

Governance Matters



Governance Services, 4th Floor West, Civic Hall, Leeds LS1 1UR
Tel: 0113 3951632
Email: cxd.corporategovernance@leeds.gov.uk

Issue 4

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Welcome to the April issue of Governance Matters.

In Governance Matters this month our regular in-depth feature 'Spotlight on..' focuses on the Members' register of interests. The register is one of the Council's key tools for ensuring that decision-making is open, honest and accountable and as such is open to inspection by Members, officers and the public. Further information on the register and access to it can be found at page 2.

We also take a look at what the governance committees have been doing over the past two months, and at their busy schedule for their last meetings of the municipal year.

Finally, you can have a go at our crossword on page 3. The answers are on the same page.

We hope you find the information helpful and interesting. You can play your part by emailing suggestions for articles to cxd.corporategovernance@leeds.gov.uk

Front Page News...

'Purdah'

The Council entered the official 'purdah' period for the May elections on Friday 24th March. This places limitations on Members who are standing for election or who are acting as election agents. The period is supported by guidance which is designed to prevent the perception of Councillors using Council business to support their political campaigning. Examples contained in the guidance include restrictions on correspondence with constituents (ensuring no reference is made to the Councillor's political party) and ensuring Council press releases, events and elected Member appearances are arranged to avoid any political overtones.

Children's Services

As a result of the Children Act 2004, all Local Authorities must appoint a Director of Children's Services who will have responsibility for education services and social services, insofar as they relate to children. Leeds City Council appointed Rosemary Archer to this post with effect from February 2006, and as such a number of changes have been made to the Council's Constitution, to ensure all relevant officers have the appropriate functions delegated to them to carry out their duties.

Access to Information Procedure Rules

To bring the exemptions in line with the Freedom of Information Act, the Council's access to information procedure rules are being updated. The new exemption categories are subject to the public interest test, so that even if information fits within the wording of one or other of the exemptions, it is only exempt if and so long as the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

Spotlight on...

The register of Members' interests

All Members are required to record their financial and other interests in a register maintained by Governance Services.

This register is a public document which is available for inspection by other Members, officers and members of the public. Anyone wishing to view the register should contact the Corporate Governance Team via email or telephone (0113 39 50261), or should visit the Governance Services Unit on 4th Floor West, Civic Hall.

Why do Members need to register their interests?

Members need to register their interests so the public, authority staff, and fellow Members know which interests might give rise to a conflict of interest. The register is a document which can be consulted when (or before) an issue arises, and lets others think about whether or not there is a conflict of interest.

The register also protects Members. It is also important for public confidence that people who are interested in the authority's meetings know about any interest that might have to be declared by Members.

What interests have to be registered?

Specific details of what needs to be registered are contained in the Members' code of conduct (Part 5(a) of the Council's Constitution).

Broadly speaking, the financial section relates to:

- Members' employment;
- businesses;
- shareholdings;
- land ownership; and
- contracts with the authority.

The 'other' section relates to:

- appointments to other bodies;
- membership of public authorities; and
- trade union or professional association membership.

Further guidance regarding what should be registered is available from the Corporate Governance Team.

CAUTION...

Failure to register an interest is a breach of the Members' code of conduct. Any breach of the code may be reported to and investigated by the Standards Board for England.

Members must keep their register entry up to date, and let the Corporate Governance Team know of any changes within **28 days**. New and re-elected Members must register or review their interests within **28 days** of the election. It is the Member's responsibility to keep their entry up to date.

