

Governance Matters



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Issue 13

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Welcome to the October issue of Governance Matters and our second anniversary edition!

This month our regular in-depth feature 'Spotlight on..' focuses on the Forward Plan and summarises some key procedures that apply when the Council is planning to take important decisions.

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

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...

Ethical Online Survey for Junior Employees

Last year the Council conducted an ethical survey of Members and senior officers with the help of the Audit Commission. This survey allowed the Council to identify areas for improvement and what it needed to do to improve understanding and awareness of ethical standards.

This year, the Council wishes to involve junior employees of the Council, and so another online survey will be launched in October on the Leeds City Council intranet site. A random sample of 1000 employees from all 64 service areas in the Council will be asked to take part.

Watch this space!

If you have been selected to take part in the survey you will be sent an email in October with a link to the survey and instructions about how to complete it. Also watch out for more information in the October edition of Team Talk.

Standards Board for England Annual Assembly

This year's Standards Board Annual Assembly is called "Down to Detail: making local regulation work", and will focus on the skills, contacts and resources standards committees need to meet the challenges of greater local ownership. Two independent members of the Committee and one of the Parish representatives will be attending the Assembly, and will share their new knowledge with the rest of the Committee at their meeting on 5th December 2007.

Spotlight on...

The Forward Plan

The Forward Plan is published on the Council's [internet site](#), and is one way in which the Council can let the public know about important decisions. More information about the Forward Plan can be found in the Access to Information Procedure Rules (in Part 4 of the Council's Constitution).

Contents of the Forward Plan

Every Council is required by law to publish a Forward Plan, and the law also sets out exactly what information should be included.

The Forward Plan sets out likely **key decisions** to be considered by the Council over the following four months and is updated on a monthly basis, at the same time each month.

It provides the following details:

- the matter to be considered;
- who is to take the decision;
- the date or the period in which the decision will be made;
- any consultation process which will be used;
- who members of the public can contact about the decision; and
- a list of documents to be considered.

Publicising the Forward Plan

The Council publishes an annual notice in the Yorkshire Post to inform the public about the Forward Plan.

JARGON BUSTER

Key Decisions - Key decisions result in the Council spending or saving over £500,000 a year, or are likely to significantly effect communities living or working in two or more wards. (See Governance Matters Issue 6 for further information).

Key decisions not in the Forward Plan

Any key decision that a Director or the Executive plans to take should be included in the Forward Plan. However, it is sometimes necessary for Directors / the Executive to take key decisions that have not been published in the Forward Plan, and which need to be taken before the plan is next updated.

In these circumstances, the decision maker should notify the Chair of the relevant scrutiny board and publicise the decision at least five days before it will be made. If the decision maker is unable to provide five days notice of the decision, the Chair of the scrutiny board can agree that the decision is urgent and cannot be deferred.

CAUTION...

These processes should only be used in exceptional circumstances, as all decisions the Council takes should be as open and transparent as possible. Providing notice of decisions to the public is key to being open and transparent.

Corporate Governance and Audit Committee

27th September 2007

Among the issues the committee considered were the Local Government Ombudsman's Annual Letter, the external auditor's report on the Council's accounts and the new Corporate Planning Framework.

OMBUDSMAN'S ANNUAL LETTER

The **Local Government Ombudsman** investigates complaints about councils and certain other bodies.

The letter is produced annually and highlights any particular areas of concern or good practice regarding the Council's handling of complaints.

Both the Local Government Ombudsman for our region, Anne Seex, and officers from the Council's customer services department were present at the meeting to answer questions from Members, and to explain how the Council ensures that we learn lessons from any complaints made to the Ombudsman.

THE AUDITED ACCOUNTS

At their June meeting the Committee received the Council's Statement of Accounts, which contain all the financial statements, explanatory and disclosure notes required by law, in order to fairly represent the financial position of the Council.

The Council's external auditors then produce a report on the accounts, in order to identify any errors. This year's accounts contained no material errors and the Auditors were complimentary of the work undertaken by Leeds' officers.

THE CORPORATE PLANNING FRAMEWORK AND AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

Members received an update regarding forthcoming changes to the Council's Corporate Planning Framework. In particular changes to the key documents setting out the Council's priorities and business planning.

They agreed that amendments to Article 4, the Council's budget and policy framework, should be recommended to the next Full Council meeting. In summary the amendments to Article 4 are:

- replacing the 'Corporate Plan' with the 'Leeds Strategic Plan'; and
- adding the 'Council Business Plan'.

28th November 2007

Items due to be considered at the meeting on 28th November 2007 include:

- the half-year update report from Internal Audit;
- update reports on risk management, the Corporate Governance Statement action plan and Delivering Successful Change;
- a report updating Members on the work that is being undertaken to identify the Council's significant partnerships and develop governance arrangements for them; and
- an item regarding the accessibility of governance information on the Council's website.

Standards Committee

10th October 2007

There have been no meetings of the Standards Committee since July 2007. Items to be considered in October include:

- a report reviewing the Protocol on Member/Officer Relations;
- a draft communications plan for the Standards Committee to help them raise the profile of standards issues;
- a report outlining the training provided on the new Members' Code of Conduct;
- a report outlining the requirements for the Use of Resources section of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment 2007-08;
- an updated training plan for Members of the Standards Committee; and
- a report on a review of the Members' register of gifts and hospitality.

NEWSFLASH!

Recent Standards Board Publications

Since the last Committee meeting, the Standards Board has published two Bulletins and their Annual Review.

In addition they have published additional guidance for Members on the Code of Conduct in the form of an occasional paper on "Predisposition, Predetermination and Bias" and a new version of the Case Review.

These documents can be found on the [Standards Board website](#).

TRAINING FOR MEMBERS ON THE NEW CODE OF CONDUCT

All Members have been invited to attend a training session on the new Members' Code of Conduct. For Members' convenience one of these will take place prior to the next Full Council meeting. This session will be held from **12pm to 1pm in committee room 7 of the Civic Hall on 31st October 2007.**

Also as the previous lunchtime sessions have proved popular with Members, there will be an additional update session on **17th October from 12pm to 2pm in committee room 1 of the Civic Hall.**

If you would like to attend either of these sessions, please contact Alison Redwood in Member Development (0113 39 50279). If neither of these sessions are convenient, we may also be attending your next group meeting to provide a short briefing on the changes to the Code. Please ask your Group Office for details.

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 how to deal with information, in particular, confidential information.

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