

Standards Committee - 22nd March 2007

Report of the Monitoring Officer

Comprehensive Performance Assessment – Corporate Assessment Report

Purpose of Report

1. To consider the findings of the Audit Commission with regard to ethical governance within the Council set out in their Corporate Assessment Report dated February 2007.

Background

2. Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) is the means by which the Audit Commission fulfils its statutory duty to make an assessment, and report on the performance, of local authorities. Corporate Assessment is one element in the overall assessment that leads to a CPA score and category.
3. The purpose of the Corporate Assessment is to assess how well the Council engages with and leads its communities, delivers community priorities in partnership with others, and ensures continuous improvement across the range of Council activities. The corporate assessment, therefore, covers a wide range of functions including ethical governance arrangements.
4. The final corporate assessment report was received by the Council in February 2007. Generally the report indicates that the Council is performing well and its corporate assessment received a 3 star rating.
5. During the inspection the Chairman of the Standards Committee and I were interviewed with regard to the work of the Standards Committee.
6. The corporate assessment report makes the following 2 references to the ethical framework: -
 1. Paragraph 10
“Ethical standards are good”.
 2. Paragraph 58
“Ethical governance is managed well. The work of the Standards Committee is well regarded and it has tackled some good subjects such as providing guidance on lobbying. Its meetings are ad hoc and it lacks

the benefit of a clear plan of proactive reviews which limits its effectiveness”.

7. The Audit Commission would clearly prefer us to have programmed meetings of the Standards Committee as opposed to the current position where a meeting is called when we have one or more specific items of business. Both the Chairman and I explained to the inspectors last year that we did not favour having unnecessary meetings and, though the inspectors accepted this, they felt that it was still good practice to have planned meetings which could be cancelled if there was no relevant business for them. The Committee may wish to give this issue further thought and, if it is felt that programmed meetings are advisable, we could include quarterly meetings in the draft calendar of meetings for 2007/8 which will be considered at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May 2007.
8. The reference in the report to having a clear plan of proactive reviews is not explained and no examples of such reviews are provided. I am seeking guidance on this from the Standards Board for England and will report verbally at the meeting.

Finance

9. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Law

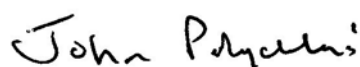
10. The CPA process is governed by Section 99 of the Local Government Act 2003.

Equality Impact

11. This report has no particular implication for the Council's policies on equality and diversity.

Recommendation

12. It is recommended that the Standards Committee note and discuss the findings of the Audit Commission with regard to ethical governance.



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J. Polychronakis.
Monitoring Officer

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List of Background Papers

1. None.