



Report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services

Standards Committee

Date: 21st December 2006

Subject: Ethical Audit 2006: Preliminary Results

Electoral Wards Affected:

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the Committee of the response statistics for the survey and some preliminary results from the questionnaires.
2. The response rate to the survey was very good, amounting to 49% overall. Some snapshots of the results can be seen in the report, split into Members, Officers, Members and Officers, and Parish and Town Councillors and Clerks.
3. A full version of the aggregated results is currently being prepared by the Audit Commission, and once this is available and has been analysed, an action plan will be formulated.
4. Members of the Committee are asked to note the contents of the report.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Committee of the number of responses received to the ethical audit questionnaire and some preliminary results from the survey.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 At the Committee meeting on 26th July 2006 Members of the Standards Committee received a report regarding the planned ethical audit and how it would be conducted. Following on from this all Members of the Standards Committee were asked to attend the launch event on 26th September 2006 as the 'champions' of the project.
- 2.2 The questionnaire was officially opened on Tuesday 26th September 2006 and remained open until Friday 3rd November 2006. All Members and Co-opted Members of the Council were asked to participate along with a sample of officers from each department above grade S01. In addition, all Parish and Town Councillors and Clerks were asked to take part in the survey, although these results are considered separately from those of Leeds City Councillors and officers.

3.0 Main Issues

Number of responses

- 3.1 Out of the 109 Members of the Council (including 10 Co-opted Members) asked to complete the survey, 44 Members responded. This amounts to a 40% response rate for Members. This is a vast improvement over the last ethical audit conducted in October 2004, which was based on only 7 responses from Members.
- 3.2 1011 officers were asked to take part in the survey, including a sample for Education Leeds. 502 officers responded, amounting to a 50% response rate for officers. This compares favourably to the Leeds City Council Staff Survey which achieved a response rate of 37% in 2005.
- 3.3 Overall, the survey had a 49% response rate, which is 12% higher than that achieved by North Yorkshire County Council. In addition, 8 Parish and Town Council Clerks and 24 Parish and Town Councillors responded to the survey, although these results are being considered separately as the questions had to be amended in order to make the survey useable for these groups.

Members' responses

- 3.4 In the Members only section of the survey, Members were asked about the Code of Conduct, the ethical agenda, the Standards Committee, their opinions of the training provided on standards issues, and the Registers of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality. Their answers to the questions can be seen in the table in Appendix A to this report.
- 3.5 The survey results show a high level of awareness amongst Members of the Members Code of Conduct, although some confusion as to whether the Council has also adopted a Code of Conduct for officers. Approximately a third of Members who responded either did not know or felt sure that the Council did not have a Code of Conduct for officers. This shows a need to publicise the officers' Code of Conduct more widely.

- 3.6 Over three quarters of Members either agreed strongly or tended to agree that the Council's approach to promoting high ethical standards was encouraging good behaviour throughout the Council. Although they were less sure that this approach was also helping to build public confidence in democracy with over a quarter disagreeing.
- 3.7 When asked about the Standards Committee over 90% of Members agreed strongly that it existed, although when asked questions about its role and performance they became less confident, with over 20% disagreeing that the Committee makes a positive difference to the ethical environment of the authority, or adds value to the work of the authority.
- 3.8 Members were generally positive about the training they receive on conduct issues, but with only 22.7% agreeing strongly, there is room for improvement.
- 3.9 Finally, the results show a good awareness of the Register of Interests and Gifts and Hospitality with all Members agreeing that they existed and that they were reminded to complete them regularly. The only question where Members expressed any doubt was the question regarding whether the Register of Gifts and Hospitality was reviewed regularly, but this could be because the report to the Standards Committee is made on an annual basis.

Officers' responses

- 3.10 In the officers only section of the survey, officers were asked questions about the Codes of Conduct, how to report a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct, the ethical agenda, and the Standards Committee. The answers to these questions can be seen in the table in Appendix B to this report.
- 3.11 The results show that 80% of officers are aware that there is a Code of Conduct which applies to them. Although further work may be needed to address the fact that 17% of officers are unable to say whether a Code exists or not.
- 3.12 The response to the survey shows that the majority of officers would know what to do if they became aware of a Member having breached the Code, with 69% saying that they would approach the Monitoring Officer.
- 3.13 Over 65% of officers are clear about their responsibilities under the ethical framework, and over half of officers are confident that the Council's approach to promoting high standards is encouraging appropriate behaviour and building public confidence in democracy.
- 3.14 Compared to Members, officers are far less aware of the Standards Committee and its operations. Over half of officers could not answer questions regarding the role of the Standards Committee and whether its work was making a difference to the Council. However the number of officers expressing a negative opinion about the Committee and its work was very small indeed.

