

STANDARDS COMMITTEE
2 October 2009

LGC STANDARDS AND ETHICS AWARD 2010

PURPOSE OF REPORT: to decide

Introduction:

- 1 Standards for England has recently announced that the LGC Awards 2010 is welcoming nominations for the Standards and Ethics category (letter to Chairman of Standards Committee attached as Annexe 1).
- 2 On 15 September 2008, Standards Committee agreed not to enter the Award in 2009 but to identify and address any areas of current weaknesses. The Committee began this work with the Standards of Conduct survey of Councillors and senior officers. The Committee also agreed to learn from the Standards and Ethics Award. A report highlighting good practice in the short-listed authorities for the 2009 Award was considered on 3 July 2009.
- 3 This report highlights the work that Surrey County Council has been engaged in between October 2008 and September 2009; demonstrating how the authority meets the Standards and Ethics Award criteria.

Standards and Ethics Award Criteria

Joint Working Between Politicians and Officers

- 4 The Award criteria requests evidence of productive joint working between local politicians and officers, supported by a proactive, influential standards committee.
- 5 In Surrey:
 - Standards Committee has surveyed Members and senior officers about perceived standards of conduct at Surrey and shared the results with them. The Interim Chief Executive commended this work to all Members and to senior officers. The survey will be repeated during 2010 to assess any changes with regard to perceived standards of conduct.

- The Independent Chairman of Standards Committee is the vice-chairman of a governance task group drawn from members of the Council's Standards Committee and Audit and Governance Committee which is reviewing the Council's governance arrangements with a view to reporting to the full Council in December.

Communications

- 6 The Award criteria requests evidence of an internal and external communications work programme that promotes the value of ethical standards and the principles of public life.
- 7 In Surrey:
 - An online quarterly training bulletin on standards issues is being established for Members. This includes information on the Code of Conduct, as well as news of the Standards Committee and Standards for England. The bulletin will encourage feedback and debate and the Monitoring Officer has set up askthemo@surreycc.gov.uk as a dedicated channel to receive queries and comments on ethical standards issues.
 - There are clear and detailed web pages about Standards Committee on the Council's public website. These include pen portraits of the Independent Representatives and information on the complaints system.
 - Changes to the process for complaining about Members have been promoted on the Council's intranet and with a press release, which was also published on the Council's public website.

Objectives, Governance and Culture of the Council

- 8 The Award criteria requests evidence of how high standards of conduct and ethics are central to the objectives, governance and culture of the authority.
- 9 In Surrey:
 - Training was provided for all Members following the local elections in June 2009 on the Code of Conduct. The Chairman of Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer led this. It was lively session with a number of Members acting out scenarios to encourage discussion about the Code.
 - Training was also provided to the eleven Local Committees, including the Borough Members on the specific implications of the Code of Conduct for Local Committee Members.
 - Reports of Standards Committee meetings are taken to the next Council meeting. They are presented by the Independent Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Committee and the Council has opportunities to ask questions about the work of the Committee.

- The Council has policy custodians who monitor and report annually on the effectiveness of policies. The Monitoring Officer has officer responsibility for the Members' Code of Conduct and ethical standards regime.
- Guidance for Members on gifts and hospitality is appended to the Member Code of Conduct. The Staff Code of Conduct also includes a section on gifts and hospitality.

Leadership

10 The Award criteria requests evidence of how senior local politicians and officers are leading work to promote standards.

11 In Surrey:

- The Chairman of Standards Committee has, since his appointment in July, met with the Leader and Deputy Leader, Opposition Group Leaders, and Chief Executive to discuss Standards Committee and the standards agenda at Surrey County Council. These meetings are to be held on a regular basis.
- The Chairman of Standards Committee wrote to every candidate in the recent election and to every newly elected Member to stress the importance of good standards.
- Standards Committee has a work plan that is kept under review by officers. It also has an action tracker to ensure that actions agreed by the Committee are taken forward.

Increasing Confidence in Local Democracy

12 The Award criteria requests evidence of the positive difference the authority's approach to high standards has made to the reputation of the authority and to our community's understanding of local democracy. Recent criticisms of the Council made by the former interim Chief Executive in his report "Diagnostic and Stocktake: Handover Report to the new Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet" are being actively addressed by the joint Standards Committee and Audit and Governance Committee referred to above.

Conclusions:

Financial and value for money implications

13 Entry to the Award would require officer time to pursue but the Award would generate interest in the Council's approach and would contribute to raising the profile of the Standards Committee.

Equalities Implications

14 None

Risk Management Implications

15 None

Implications for the Council's Priorities or Community Strategy/Local Area Agreement Targets

16 None

Recommendations:

Standards Committee to note the announcement that the LGC Awards 2010 is welcoming nominations for the Standards and Ethics category and to decide whether to make a bid this year.

Next steps:

If the Committee decides to pursue and application for an award it is proposed that a small task group of Members oversees the work of officers.

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Sources/background papers:

Letter from Standards for England dated 6 July 2009 (attached as Annexe 1).