

TO: STANDARDS COMMITTEE
DATE: 4th August 2009
SUBJECT: LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHRONICLE STANDARDS AND ETHICS AWARD
BY: CORPORATE SERVICES DIRECTOR AND MONITORING OFFICER
Classification: Unrestricted –

Summary:

- The report advises members of the recent results of the award and sets out key learning points for consideration.

Implications:

Human Resources Implications: within existing resources

Finance Implications: not applicable

Legal Implications: good governance minimises the potential for legal challenge and referrals under the Code of Conduct

Crime & Disorder Implications (Section 17): not applicable

Equalities & Diversity Implications: not applicable

Sustainability Implications: Not applicable

Risk and Health and Safety Implications: Not applicable

Corporate Plan Implications: ***High performing organisation – corporate governance.***

Decision Required: Members are asked to consider the key learning points and suggest some areas for further investigation as part of the work of the Standards Committee.

1. The Local Government Chronicle introduced its Standards and Ethics Award for the first time this year. The Standards Board for England has been keen to promote the learning from this event.
2. The learning has been grouped into five areas:
 1. Engaging leadership
 2. Training and skills for members
 3. Communicating with staff and stakeholders
 4. Increasing confidence in democracy
 5. Working in partnerships with other authorities

3. Engaging leadership

- **Rossendale Borough Council** has an engaged chief executive and council leader who champion standards at the authority. They have also worked closely with the Audit Commission to develop an experience based learning approach to ethical conduct.
- **Newark and Sherwood District Council** has a very proactive monitoring officer, Kirsty Cole, who regularly speaks at different events and has a national profile in the standards committee. This has enabled Kirsty to share her experience and knowledge at events both locally, regionally and nationally, in training IDeA peers on Code of Conduct and ethical governance issues and undertaking work as an IDeA peer undertaking ethical governance reviews.
- **Rossendale Borough Council's** standards committee monitor current policies and proactively seek to influence and develop new policies, which helps to embed high ethical standards and good governance.
- **Leeds City Council's** standards committee produce an annual report that is reported to the full council. The standards committee also has a forward work plan, which is kept under review by officers with reference to national developments.
- **Rossendale Borough Council** has appointed lead officers to act as 'Governance Champions' to promote high standards and advise on issues such as contract procedures, their gifts and hospitality policy and whistle-blowing.

4. Training and skills for members

- **Rossendale Borough Council** are focused on member development and have worked with the IDeA on a learning programme. All their councillors also have a personal development plan.
- Some councils ensure their members receive media and presentation skills so they are well equipped to deal with the local media's questions.
- **Leeds City Council** develop training in formats tailored to their members needs and now provide e-learning courses for councillors to give them extra guidance on the Code of Conduct. Their standards committee review the decisions of the APE and consider any lessons the council could learn.
- **Newark and Sherwood District Council** worked with the [Local Government Training Unit](#) and with qualified mediators to develop a course on mediation, which was attended by over 50 delegates from all over England and Wales.
- **Leeds City Council** has provided all their parish councillors with access to a new online training system from the IDeA called 'Modern Councillor'.
- As part of **Rossendale Borough Council's** standards committee's commitment to learning and development; at every meeting members consider a real-life case study of standards issues from another authority to discuss what can be learned from the situation and applied in Rossendale.
- **Rossendale Borough Council's** councillors serving on Development Control or Licensing Committee must receive training before taking up their position so that they are aware of protocols, policies and regulations governing these meetings.

- **Newark and Sherwood District Council** has developed a recruitment pack for the appointment of independent members containing a job description, person specification, advertisement and guidance on legislative requirements. A copy of this is referenced on [ACSeS' website](#).

5. Communicating with staff and stakeholders

- **Leeds City Council** has developed an internal newsletter called '[Governance matters](#)' which promotes ethical and corporate governance issues and details the work of their standards committee.
- **Leeds City Council** has identified good ethical behaviour as part of the organisations overall [aspirational culture](#)
- **Rossendale Borough Council** has their own slogan 'Serious about standards' which helps to engage staff.
- Councils can hold events to engage their members and council officers and keep them up-to-date with what the authority is doing to maintain high standards. For example, some councils host clerk forums that are regular meetings between council officers and town and parish clerks.
- **Lincolnshire County Council** produce standards committee annual reports that outline the members of the committee, what they do, their work programme and the numbers of complaints and policies they've considered.
- **Newcastle City Council** has used their internal staff information bulletin to draw staff attention to the code of conduct for members and the work of the Committee.
- Some councils agree various ethics statements that are used in publicity and in engagement with the public and other stakeholders.
- **Rossendale Borough Council's** standards issues are reinforced through the corporate Team Briefing, in their staff newsletter 'Grapevine' and through specific information booklets on whistleblowing and their gifts and hospitality Policy.

