

Governance Services, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor West, Civic Hall, Leeds LS1 1UR

Tel: 0113 3951632 E-mail: [cxd.corporategovernance@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:cxd.corporategovernance@leeds.gov.uk)



Leeds City Council Democratic Services – Governance Services

# Governance Matters

Issue 1

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'Governance Matters' is a bi-monthly internal newsletter providing information and advice on Corporate Governance, Standards and conduct issues.

**Corporate Governance** means the systems by which organisations are connected, directed and controlled. For Leeds, this concerns the way in which the affairs of the Council are handled by Elected Members and officers, and how the Council's stakeholders and partners are engaged in the Council's work.

There are two Governance Committees at Leeds City Council:

## The Corporate Governance & Audit Committee

The Corporate Governance & Audit Committee fulfils the Council's (non Executive Functions) in relation to;

- the approval of the Council's arrangements relating to Accounts and Audit;
- the review of the adequacy of the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements;
- Making recommendations to Council to amend the Constitution.

Items due to be considered by this Committee include;

- ★ The Annual Letter sent to the Council by the Local Government Ombudsman outlining the number of complaints received against the Council.
- ★ All audit and inspection reports received by the Council since the last Committee.

- ★ The risks associated with the implementation of the Children's Act 2004.
- ★ Summaries of serious whistleblowing allegations.
- ★ How the authority intends to bring a more consistent approach to the management of major projects
- ★ The review of the work of the Audit Commission's appointed auditors in 2004

Further information, including membership and meeting dates and papers are available on the internet. Follow the links to Council and Democracy.

Useful links:

[www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)

The Leader of Leeds City Council (currently Councillor Mark Harris) chairs the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee.



On the first of December 2005 the Leader of the Council will be Councillor Andrew Carter, who will then take on the role of Chair of the Committee.

### **The Standards Committee**

The Standards Committee is responsible for maintaining high standards of behaviour among Councillors and Co-opted Members. It also advises the Council on the Members' Code of Conduct.

The Committee is chaired by an Independent Member, Mike Wilkinson. Mike also sits as a non-voting co-opted member of the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee.

*' As Chair, I am keen that the Standards Committee plays a full proactive role in helping to ensure that local people, Councillors and Council staff can all have significant confidence that there is a high level of ethical probity within local government in Leeds. '*

(Mike Wilkinson)

The Standards Committee may determine allegations of misconduct following an investigation either by

an Ethical Standards Officer at the Standards Board for England or the Monitoring Officer of Leeds City Council.

Members of the Committee recently attended the Fourth Annual Conference of Standards Committees held in Birmingham on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> September. Here they were able to talk to other Members involved in Standards Committee work, discussing common difficulties, best practice and broader ethical issues such as public trust in public officials.

Items due for consideration by this Committee include;

- ★ Summaries of Adjudication Panel Tribunal decisions on allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct.
- ★ The results of a self assessment of the council's position against Comprehensive Performance Assessment Key Lines of Enquiry concerning Governance
- ★ A Protocol for the use of IT equipment by Elected Members.
- ★ A revised Officer Code of Conduct (we are currently awaiting the issue of a model code by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister).

Further information, including membership and meeting dates and papers are available on the internet. Follow the links to Council and Democracy.

Useful links:

[www.standardsboard.co.uk](http://www.standardsboard.co.uk)  
[www.adjudicationpanel.co.uk](http://www.adjudicationpanel.co.uk)

All meetings of the Standards Committee and the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee take place in the Civic Hall in the centre of Leeds and are open to the public.



### **Did you know...?**

There are Codes of Conduct for both staff and Elected Members, which set out expected standards of behaviour.

One element common to both Codes is the requirement to...

### **Register Interests**

#### **Elected Members**

All Elected Members and voting co-opted members must generally register any paid employment they undertake, any land they own and the names of bodies to which they belong.

Members must also register the existence and nature of any gifts or hospitality over the value of £25 within 28 days of it being received.