Corporate Governance and Audit Committee

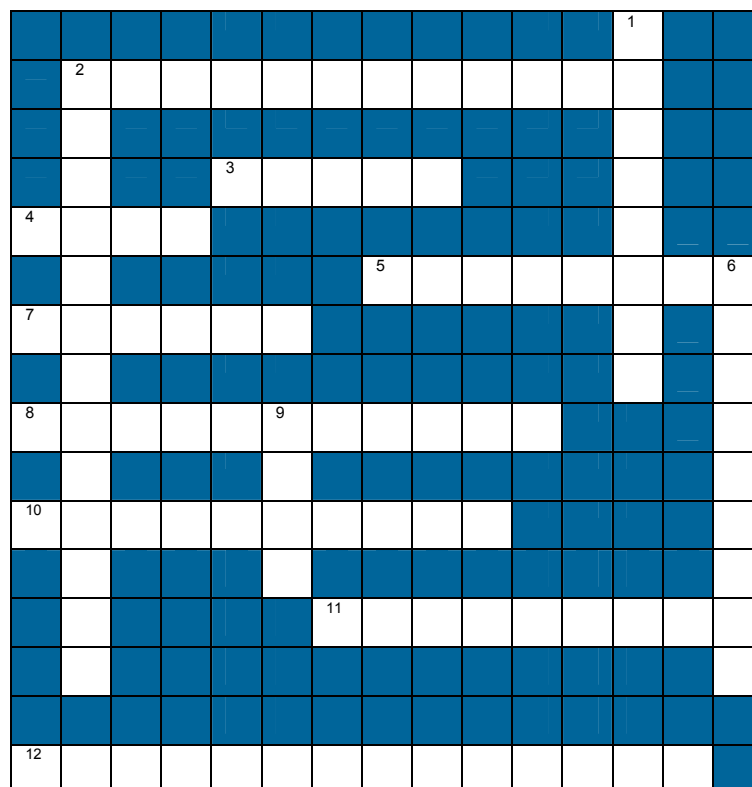
19th April 2006

Items to be considered at the next meeting include:

- a report detailing the planned work of internal audit for 2006/07;
- the receipt of four reports of the external auditors;
- the annual review of the Constitution;
- a report detailing the ongoing review of the revised Personnel Panel arrangements;
- a report providing details of the outcome of complaints to the Ombudsman;
- an item regarding the action plan contained in the Annual Audit and Inspection Letter;
- a review of the monitoring arrangements the Council has in place to ensure compliance with laws and regulations;
- a report on the activities of the Council's external auditors;
- a report regarding the Council's performance in relation to the collection of sundry incomes; and
- an update on Financial Management.

ANSWERS TO CROSSWORD

1 down: internal
 2 down: comprehensive
 6 down: statement
 9 down: risk
 2 across: constitution
 3 across: audit
 4 across: KPMG
 5 across: accounts
 7 across: leader
 8 across: performance
 10 across: assessment
 11 across: ombudsman
 12 across: whistleblowing



DOWN

6 down and 1 down. The Corporate Governance and Audit Committee approve the ----- on ----- control. (9, 8)

2 down, 8 across and 10 across. What does CPA stand for? (13, 11, 10)

9. The ---- management framework had recently been considered by the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee. (4)

ACROSS

2. This document sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed. (12)

3. The Corporate Governance and Audit Committee consider and monitor both internal and external ----- . (5)

4. Who are the Council's external auditors? (4)

5. The Corporate Governance and Audit Committee consider and approve the statement of ----- . (8)

7. The ----- of the Council is Councillor Andrew Carter. (6)

8. See 2 down. (11)

10. See 2 down. (10)

11. The Corporate Governance and Audit Committee consider reports about complaints made to the Local Government ----- . (9)

12. This policy allows employees of the Council to report any serious concerns they have about the Council. (7, 7)

Standards Committee

16th March 2006

Among the issues the Committee considered were training for Parish and Town Councils, and the Council's insurance arrangements regarding *co-opted members*.

PARISH AND TOWN COUNCIL TRAINING

The Committee considered a report outlining the results of a survey into what training Parish and Town Councils had received on the Code of Conduct. The Committee decided to host further training sessions for Parish and Town Councils both centrally at Civic Hall, and in the wider area by grouping Parishes together in certain localities. The Committee also decided to make the e-learning module on the Code of Conduct available to Parish and Town Councils after it has been completed in May.

MEMBERS' INSURANCE

The Committee received a report outlining the Council's current insurance arrangements for Elected Members. The Committee members present have asked the Director of Corporate Services to extend these arrangements to include co-opted members of the Council also.

25th April 2006

Items to be considered in April include:

- the final draft of the Standards Committee Annual Report 2005/6; and
- a summary of the ODPM Select Committee report on the role and effectiveness of the Standards Board for England.

JARGON BUSTER

A **co-opted member** of the Council means a person who is not a Councillor but who is a member of a Council committee. There are three co-opted members of the Standards Committee, two independent members, and a parish representative.

THE NEXT ISSUE OF GOVERNANCE MATTERS

We hope you have found this issue of Governance Matters useful.

In the next issue we will focus on the Council's Constitution.

If you have any ideas for our 'Spotlight On...' feature or any questions you would like answering, please contact the Corporate Governance Team on 0113 39 51632 / 0113 39 50261 or email us at cxd.corporategovernance@leeds.gov.uk