



Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
All Wards - Corporate Issue

FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:
Standards Committee

3 October 2007

Ethical Governance - Review and Initial Action Plan

Report of the Corporate Director of Resources

1. Purpose of Report

This is a discussion paper which provides a background to reviewing key elements of ethical governance within the City Council, particularly in relation to the management of standards for Elected Members. It identifies the actions necessary to ensure the maintenance of the highest standards.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to discuss the actions contained in paragraph 3.5 and agree whether they wish to pursue these.

3. Report

3.1 Appropriate standards of conduct form an essential element of ethical governance in relation to both Members and officers and is at the heart of public confidence within the local democratic process. This report reviews, in particular, those elements which relate primarily to the maintenance of the standards of conduct by Elected Members.

3.2 In considering this topic, there are a number of questions which are perhaps pertinent.

(i) Do members (and officers) have access to all the relevant information/guidance that they need to do the job properly?

(ii) How easy is it to:

- declare an interest
- register an interest
- claim expenses
- offer and/or receive hospitality.

How clear are the Members about the systems and processes involved?

(iii) To what extent are ethics in the council assessed or monitored?

- (iv) To what extent are members aware of the protocols within the Council, for example IT, allowances and expenses?
- (v) Has a lack of guidance led people to fail to follow set procedures?
- (vi) To what extent are suppliers/contractors aware of the standards of behaviour expected of council officers and members?
- (vii) How easy is it for members to invoke the whistle blowing policy?

3.3 In the Council term just ended, the political composition and, at times exact balance of the Council, perhaps understandably led to the sharp political and personal interaction which was at times in evidence. The significant changes in the Council, with 25 new Members, and a changed political composition of the Council does, nevertheless lead to a revised set of challenges if ethical standards are to be maintained.

3.4 Whilst much time is spent on Member training and induction, including mandatory training on the revised Code of Member Conduct, operable within the Council from 30th September 2007, there are a range of issues covering ethical standards, referred to in the above questions, which also need to be addressed. As new Members are, understandably, on a steep learning curve with their new role, it is appropriate to introduce such matters over a period of time. As a first step, therefore, having regards to experience to date, it is recommended that the work be undertaken to review, codify and make as accessible as possible for Members the relevant information regarding their ethical conduct.

3.5 Incorporating suggestions put forward at the recent Members Code of Conduct Training, the following actions are, therefore, proposed for member consideration:

- a) Consideration of a specific Web/Intranet presence for Members on Policies, Procedures and Information relevant to Members. This would include either directly or through links, access to
 - the Council Constitution
 - Members Allowances Scheme
 - Code of Conduct
 - Political Conventions
 - Register of Members Interests
 - Whistle-blowing procedure
 - ICT Procedures and Protocols.
- b) Production of a pocket reference guide to the Revised Code of Conduct.
- c) Issue to all Members a copy of their Register of Members Interests, including gifts, updated each time their registrable entry changes.
- d) Review the documentation used by Members to, for example, Register Gifts and Hospitality to ensure easy to use systems are in place.

- 3.6** The Audit Commission are about to carry out an audit of Ethical Governance within the Council, as part of the annual audit programme. This will involve a survey of all members and the top 3 tiers of management. In addition to this, key members and officers will be interviewed to get a more detailed view of the Council's approach to Ethical Governance. The findings of the audit will then be used to form an action plan to further our approach to maintaining the highest standards in Leicester. This will be reported back to the Standards Committee early in the new year.
- 3.7** The Audit Commission's Annual Use of Resources Statement recommended that the Council should "Undertake a formal proactive review of standards of officers' and members' conduct (e.g. analysis of complaints, review of registers of interest, gifts, hospitality etc) ensuring appropriate action to address any areas of concern". Some of the steps outlined above will form part of this action and will also be reported back to the Standards Committee in the new year.

4. FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

4.1. Financial Implications

None.

4.2 Legal Implications

Any action agreed by the Standards Committee needs to be included in the Corporate Governance Action Plan.

5. Other Implications

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph Within Supporting information	References
Equal Opportunities			
Policy			
Sustainable and Environmental			
Crime and Disorder			
Human Rights Act			
Elderly/People on Low Income			

6. Background Papers – Local Government Act 1972

Ethical Governance Toolkit – IdeA and The Standards Board for England.

7. Consultations

None.

8. Report Author

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