

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE 9th OCTOBER 2008

FEEDBACK AND ACTION PLANS ARISING FROM THE ETHICS SURVEY 2008

JOINT REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR: RESOURCES and THE MONITORING OFFICER

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To present to the Standards Committee the results of the Ethics Survey undertaken in March 2008.
- 1.2 To agree the action plans for officers and members.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That members note the results of the survey outlined in the report and appendices.
- 2.2 Agree the officer action plan outlined in Appendix A; and
- 2.3 Agree the member action plan outlined in Appendix B.

3. SUMMARY

- 3.1 The Council has a Code of Good Governance and high standards of conduct and behaviour are integral to it. The Council's high standards of ethics and conduct are underlined by the Member and Officer Codes of Conduct. However, the Council cannot be complacent and it is important to continually identify any areas where development and improvement can be made.
- 3.2 The Ethics, Standards and Conduct Survey was completed in March 2008 in order to achieve this. The original timetable for the survey was September 2007 but as many new members had joined the Council in May 2007 it was delayed to provide more meaningful results. The results from the survey were available in May 2008 and would have been reported earlier but have been delayed due to the CPA, JAR and Use of Resources review.
- 3.3 The survey was based on an Audit Commission/IDEA questionnaire which was updated to reflect Telford & Wrekin terminology and practice. KPMG in their feedback on the Use of Resources 2006/07 recommended that the survey should be undertaken. They will be provided with the results and action plan following agreement by Directors as part of the Use of Resources 2007/08.

4. PREVIOUS MINUTES

- 4.1 None

5. INFORMATION

- 5.1 The Audit Commission/IDEA survey was updated to reflect T&W terminology and circulated electronically to 52 members and 143 officers (Directors, Heads of Service and

Business Managers) in March 2008. Hard copy surveys were provided to a handful of members. 33 were completed by members (63% response) and 100 by officers (70% response). This level of response provides us with sound data on which to take action.

5.2 The survey asked members and officers specific questions and then some generic questions. There was also some free format questions for additional comments. Information was also collected on how long officers and members had been at the Council to see if there were any trends in responses.

5.3 Specific questions were asked of officers and members about:

- a) Codes of conduct
- b) Understanding of the appropriate codes of conduct
- c) Standards and Audit Committee (see 5.4 below)
- d) Speak Up (whistle blowing policy)
- e) Training
- f) Conflicts of interest

The same questions were asked in these areas:

- g) Leadership
- h) Communications
- i) Relationships
- j) Accountability
- k) Management of Standards
- l) Team working and co-operation
- m) Partnership working

5.4 The questionnaire asked about the Standards and Audit Committee because that was the committee at that time which was responsible for standards within the Council. Now that the committees have been separated any actions for the committee will mean the Standards Committee as standards, ethics and conduct are key parts of their terms of reference. However, there maybe some actions for the Audit Committee due to their governance role and to raise awareness of their activities following the separation.

5.5 The results are very positive for both officers and members and they confirm the high understanding of standards, ethics and conduct within the Council. Overall the member results were slightly more positive than the officer results. There were no trends in answers arising from how long an officer or member had been with the Council.

5.6 OFFICER ANALYSIS

5.6.1 Appendix C shows a summary of the results for officers. As the appendix shows the results show a good understanding and appreciation of the high standards of ethics and behaviour required by the Council and the public. The areas where officers were less sure were around the political arena with many officers not knowing about the Member Code of Conduct (from a member and officer perspective), how members worked together and whether the Monitoring Officer could effectively undertake his role. Over 44% did not know whether the whistle blowing (Speak Up) policy is used appropriately or without fear of reprisal. Although officers were aware of the Standards and Audit Committee they were unsure of its operation and effectiveness. Over 34% indicated that they had not received Human Rights training.

5.7 MEMBER ANALYSIS

5.7.1 Appendix D shows a summary of the results for members. As the appendix shows the results show a good understanding and appreciation of the high standards of ethics and behaviour required by the Council and the public. The areas where members were less sure were around conflicts of interest, training on Freedom of Information and Data Protection, whether the Standards and Audit Committee is working effectively and making a positive difference. Over one fifth did not know if there is a whistle blowing (Speak Up) policy and similar percentage whether it is used appropriately or without fear of reprisal.

6. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

AREA	COMMENTS
Equal Opportunities	The survey was circulated as appropriate to meet the equality requirements of those completing it. It also asked questions about understanding of equalities legislation.
Environmental Impact	None
Legal Implications	The functions of the Standards Committee and the terms of the members' Code of Conduct are set out in legislation and also addressed in guidance from the Standards Board for England. All elected members should be familiar with both their obligations under the Code of Conduct and the role of the Standards Committee. The results and actions arising from the survey will help to ensure that members and officers of the Council continue to understand the legal requirements of administering the ethical framework.
Links with Corporate Priorities	Acting on the survey results helps the Council to achieve Priority 7: An Efficient, Effective and Customer-Focused Council that delivers Value-For-Money for the Community. The action plan contributes to good governance and the Council's desire to ensure sound conduct and ethical behaviour by all.
Financial Implications	There are no financial implications arising from this report. The implementation of the actions within the action plans will be met from within existing budgets.
Opportunities and Risks	The opportunities and risks from the survey results have been identified and are being managed appropriately.
Ward Implications	District wide implications.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Ethics, Standards and Conduct Survey Results May 2008

Report prepared by Jenny Marriott – Audit & Risk Manager Tel: 01952 383101.

APPENDIX A

Ethics Survey Action Plan for Officers

No.	Action	Responsible	By when
1.	Political Awareness Master Class to raise officer awareness of member's roles and responsibilities, how they operate and the requirements of the member Code of Conduct.	Head of HR	31/12/08
2.	Update on a) the role of the Council's statutory officers including the Monitoring Officer. b) the Code of Conduct for members	Monitoring Officer	31/03/09
3.	Raise awareness and communication of what the Standards Committee business is, how the public can access this information and decisions made following appropriate meetings.	Monitoring Officer	On-going after meetings
4.	Raise awareness and communication of what the Audit Committee business is, how the public can access this information and decisions made following appropriate meetings.	Audit & Risk Manager	On-going after meetings
5.	The Annual Update report to the Audit Committee will include information on that the Speak Up policy is used appropriately and without fear of reprisal. Provide a briefing in the bulletin for officers following the meeting (27/01/09)	Audit & Risk Manager	22/02/09
6.	Consider refresher training in Human Rights or briefing through the bulletin or breakfast interactive.	Head of Legal Services	25/02/09
7.	When issuing the annual reminder to staff about the Gifts & Hospitality requirements include that when making entries in the book that they should inform their manager and that Internal Audit regularly review the registers.	Audit & Risk Manager	30/11/08

APPENDIX B

Ethics Survey Action Plan for Members

No.	Action	Responsible	By when
1.	Code of Conduct training – to include reminders about registering interests and what should be declared. What members should do if they think a member has not met the requirements of the Members Code of Conduct.	Monitoring Officer (MO)	30/11/08
2.	Raise awareness and communication of what the Standards Committee business is and how the public can access the information and decisions made following appropriate meetings. Include in any member governance update training.	MO Audit & Risk Manager	On-going after meetings
3.	Raise awareness and communication of what the Audit Committee business is, plan of business, how the public can access the information and decisions made following appropriate meetings. Include in any member governance update training.	Audit & Risk Manager	Seminar 06/10/08 On-going after meetings
4.	Governance update training to include reminder information on the Speak Up policy and circulate annual report following presentation to Audit Committee in January 2009.	Audit & Risk Manager	06/10/09 Annual report by 31/01/09
5.	Member awareness sessions for Freedom of Information and Data Protection are planned to be completed early 2009.	Member Services & Information Governance	31/03/09
6.	Consider refresher training for members in Human Rights and Equalities legislation.	Member Services and MO	25/02/09
7.	In governance update training and when issuing the annual reminder to members about the Gifts & Hospitality requirements include that Internal Audit regularly review the registers.	Audit & Risk Manager	30/11/08