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Leeds
CITY COUNCIL

Report of the Chief Officer Human Resources

Standards Committee

Date: 8th July 2009

Subject: Ethical Audit Action Plan: Human Resource Issues

Electoral Wards Affected:	Specific Implications For:
	Equality and Diversity ☐
	Community Cohesion ☐
☐ Ward Members consulted (referred to in report)	Narrowing the Gap ☐

Executive Summary

1. This report updates on-going work arising from the Ethical Audit Action Plan and presents:

   a) a review of progress regarding development programmes to raise awareness and understanding; and

   b) a preview of the next Staff Survey which will be an opportunity to refresh our information on Officers' understanding of ethical governance issues.

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.

1.2   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.

1.3   This report provides updated information to the Committee on the steps being taken to improve and evaluate this understanding.

2.0   Background Information

2.1   The Council's Ethical Audit findings highlighted gaps in awareness, knowledge and skills across a number of areas. The findings show opportunities to promote good governance. This applied to the following:

- the audit findings showed that a significant proportion of officers were unaware of their responsibility to abide by the Officers' Code of Conduct;

- a significant proportion of Officers are 'fairly' or 'very unclear' about their responsibilities under the Ethical Framework; and

- a significant proportion of Officers did not understand the role of the Standards Committee, or the Whistle Blowing Policy.

2.2   In consequence, the Standards Committee requested that the Chief Officer (Human Resources) address these findings by ensuring:

- awareness was better promoted; and

- this was embedded, i.e. that 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.

3.0   Main Issues

Ethical Audit Action Plan

3.1   The issues raised in paragraph 2.1 are being specifically addressed by:

- Manager Briefings - Using a standard briefing for managers to consider ethical audit findings; and in turn to brief their teams;

- Clearer induction – updating induction materials and programmes for new staff; and

- Developing leadership standards which include governance matters; and

- Developing a set of core competencies which are allied to the above standards, but provide more detail regarding specific skills and knowledge managers need to have at all levels.

3.2   In terms of specific progress the following is noted:

Manager Briefings

3.3   As indicated in paragraph 2.1, the low level of managerial awareness encompassed knowledge and understanding of ethical governance matters. One method of increasing this is to provide briefings for managers that are designed to make issues relevant to their jobs and to promote discussion. For example, by considering various scenarios that managers may encounter helps increase their awareness and guide them to seeking appropriate advice.

3.4   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 also prompt managers to consider their responsibilities to promote good governance with their staff.

3.5   Although there have been delays in rolling-out this programme out, this work has now been refined and will be run on a regular basis. This will be a means of testing managers' understanding and to develop further training packages of support tailored to the needs of different managers.

3.6   Allied to the role of briefing managers, is a need to also set standards against which managers can be measured against and where necessary developed if their understanding, performance or even behaviours are deficient. This is part of the embedding process raised in paragraph 2.

3.7   To underpin this a set of core competencies have also been developed. These will be linked to appraisals and rolled out over the next 12 months and enable a more target development of staff. Further work will also be undertaken to provide resources to maintain and sustain this development activity.

Induction

3.8   As well as dealing with our current staff, the Council has volume staff turnover. This means it is also necessary to stress issues with new joiners whilst they are receptive, and the induction process can be used to achieve this.

3.9   Corporate induction materials are regularly updated. Standard Induction checklists include direct references to the Officers Code of Conduct and its key features, plus information on the role of Councillors and decision making. This was introduced in April 2008. Around 1900 staff who newly joined the Council should have been inducted by managers who were required to reference the above.

3.10   A further review of the induction process has now also been completed, with the programme revamped to meet common corporate standards. This has been introduced on a phased basis by directorates since October 2008. So far it is estimated that around 500 new joiners this year will have been through this programme which makes references the above mentioned themes.

Leadership Standards and 360 Degree Appraisal Results

3.11   A further element of embedding ethical governance has been to focus on accountability and performance of the most senior managers in the Council; who, as leaders, are responsible for setting the tone and direction. This is being assessed and measured.

3.12   Leadership standards were launched in September 2008 and were reported to this Committee. Since then a 360 Degree Appraisal programme has been undertaken for all JNC 350 plus staff. This measures staff performance against standards.

3.13   So far results have been received for all staff graded up to JNC 52.5%, which forms a major part of the core of senior officers who work regularly with Members.

3.14   These results are based on each officer undertaking a self assessment, combined with assessments from up to 9 other participants which include:

- Staff reporting to them;
- Their manager;
- Peers; and
- Partners and other stakeholders, which may include Members.

3.15   Appendix 1 details responses in terms of the key questions that relate to governance. In broad terms Officers at this level suggest there is a good level of understanding and display of behaviours that promote effective Officer-Member relationships.

3.16   The outcomes of the 360 feedback have been given to Officers and their line managers; who are required to discuss them. As part of the embedding of the management standards, the feedback will be further discussed as part of a common appraisal process. In turn, this will identify any Offices that need to further develop their knowledge and experience or make sure that their staff are supported and can do this. Also more work is being undertaken to review the Council wide position; looking at Directorates and Service areas.

Staff Survey 2009

3.17   Whilst the above work shows some progress to embedding and evaluating changes, it is planned to also re-assess the position on governance across the whole work-force. This will be done using by using the Staff Survey.

3.18   This survey is undertaken on an 18-month cycle to coincide with the Council's 3-Year Business Plan. The survey is sent to all 17,000 staff and normally gets around a 40% return rate, which is high compared to other Councils.

3.19   The survey is used to provide a variety of information regarding how staff view their working lives and their understanding of the Council. This includes measures that show levels of motivation and satisfaction across the work-force.

3.20   This year new questions have been included to cover Ethical Audit themes. Due to the nature of the survey, which is wide-ranging, the Ethical Audit cannot be replicated. However the key themes can be raised.

3.21   Attached at Appendix 2 are the questions that have been devised to cover these. These have been designed in consultation with Corporate Governance to ensure proper coverage is given to issues, whilst maintaining a good fit with the other questions covered in the survey. Thus although not as a detailed as the Ethical Audit, this survey provides an opportunity to capture perceptions against key issues

3.22   The survey was launched in June and will close in July; with results available in October. The issues raised on ethical governance will be presented back to this Committee in due course and will be an assessment of progress

4.0   Implications for Council Policy and Governance

4.1   These improvements are designed to further develop and embed the Council's Ethical framework.

5.0   Legal and Resource Implications

5.1   On-going consideration will be given to how learning and development budgets are used to support and sustain the work identified above. This will require managers across the Council to prioritise issues accordingly.

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 initiatives, it is important that evaluation is undertaken. This report shows some emerging findings and sets out next steps in this process.

7.0   Recommendations

7.1   Members of the Standards Committee are asked to note:

- the specific position regarding Ethical Governance awareness raising;

- how this work is being used to strengthen overall approaches to embed good governance and emerging findings arising from senior Officer appraisals, and;

- Plans to survey all staff and to feedback results.

7.2   It is also recommended a follow up report is presented to the Committee which will show:

- the full position on the senior Manager 360 Appraisal, and

- Staff survey results.

Background documents

Ethical Audit Action Plan 2006