For further information, please contact Corporate Governance Team on 0113 39 51632.

#### **Staff**

Employees must declare any non-financial interests that they consider conflict with the Council's interests.

Any financial interests which could conflict with the Council's interests must also be registered.

Employees are only permitted to accept gifts and hospitality in certain circumstances and all offers of gifts and hospitality must be recorded on the appropriate form.

For further information, please contact HR and Service Development on 24 74783.

### **Did you know...?**

The Council has two principal Corporate Governance tools that the Governance Services team are responsible for updating and monitoring. It is these tools which help the Council ensure that they operate in accountable, efficient and equitable way. These tools are the Code of Corporate Governance and the Corporate Governance Statement.

### **The Code of Corporate Governance**

In 2003, the Council's auditors recommended that in order to comply fully with the requirements of Corporate Governance, the Council should develop and implement a local Code of Corporate Governance. This was published in 2003.

In 2004 the Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services developed a common code and set of principles for good governance across public services. Leeds City Council has examined the report produced by this body and used it as a benchmark to assess the strengths and weaknesses of our Code. The Leeds Code has now been revised to reflect these principles more clearly and enable them to be more

easily communicated to Members, staff and other stakeholders.

The Good Governance principles adopted by the Council are:

1. Focussing on the Council's Purpose and Community Needs
2. Having Clear Responsibilities and Arrangements for Accountability
3. Good Conduct and Behaviour
4. Informed, Transparent Decision Making and Managing Risk
5. Developing Skills and Capacity
6. Engaging Stakeholders

The Leeds Code of Corporate Governance was agreed on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2005 and is available on the intranet. Follow the links to Council and Democracy.

### **The Corporate Governance Statement**

The purpose of the Corporate Governance Statement is to provide a public statement on the adequacy of the Council's Governance arrangements and how the Council is performing on:

- Focussing on the Council's purpose and Community Needs
- Complying with laws and regulations
- Informed, transparent decision making
- Demonstrating good conduct and behaviour of Councillors and officers

The Statement forms an integral part of the Council's annual accounts. This means that the public have an opportunity to

question and challenge both the draft accounts and the Statement.

The latest version of the Statement is available on the intranet. Follow the links to Council and Democracy.

### **Did you know...?**

The Council also has a Constitution which sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people.

### **The Constitution**

Throughout the year both the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee and the Standards Committee consider recommendations relating to certain aspects of the Constitution in order that they can be amended. In some cases the committees can approve these changes in others the changes have to be agreed by full Council. At the Council meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2005 and the Standards Committee meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2005 a number of changes to the Constitution were agreed and holders of the hard copy of the constitution should have received those amendments recently. The relevant pages of the inter-net and intra-net are also updated by Governance Services. Follow the links to Council and Democracy.

Queries relating to the Constitution should be directed to the Corporate Governance Team 0113 39 51632.

## **Governance and the Comprehensive Performance Assessment**

Comprehensive performance assessment (CPA) is about helping local councils in England improve local services for their communities. Assessments are carried out by the Audit Commission, who publish the results on their website.

The Commission assesses the performance of councils and the services that they provide for local people.

Corporate Governance now features in the CPA score. To score well, Councils must demonstrate that:

- High ethical standards are being promoted
- They have a high external reputation for efficiency and integrity
- There is transparency, openness, accountability and equity in its decision making
- Codes of Conduct are integrated into other policies

## **What's in the News?**

Other Governance issues making the news include:

- ★ A report has recently been published by the Audit Commission into the Corporate Governance Framework. You can read all these reports on the Audit Commission website.

## **What's coming next?**

In the next issue of Governance Matters there will be updates on the work of both the governance committees. There will also be information on the work of the Standards Board for England and

the Adjudication Panel for England, and how they relate to Council.

**If you have any ideas for features for future editions of 'Governance Matters', please contact the Corporate Governance Team on 39 51632**