

Norwich City Council
STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Item

10

REPORT for meeting to be held on 26 February 2010

Promoting Ethics & Standards

Purpose

To inform the standards committee of best practice for promoting the work and raising the profile of the committee.

Recommendations

That the Standards Committee:

Considers the outlined proposals and areas of best practice towards promoting ethics and standards and decide on those they wish to be taken forward.

Financial Consequences

There are no financial consequences to this report.

Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities

By enhancing the role and involvement of the monitoring officer and the standards committee the council's reputation would be maintained and further enhanced.

Risk

There are no perceived risks.

Background Documents

None

Contact Officers

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1. Background Information

- 1.1 Standards for England was established in 2001, and up to 2008 its main role was to investigate allegations of misconduct by elected members of local authorities. From May 2008 the role changed and the responsibility for handling complaints was devolved to local authorities.
- 1.2 Complaints about members conduct are now mainly dealt with by local authorities via their standards committees.
- 1.3 Complaints against councillors are always likely to attract media attention of different levels so there is a need to be aware of how any enquiries should be dealt with. A press toolkit provided by Standards for England provides detailed advice and guidance on how to deal reactively with media enquiries.
- 1.4 There is now an opportunity to learn from the best practice of other councils to improve the way standards issues are promoted, internally to employees, members and managers. Also externally to the media and partners when appropriate.

2. Areas of Best Practice

- 2.1 Outlined in this report are areas of best practice which have proved successful for other local authorities.
- 2.2 While the monitoring officer is looking to improve communications around standards, it should be noted that, there should be a 'cherry picking' approach to the examples of best practice outlined in this report. There is no 'one size fits all' solution to promoting standards within a council so a practical and realistic approach should be taken as to what will work for us, what capacity is available to deliver it and what overall outcome is desired.

3. Successful Methods used by other Councils to Promote Standards

- 3.1 Below is a list of key principles for improving communications around ethics and standards. The suggested methods have been compiled after research into successful tactics used by other councils.
- 3.2 **Possible proposals to promote the standards committee internally to officers and members:**
 - Publish stories in Inner City and reintroduce the committee, what it does, who sits on it, what it means for employees, councillors etc, how issues can be reported. Follow this up with reports on cases and outcomes where appropriate.

- Raise the profile of the position of monitoring officer. All internal standards and ethics communications could be led by the monitoring officer to give the standards process an champion.
- Include regular standards information to be published on our website.

3.3 Possible proposals to promote the standards committee publicity:

- Submit stories to be considered for publication in citizen.
- Identify key media opportunities and plan to maximise these opportunities with press releases and interviews; appointment of new committee members, case outcomes, any national 'weeks' etc.
- Improve and build on the standards web pages on the council website, including publishing regular standards updates.

3.4 It may be useful for the committee to investigate what documents and training are provided for officers and members on policies such as whistle blowing, gifts and hospitality register and contract procedures. Can these be improved upon and how?

4. Key Principles for any standards communication work

- 4.1 All communication should be delivered in plain English and should be open and honest and should explain processes, reasons, outcomes and implications.
- 4.2 The standards committee and the monitoring officer should take the lead in identifying communications opportunities and bringing them forward to the communications team.
- 4.3 Communications should be regular so internal and external audiences become accustomed to standards issues and information.