



Report of the Chief Officer Human Resources

Standards Committee

Date: 16th October 2008

Subject: Ethical Audit Action Plan: Actions for the Chief Officer Human Resources

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Executive Summary

1. This report follows on-going work arising from the Ethical Audit Action Plan and presents:
 - a) a review of recent progress;
 - b) a wider assessment of responsibilities for embedding interrelated key governance issues, including issues arising from the Ethical Audit.
2. The Standards Committee is asked to note the information provided and comment as required.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 This report deals with the consequences of the Ethical Audit Action Plan which were attributed to the Chief Officer (Human Resources) following the 2006 Ethical Audit. This sampled the views of staff graded above SO2 and who were in managerial roles. It was also followed up by a survey of staff graded below this level. Both surveys show the degree to which our work-force understands and is aware of our overall Ethical Framework.
- 1.2 This report provides information to the Committee on the steps taken here to improve this understanding. It also presents a wider set of emerging and on-going requirements for effective governance that affect the Authority as a whole. More work is needed to link themes together, but this can provide better outcomes and engagement on the Ethical Audit themes.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 The Council's Ethical Audit findings highlighted deficiencies in awareness, knowledge and skills across a number of areas. The level of Officers' exposure to issues potentially affected this. However, findings also show opportunities to promote good governance. This applied to the following:
- a) the audit findings showed that a significant proportion of officers were unaware of their responsibility to abide by the Officers' Code of Conduct
 - b) a significant proportion of Officers are 'fairly' or 'very unclear' about their responsibilities under the Ethical Framework
 - c) a significant proportion of Officers did not understand the role of the Standards Committee, or the Whistle Blowing Policy.
- 2.2 The Standards Committee requested that the Chief Officer (Human Resources) address these findings by ensuring the development of key competencies and behaviours for managers made appropriate reference to the Ethical Framework.
- 2.3 The Committee requested that progress be reported to this meeting. By undertaking this work, a number of wider themes have also emerged and these are discussed later.

3.0 Main Issues

Ethical Audit Action Plan

- 3.1 The issues raised in paragraph 2.1 are being addressed by:
- a) Manager Briefings - Using a standard briefing for HR staff to consider ethical audit findings with groups of managers
 - b) Clearer induction – updating induction materials for new staff
 - c) Developing leadership standards which include governance matters
- 3.2 In terms of specific progress the following is noted:

- a. A managers briefing has been trialled with a cross section of managers. As well as raising key issues from the ethical audit e.g. engagement with members, these prompt managers to consider their responsibilities to promote good governance. This will be a means of testing managers' understanding to develop further packages of support tailored to the needs of different managers and best delivery methods. Arrangements are now being put in place to ensure managers are able to be briefed and assess their requirements for more support and knowledge
- b. Corporate induction materials have been revised to include appropriate references to the Officers Code of Conduct, Whistle Blowing and Ethical Framework. A further review of the induction process will be used to assess the impact of these changes.
- c. New leadership standards were launched in September and will be applied as part of the appraisal process for Senior Managers (i.e. JNC staff). (See Appendix I). Section 9 of this document will be the benchmark by which managers are judged regarding their relationships with members and their wider responsibility to ensure their staff and services adhere to these standards.
- d. In addition, the importance of good officer/member relationships were raised at the "Good to Great" Conference this last month. The 300 most senior managers and a cross section of members attended this.

The Wider Governance Context

- 3.3 The above work addresses specific issues which are important to the work of the Standards Committee. Some feedback suggests there could be greater benefits and engagement by having a more combined focus across a converging set of governance issues. This means improvements can fit with:
- cultural change and leadership developments e.g. leadership standards and managers responsibilities for improving awareness and setting standards.
 - Understandings and applications of key service conditions – e.g. the Code of Conduct
 - Developing relevant technical skills that are needed by Officers to underpin good governance in other areas:
 - i. Managing projects to our "Delivering Successful Change" standards,
 - ii. Promoting good employment and equality practice,
 - iii. procurement and financial management.
- 3.4 Further work is being carried out to ensure a more comprehensive framework is in place to cover this. It will also set out requirements different types of staff i.e.
- Chief Officers/Heads of Service
 - Middle Managers
 - Professional/Specialist Officers

- Other staff¹

3.5 As well as identifying the skills, behaviour and knowledge needed, requirements would also identify how different groups would be either:

- Accountable or responsible for ensuring issues are embedded
- Informed and consulted on matters to ensure adequate understanding and “buy-in”.

4.0 Implications for Council Policy and Governance

4.1 This report addressed a range of governance themes; aiming to improve our approach and good governance culture.

5.0 Legal and Resource Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications. However it will be necessary to consider how existing funding is prioritised to meet development requirements. This will be done through normal processes whereby services review development needs.

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 Responding to the Ethical Audit Action plan has presented an opportunity to work more widely across common governance issues. As with many training and development requirements, this also should be considered as a continuous need; and not a one-off initiative. To provide sustained and continuous improvement, work will also focus on core governance issues and to develop solutions that are applied as an on-going effort. Specifically Learning Development managers will be required to take this work forward; with the intention that good governance is central to the Council’s new culture and way of working.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 Members of the Standards Committee are asked to note:

- the specific position regarding Ethical Governance awareness
- how this work is being used to strengthen overall approaches to embed good governance.

Background documents

Ethical Audit Action Plan 2006

¹ This later group would cover the staff graded below SO2 who were the subject of the last Ethical Audit.