Responses of Members and officers

- 3.15 The majority of the questions in the survey were addressed to both Members and officers. These questions related to issues surrounding Member/officer relations, leadership, bullying, and common goals.

- 3.16 The results in Appendix C show that overall senior officers score more highly than Members in terms of showing respect and setting a good example. Only 29% believe that the Leader of the Council is always a positive role model as oppose to 53% who think that the Chief Executive is. However over half of those surveyed feel that communication between Members and officers is always or usually positive and constructive.
- 3.17 Finally, the majority of those who responded felt that Members worked well with each other, Members and officers worked well together, and that the Council worked well with its various partners in order to achieve the area's common goals.

Parish and Town Councils

- 3.18 The surveys distributed to Parish and Town Councils were amended slightly from the ones distributed to Leeds City Council Members and Officers. This was because not all questions made sense when applied to a Parish or Town Council.
- 3.19 However some useful information can still be taken from these surveys. The results show that 87.5% of Parish and Town Councillors are aware that their Council has adopted a Members' Code of Conduct and that they have agreed to abide by it. There is also good awareness of the existence of the Standards Committee, although almost 30% of those who responded disagreed that the work of the Committee added value to their Council.
- 3.20 The majority of Parish Councillors agreed that the training provided on conduct issues was appropriate, although 25% didn't know. This may be due to the lack of take up amongst the Parishes.

Further analysis

- 3.21 The Audit Commission is currently producing a full aggregated version of the results, which will be used to formulate an action plan. Initially the action plan will be discussed at the Corporate Governance Officer Group whose purpose is to review the adequacy of the Council's corporate governance arrangements. This action plan will address any shortcomings identified in the survey and meet any recommendations from the Audit Commission.
- 3.22 It is proposed that this action plan will be submitted to the Corporate Management Team for discussion and comment prior to its being publicised together with the full outcome of the survey at a meeting of the Standards Committee before the end of this municipal year. The Standards Committee will then monitor progress against the action plan for the remainder of the 2006/07 municipal year, and the 2007/08 municipal year.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 4.1 The Council Plan for the 2006/07 Municipal Year states:-

“The council has an ethical framework which fosters a culture of behaviour based on shared values, ethical principles and good conduct. The Council does this by establishing and keeping under review separate codes of conduct for councillors and for employees and additional protocols which govern the

relationship between them. The council has also appointed a Standards Committee with responsibilities for promoting and monitoring the framework. In 2006/07 the council will, building on previous work done by the Audit Commission, undertake an in-depth 'ethical audit' so as to enable the council to benchmark itself against other councils and help focus further development of ethical framework."

The completion of the ethical audit is therefore in accordance with the Council Plan.

- 4.2 The completion of the ethical audit also contributes to good governance in the Council by ensuring that all Members and officers are aware of their responsibilities under the ethical framework.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

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

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 Overall, the survey had a 49% response rate, which is 12% higher than that achieved by North Yorkshire County Council. In addition, 8 Parish and Town Council Clerks and 24 Parish and Town Councillors responded to the survey.

- 6.2 The Audit Commission is currently working on a full aggregated version of the results, but the report above contains some useful 'headline' results and some preliminary analysis.

- 6.3 The full version of the results will be used to formulate an action plan. Initially the action plan will be discussed at the Corporate Governance Officer Group whose purpose is to review the adequacy of the Council's corporate governance arrangements. This action plan will address any shortcomings identified in the survey and meet any recommendations from the Audit Commission.

- 6.4 It is proposed that this action plan will be submitted to the Corporate Management Team for discussion and comment prior to its being publicised together with the full outcome of the survey at a meeting of the Standards Committee before the end of this municipal year. The Standards Committee will then monitor progress against the action plan for the remainder of the 2006/07 municipal year, and the 2007/08 municipal year.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 Members of the Committee are asked to note the contents of this report and the appendices.