the Sixth Annual Assembly opening plenary session. Available at <http://www.annualassembly.co.uk/AnnualAssemblyarchive/2007Assembly/>

“Standards Committee Communications Plan”, report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance) to Standards Committee on 1st October 2007.

Ethical Audit Action Plan 2006