6. Increasing confidence in democracy

- **Waveney District Council's** standards committee are calling on budding young filmmakers to help them raise awareness of their work. The Waveney Young Filmmaker competition gives young people a great opportunity to showcase their creative talents. The winning film will bring a new perspective to the work of the standards committee giving them a fresh way to promote ethical governance to the local community. Caroline Nixon, Chairman of the standards committee, encourages young filmmakers to get involved: "The Waveney Young Filmmaker Competition offers young people from across Waveney the opportunity to submit their films and have them judged by a panel, including industry professionals. Whether you are a first-time filmmaker or developing your skills, the competition is a fantastic opportunity for budding filmmakers to garner approval for their work and add valuable material to their portfolio. Their original idea will also be shown on the Waveney District Council website". For more information on the competition, visit the [Waveney District Council website](#).
- **Newcastle City Council** made sure they promoted the changes to the complaints system with a number of articles in their [residents newsletter](#). This

newsletter also included an article written by the standards committee Chair to promote the role of the standards committee.

- **Leeds City Council's** standards committee has their own communications plan covering members, parishes and the public.
- **Newark and Sherwood District Council** promotes the role of their standards committee to the local media and in their community newsletter.
- **Colchester Borough Council** held an '[I'm a Councillor get me out of here](#)' event that aimed to get young people and councillors talking. This involved a number of schools in the Colchester area.
- The chairman of **Ceredigion County Council's** standards committee took an active role in highlighting the role of the committee, the importance of the Code and the integral role of independent members in a local press article.
- **Rossendale Borough Council** host an annual Local Democracy Week, which aims to help young people understand more about their council and local democracy. Primary schools tour the Council Chamber, discuss council services and learn about the role of the Mayor and Councillors. Secondary school pupils also take part in a 'Question Time' event to pose challenging queries to local councillors and community leaders.
- **Rossendale Borough Council** has also produced a Standards Bulletin that is published on their website so that local people and partners can be assured of the correct conduct of the council.
- **Lincolnshire County Council** is one of the few councils providing live webcasts of council meetings with an archive on their website.

7. Working in partnerships with other authorities

- **Ceredigion County Council** hosted the Welsh Standards Conference with Wales ACSeS Group at Aberystwyth University for monitoring officers and standards committee members to share their experiences of the new Code. The Council is also developing close links with the University and the Monitoring Officer will shortly be providing a talk to law students in the University in relation to legal careers in local government.
- **Rossendale Borough Council** advises Burnley Borough Council on their protocols and work for the standards committee.
- **Newark and Sherwood District Council** provide best practice, advice and support to other authorities via Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire standards forums, monitoring officer groups and the organisation of an annual Monitoring Officers' conference.
- **Newcastle City Council** standards committee has built a proactive relationship with chief whips.
- **Newark and Sherwood District Councils** monitoring officer has been proactive in leading a Nottinghamshire Monitoring Officers Group which meets regularly to discuss ethics and standards and to share learning and knowledge. As a result, the Nottinghamshire districts have developed common procedures and protocols for dealing with standards complaints.
- **Rossendale Borough Council's** proposals for a Joint Standards Committee with other councils will provide increased capacity and make it easier to avoid any conflicts of interest. This will create a stronger support and advisory function which can draw on its collective experience to promote greater consistency in procedures and decisions.

- **Ceredigion County Council** produced a [flow chart](#) to assist with training for councillors, which has been distributed to all monitoring officers in Wales.
- **Leeds City Council's** standards committee maintain a close relationship with the Corporate Governance and Audit committee (CGA) and send them a progress report every six months.
- **Newark and Sherwood District Council** adopted a deliberate policy to share their learning and best practice not just locally, but regionally and nationally.
- **Nottinghamshire Monitoring Officer Group** identified a particular problem in respect of the understanding of governance issues within parishes and responded to this by developing the '[Parish Council Toolkit](#)'. All parish councils in Newark and Sherwood District Council have received a copy and many have adopted its model procedures. This has been welcomed by the Society for Local Council Clerks (SLCC) who is working closely with the group to produce version three of the toolkit.

Commentary

8. Clearly the short listed councils have a lot to offer in sharing learning. This must be seen in the context of available resources within Swale. I would ask members to consider the five areas and suggest any areas which on a proportionate basis could assist.

9. When considering the Key Line of Enquiry last time various initiatives in relation to communication were discussed and these are picked up elsewhere on the agenda.

10. It might be that Members would also like to suggest their three key learning points that I could consider further in developing the work of the Standards Committee. As a suggestion for discussion I wonder whether the following would be worth consideration:

- More regular meetings/ liaison with the Audit Committee as those charged with governance
- Forging improved relationships with the leadership of the authority both officer and member through regular meetings.
- Training and development matters
- Increasing confidence in democracy through communicating the role of the standards Committee and publishing complaints process.

Recommendation

11. Members are asked to consider the key learning points and suggest some areas for further investigation as part of the work of the Standards Committee.

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Date Friday, 03 July 2009