

**Norwich City Council**  
**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Item

7

**REPORT for meeting to be held on 17 July 2010**

**Increasing Confidence in Democracy**

**Purpose**

For members to consider suggestions that would enable the standards committee to further consolidate its work towards strengthening confidence in the council's decision making and to help raise ethical standards in partnership working.

**Recommendation**

That the Standards Committee considers the points raised in the report and to advise the monitoring officer to develop a "10 principles of public life campaign" for the council to launch as part of local democracy week.

**Financial Consequences**

There are no financial consequences to this report.

**Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities**

Contributes to maintaining and improving the council's reputation. Good communication and the ability to demonstrate openness in the decision making process is essential to let the public know what you do and how you do it.

**Risk**

There are no perceived risks.

**Background Documents**

None

**Contact Officers**

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## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Following on from the previous report on the agenda which looks at handling the media and working with the communications team, this report provides the opportunity for discussion around how to increase confidence in how the council makes its decisions. This also includes the many partnerships that the council is engaged in that contribute to the services that are delivered on behalf of the public.
- 1.2 By keeping the public informed and engaged, this not only serves to bring them closer to the democratic process but you can also use this to strengthen governance arrangements by actively promoting the ten general principles of public life.
- 1.3 The standards committee and the monitoring officer now need to build upon the discussions of the last meeting of the committee and the early momentum gathered since the appointment of the monitoring officer. This would assist the council to further and effectively promote the principles and values of good governance.

## **2. Promoting the Principles of Public Life**

- 2.1 It is suggested that consideration be given to launching a campaign that promotes the importance of ethical standards in public life. Such a campaign should be agreed and signed up to by members and a pledge of commitment could be made by Full Council. May be a time for such a campaign launch could be in Local Democracy Week?
- 2.2 A key aim of the campaign should be to have a range of public bodies/partnership organisations signed up to the 10 principles of public life. This would serve to build and maintain trust and make the public aware of the standards that can be expected from their representatives whether they be from the council or another organisation involved in delivering local public services.
- 2.3 To encourage or require partner organisations and partner groups to publically sign up to the 10 principles of public life the standards committee could promote the principles during visits to meetings of partner organisations and community groups. Key partners such as those that form the Local Strategic Partnership should sign up, and the council should ask organisations who would like to make this commitment to joint the growing list.

## **3. Engaging the Public**

- 3.1 Perhaps the standards committee could run a competition for local school/college - Art Department students, to see if they could assist in producing a range of posters to raise awareness of the 10 principles. The winners could receive a prize and have their work made into posters that could be displayed in public buildings/reception areas across the city.

This could help publicise the campaign and engage young people to learn more about democracy, ethics and standards. This would better help to inform the public either via media coverage or by their interaction with partner organisations, the council or in seeing the posters.

- 3.2 Alongside this and as part of the campaign the council could carry out an engagement exercise with community groups and schools. An event could be held where perhaps the chair of standards or the monitoring officer could deliver a talk on the principles of public life message. The event could then offer an opportunity for councillors to engage with young people and community groups. For example; if the group were sixth form students or local residents from a particular area, they would have 3 minutes with a councillor to ask them any question they liked. After 3 minutes the student/resident gives a mark on a score card and then moves round to the next table. There could also be a feed back session. Maybe this would be a good thing to hold while launching/unveiling the posters that had been selected?

#### **4. Encouraging Members and leaders in Ethics and Standards**

- 4.1 To assist the monitoring officer and the standards committee in promoting the campaign and the 10 principles, members are asked to consider inviting the chief executive and the political group leaders to assist pro-actively to champion standards and ethics within the authority and with partners.
- 4.2 The above coupled with a pro-active monitoring officer, speaking at different events to enable share of experience and knowledge at events both locally and regionally would further strengthen the campaign and further embed ethics and standards while having a positive impact on the council's reputation.
- 4.3 Members are asked if they would like on a regular basis to invite individual leader/deputy leaders of political groups to meetings of the standards committee. The aim would be to facilitate a two way dialogue and to further promote and embed good ethics and standards. The Chair of the council/Lord Mayor could also be included in this. Any issues raised and brought to the attention of the committee could then be further explored.
- 4.4 Also and in a similar vein and to close the circle, the independent members on the standards committee could attend at least one of the meetings of the council a quarter. They could then report back their experiences to the committee and if there are issue arising, the committee could take them up for their future work programme. Another likely outcome would be the identification of training for members and officers.