



STANDARDS COMMITTEE

22 JANUARY 2009

Report of the Interim Head of Civic Democratic and Legal Services

RAISING THE PROFILE OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Summary

1. This is an outstanding report on the Standards Committee's work plan. It contains some ideas about what the Standards Committee and individual members of it might do in order to ensure the Committee can carry out its wide ranging roles.

Background

2. The Standards Committee's role as set out in the Council's constitution includes seeking to promote and maintain a high standard of conduct in the transaction of all Council and Local Council business and to take a general overview on all ethical issues and issues of probity. The reason for raising the profile of the Committee is to take forward this agenda.
3. At the moment, the Standards Committee meets regularly and has undertaken some local determinations. It carries out its role of oversight of the Code of Conduct. However its role does not appear to be widely recognised within the Council and the Committee should consider whether there is more that it could do to develop the wider promotional role.

Options

4. The Standards Committee can continue to operate in its present way and would still meet the core of its role. Alternatively the Committee could take the broader role as set out in this report and become a more visible and proactive part of the Council's corporate governance. If the Committee is inclined towards the latter approach, there are a range of options as set out in the report which it could take forward.

Analysis

5. The ideas set out in the following paragraphs are by way of first thoughts to encourage discussion by the Committee. They are not intended as formal proposals and have not been discussed elsewhere in the Council or with Parish Councils. Following this meeting, the intention would be for the Monitoring Officer to take forward any of the

ideas which the Committee supports (together with ideas arising at the meeting) to see whether they can be implemented. There would be a further report which would develop proposals in detail.

Media Coverage

6. One obvious way in which the Standards Committee can try to raise its profile is to seek publicity in the local media. The Chair has been in discussion with the Council's press office about how this might be achieved and it seemed possible that there might be some interest linked to the year of the Volunteer. However this has not yet materialised. The problem with relying on local media coverage is that the Council cannot guarantee any coverage.
7. The Committee could consider whether there was any purpose in developing a newsletter to go to CYC and parish council members and others (CYC officers, parish clerks and so on) which covered national and local issues. This could be published every 6 months or so.

Training

8. Training events are another mechanism by which the Standards Committee can be seen to be involved in the ethical agenda. As the Committee is aware, the Council runs a member development training programme and by the time the Committee meets there will have been a training event on the Code of Conduct for members which the Chair is also attending. A similar event for officers will also have taken place. As well as being important in their own right, both these sessions are also intended to provide an introduction for the theatre workshop on officer member relations which will be held on 17th February. All members of the Standards Committee have been invited.
9. In future, consideration could be given to the role of members of the Standards Committee in promoting training events and taking part in them. Members of the Committee may have ideas about the range of training which would assist in promoting high ethical standards.

Ethical Governance Champions

10. All the political groups on the Council are represented on the Standards Committee. Consideration could be given to the elected members of the Standards Committee taking on the role of ethical governance champions within their groups. This could entail ensuring that ethical issues were promoted within the groups and taking responsibility for dealing with perceived ethical issues amongst group members. Ultimately these members could bring perceived issues within their group to the Standards Committee for discussion. However, this is unlikely to happen until all members have confidence in the Committee's ability to deal with issues in a non party political way.

Links with Parish Councils

11. The Standards Committee has the same responsibility for ethical conduct for Parish Councils as it does for City of York Council. That is of course why there are parish council members of the Committee. The way in which the Standards Committee carries out this role is complicated by the fact that Parish Councils are independent of the City Council. Parishes are understandably protective of this independence. It would be useful for those members of the Committee from Parish Councils to give some thought about how best to take this role forward.
12. Some authorities through their Standards Committees have developed close working links with their local Local Councils Association. Others have established working relationships with parish councils in their area both to support the ethical framework and to assist parishes gain Quality status for example. Clearly the latter approach is much wider and has implications beyond the remit of the Standards Committee.

Specialising

13. Members of the Standards Committee could take responsibility for different aspects of the Council's governance structure and develop expertise in the ethical issues relating to that area. For example, individual members could have responsibility for Planning Committee, Licensing Committee, the Executive, Overview and Scrutiny and so on. This could include the key partnerships in which the Council is involved. This could involve attending some of the meetings of these bodies to gain an understanding of the likely ethical issues and to report back to the Standards Committee. In time these links could become more visible and the committees etc themselves could be engaged in discussions around these issues. In time, there may be some mileage in considering joint informal meetings of the Standards Committee and other committees

Audit and Governance

14. The role of the Standards Committee includes liaison as appropriate with the Audit and Governance Committee on 'any matter that may be of common concern to both, principally in relation to any matter arising in relation to corporate governance'. Some thought could be given about how to take this forward in a proactive way. Other councils have established occasional joint meetings of both committees and/or developed joint programmes of work between similar committees which include publicising internally codes of conduct at officer and member level; whistleblowing and so on.

Corporate Priorities

15. The Standards Committee's role in promoting high ethical standards both within the City of York Council and in parish councils is an essential part of the 'Effective Organisation' strand of the Corporate Strategy. Effective ethical governance is a key aspect of corporate governance overall which is an important priority for the Council.

Implications

16. This report contains no concrete proposals and there are therefore no implications in any of the areas.

Risk Management

17. As this is by way of a discussion paper there are no risks associated with this report.

Recommendations

That the Standards Committee considers the ideas contained in this report and identifies which activities it would like to be taken forward

That the Standards Committee agrees to receiving a further report in due course containing more detailed proposals for implementation.

Reason: In order to ensure that the Committee's role in promoting high ethical standards is carried out..

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	Report Approved	√	Date 06/01/10
Specialist Implications Officer(s) None			
Wards Affected: <i>List wards or tick box to indicate all</i>			All x
For further information please contact the author of the report			

Background Papers:

All relevant background papers must be listed here.

There are no documents which are required to be listed which have been used in the preparation of this report.