



Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance)

Standards Committee

Date: 8th July 2009

Subject: Standards Board for England Annual Return 2009

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 notify Members of the Standards Committee of the new requirement to produce an annual return for the Standards Board for England. A copy of this year's return is attached as Appendix 1 for Members' information.
2. The annual return is part of a statutory requirement to provide information to the Standards Board which is stipulated in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Collecting information on how local authorities are supporting ethical conduct is part of the Standards Board's role in ensuring the effectiveness of local standards arrangements.
3. This year's annual return was submitted to the Standards Board in June 2009. Once this information is submitted the Standards Board suggest that it is shared with the Standards Committee and the Full Council, and possibly published on the Council's website.
4. The Standards Board will use this information to develop their guidance and to identify examples of good practice, as well as share it with the Audit Commission to be used as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment.
5. Members of the Standards Committee are asked to:
 - Note the information in the annual return (attached as Appendix 1 to this report; and
 - Consider whether they wish to publish this information with the Annual Report on the Council's website.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to notify Members of the Standards Committee of the new requirement to produce an annual return for the Standards Board for England. A copy of this year's return is attached as Appendix 1 for Members' information.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 The annual return is part of a statutory requirement to provide information to the Standards Board which is stipulated in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Collecting information on how local authorities are supporting ethical conduct is part of the Standards Board's role in ensuring the effectiveness of local standards arrangements.
- 2.2 This year's annual return was submitted to the Standards Board in June 2009. Before the final version was submitted to the Standards Board it was shared with the Monitoring Officer and the Chair of the Standards Committee for comments and amendments. A copy of the final version is attached as Appendix 1 to the this report for Members' information.
- 2.3 Once this information is submitted the Standards Board suggest that it is shared with the Standards Committee and the Full Council, and possibly published on the Council's website.

3.0 Main Issues

- 3.1 The purpose of the annual return is to find out what arrangements each authority has in place to ensure and promote high ethical standards. The return asks questions about the way the authority supports ethical standards as a whole, not just how it handles complaints. The annual return is also an opportunity for each authority to inform the Standards Board of their particular achievements and successes in supporting and promoting the ethical framework.
- 3.2 The Monitoring Officer is required to submit quarterly returns to the Standards Board about the complaints which have been received and how they have been dealt with. The annual return complements the quarterly return, by asking about the ethical environment in the Council and requesting information which will allow the Standards Board to understand the culture and wider governance arrangements within the Council.
- 3.3 The questions in the annual return will change each year in line with the development of the framework. The Council was required to provide information about the following topics to complete this year's return:
- The role of the standards committee
 - The annual report of the standards committee
 - What the standards committee does to promote standards
 - Training
 - Leadership
 - Complaints
 - Member / officer relations
 - Registering interests
 - Officer conduct

- 3.4 The Standards Board have stated that the information collected in the annual returns will be used to drive up performance, champion the work of standards committees, and to ensure that they have an effective overview of local standards frameworks. In particular the Standards Board will:
- Collect notable practice examples of standards committee activities which they will then disseminate.
 - Identify national gaps in local standards frameworks. A national overview of the local operation of the standards framework would enable the Standards Board to identify strengths and weaknesses of local standards frameworks and mitigate some risks in their operation by prompting where they should be producing guidance or seeking policy changes in response to any emerging national trends.
 - Identify local gaps in local standards frameworks. This would enable the Standards Board to identify those authorities who could be experiencing difficulties and may require support and advice.
 - Build profiles of individual authorities which can be used as background information when the Standards Board are engaging with an authority.
 - Share information with the Audit Commission to enable them to complete their organisational assessments. The Audit Commission will use the annual return information to form the basis of their assessment of local authorities under the Use of Resources Key Line of Enquiry in the new Comprehensive Area Assessment.

Matters arising from the questions in the annual return

- 3.5 Prompted by some of the questions in the annual return, the following areas for development have been identified:
- The use of press releases.
 - The circulation of the Annual Report amongst senior officers of the Council.
 - Quarterly meetings between the Chair of the Standards Committee and the leaders of all the political groups within the Council.
 - The Chair's attendance at meetings of the Full Council.

Next Steps

- 3.6 Once the annual return has been completed and shared with the Standards Committee, the Standards Board suggest the following actions:
- Publishing the completed annual return on the Council's website – The Standards Board believe that this would show transparency and is an opportunity to promote the work the Standards Committee are doing to integrate ethical standards in Leeds City Council. If Members were minded to do so, this information could be published alongside the Annual Report.
 - Forwarding the annual return to the Full Council – The Full Council are due to receive the Standards Committee Annual Report 2008/09 at their next meeting on 15th July 2009. The annual return will be forwarded to the Full Council at the same time, in accordance with the Standards Board's advice. In future years the Annual Return will be included within the Annual Report to avoid any duplication.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

4.1 The information in the annual return contributes to the Use of Resources element of the Comprehensive Area Assessment, as the information is shared with the Audit Commission and will form the basis of the Audit Commission's assessment of each authority.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

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

6.0 Conclusions

6.1 The annual return is part of a statutory requirement to provide information to the Standards Board which is stipulated in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. Collecting information on how local authorities are supporting ethical conduct is part of the Standards Board's role in ensuring the effectiveness of local standards arrangements.

6.2 This year's annual return was submitted to the Standards Board in June 2009. Once this information is submitted the Standards Board suggest that it is shared with the Standards Committee and the Full Council, and possibly published on the Council's website.

6.3 The Standards Board will use this information to develop their guidance and to identify examples of good practice, as well as share it with the Audit Commission to be used as part of the Comprehensive Area Assessment.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 Members of the Standards Committee are asked to:

- Note the information in the annual return (attached as Appendix 1 to this report); and
- Consider whether they wish to publish this information with the Annual Report on the Council's website.

Background Documents

Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007

Standards Committee (England) Regulations 2008

Council Procedure Rules (Part 4a – Leeds City Council Constitution)

Standards Board for England website: <http://www.standardsboard.gov.uk>