



Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance)

Standards Committee

Date: 17th February 2009

Subject: Standards Committee Training 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 seek Members' comments on the amended Standards Committee training plan, and to seek the Committee's approval of the updated plan.
2. The training plan (attached as Appendix 1) contains details of training to be provided to new Members of the Committee as well as regular training for all Members. Members of the Committee identified possible omissions from the training plan at their Committee meeting on 16th December 2008, specifically in relation to Parish and Town Council Members understanding the role of Leeds City Councillors.
3. Members of the Standards Committee are asked to:
 - consider whether to include the additional training suggested in the report and whether the training methods proposed sufficiently address these training needs; and
 - approve the amended plan attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members' comments on the amended Standards Committee training plan, and to seek the Committee's approval of the updated plan.

2.0 Background Information

2.1 The Ethical Audit undertaken by the Audit Commission in 2004¹ 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. The plan was last reviewed and updated in October 2007 to take account of the Committee's new local assessment functions.

2.3 As a result of the experiences of the new local assessment process, and the fact that Parish and Town Council Members have been involved in every Assessment and Review Sub-Committee so far (even though only two complaints had related to a Parish and Town Councillor), Members of the Committee felt that it may be appropriate for the Parish and Town Council Members to be trained on the role of a Leeds City Councillor.

3.0 Main Issues

3.1 The Standards Committee's current training plan focuses on the following aims:

1. To ensure all members have an understanding of the Code of Conduct and various protocols governing member and officer relations;
2. To ensure all members have the necessary skills to conduct a local hearing;
3. To ensure all members of the Committee are aware of the role and function of the Monitoring Officer;
4. To ensure all members of the Committee have the necessary skills to consider / filter local complaints;
5. To ensure all external members of the Committee have the necessary awareness of Council business and political context;
6. To ensure all independent members of the Committee have the necessary skills to chair meetings of the Committee; and
7. To ensure all members of the Committee are aware of current issues for the Committee and the context of the Committee's work.

3.2 It is proposed that the fifth aim could be amended to read "To ensure all external members of the Committee have the necessary awareness of Council business, the political context, and the role of a City Councillor". This amendment is reflected in the training plan attached as Appendix 1.

¹ Audit Commission report, "Setting High Ethical Standards: Leeds City Council".

- 3.3 External members of the Committee are already advised to attend meetings of Full Council and other selected Committees to observe proceedings in order to gain an understanding of how meetings work. However, it was proposed at the Standards Committee meeting on 16th December 2008, that external members of the Committee could “shadow” City Councillors in other areas of their work, such as ward surgeries.
- 3.4 It is proposed that the Parish and Independent Members of the Committee could attend the ward surgeries of the City Councillors on the Standards Committee in the first instance, and then if further training is required, other Councillors could be approached and asked to take part, for example by asking for volunteers through Group meetings or advertising the scheme in ‘Governance Matters’.
- 3.5 External members of the Committee attending these ward surgeries will need to be aware that they will only be able to observe at these surgeries if the member of the public agrees to a third party being present. Observers will also need to be aware that they should not participate in the surgery or provide opinions on the matters under discussion.
- 3.6 The list of other available training has been reviewed and one addition has been made regarding training on filtering local complaints. It is proposed that a training day with an external facilitator be arranged to encompass both local assessment and hearings. This will be repeated annually or earlier if necessary. The first of the sessions will be arranged after the Standards Committee membership has been reviewed by Full Council and appropriate action taken.

- 3.7 Members of the Committee are asked to identify any other areas of the training plan requiring improvement.

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.
- 4.2 In addition, training external members of the Committee on the role of a City Councillor will assist City Councillors who are the subject of a complaint to feel that the local assessment process is fair.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1 There will be resource implications in relation to the training day with an external facilitator, however these costs can be met from within existing resources.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 At the Standards Committee meeting on 16th December 2008, Members of the Committee suggested that external members of the Committee may be assisted in assessing local complaints by having a fuller understanding of the role of a Leeds City Councillor.
- 6.2 It was proposed that external members of the Committee could “shadow” City Councillors in other areas of their work, such as ward surgeries. It is proposed that the Parish and Independent Members of the Committee could attend the ward surgeries of the City Councillors on the Standards Committee in the first instance,

and then if further training is required, other Councillors could be approached and asked to take part.

- 6.3 The list of available training has been reviewed and one addition has been made regarding training on filtering local complaints. It is proposed that a training day with an external facilitator be arranged to encompass both local assessment and hearings. This will be repeated annually or earlier if necessary.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 Members of the Standards Committee are asked to:
- consider whether to include the additional training suggested in the report and whether the training methods proposed sufficiently address these training needs; and
 - approve the amended plan attached at Appendix 1 to this report.

Background Documents

- Minutes of the Standards Committee meeting held on 16th December 2008.