



STANDARDS COMMITTEE
15 February 2010

Standards of Conduct Survey 2010

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To agree a way forward on the Standards of Conduct Survey 2010.

Introduction:

- 1 During December 2008 and January 2009, Standards Committee undertook a survey of Members and senior officers to identify strengths and weaknesses in the Council's approach to standards of conduct.
- 2 The Committee wished to repeat the survey at regular intervals. This report is to gain approval for taking forward a survey during early 2010.

Previous Survey:

Why the survey was carried out

- 3 In September 2008, Standards Committee considered whether to enter for the LGC Standards and Ethics Award. The Committee felt that it could learn from the Award without entering that year, and also spend time identifying and addressing any areas of weakness. To fulfil this, the Committee received a report on 3 July 2009 highlighting good practice among those shortlisted for the Award. It also conducted a survey of Members and senior officers to assess perceptions of the ethical environment at Surrey County Council.

How the survey was conducted

- 4 The survey was created as an online questionnaire using SurveyMonkey and is attached as Annexe 1. A link to the survey was circulated to all Members of the Council, co-opted Members and senior officers on 15 December 2008. Hard copies of the survey were sent on request and to Members not using the email system. A couple of reminders were circulated and the survey closed to responses on 12 January 2009.

Governance Survey

- 5 During December 2008, the Audit and Risk Assurance Service was also undertaking a Governance Survey, which focussed on knowledge of the Members' Code of Conduct, attached as Annexe 2. While the two surveys focussed on different areas, the Committee is asked to consider whether it would like to include the questions on the Code of Conduct into its own survey. This would help the Committee to assess whether training is having an impact over time.

Findings and outcome

- 6 The results of the Standards of Conduct Survey are attached as Annexe 3.
- 7 Following the survey, greater focus was placed on raising awareness of the Code of Conduct, with increased presence by Standards Committee during the election period. The Chairman of Standards Committee was also invited to present the Committee report to Council to raise awareness of the Committee's work. Ongoing training is taking place through the circulation of the online Standards Brief. The results of the survey were also referred to by the outgoing interim Chief Executive in his handover report to the new Chief Executive. In response to the handover report, a Governance Task Group was established which included members of Standards Committee.

Survey 2010:

- 8 In response to the Committee's request to repeat the survey, Members are now asked to agree taking this forward. The Governance Task Group, which recently completed its work, also recommended that Standards Committee continue to carry out its survey of Members and senior officers, to help identify areas of both strengths and weaknesses in Member/Officer relationships.
- 9 It is suggested that existing questions are not changed to enable comparison to be made with the previous results. However, Members may wish to add questions, such as those from the Governance Survey.

Conclusions:

- 10 The Committee is asked to consider the approach previously taken to the Standards of Conduct Survey, to review the timeliness of taking forward a further survey shortly, and agree the questions.

Financial and value for money implications

- 11 None

Equalities Implications

- 12 The Committee should ensure that all those invited to complete the survey are given any support required to do so.

Risk Management Implications

- 13 Standards Committee should be aware of the overall knowledge of the Conduct of Conduct amongst Members in order to take relevant action to address shortcomings and avoid risk to the Council's reputation. Perceptions of a poor ethical environment at Surrey County Council could also impact on morale and would need to be addressed.

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

- 14 None.

Recommendations:

Standards Committee to agree a way forward on the Standards of Conduct Survey for 2010.

Next steps:

To conduct the Standards of Conduct Survey.

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Sources/background papers:

Standards Committee Reports and Minutes: 4 September 2008; 13 March 2009; 3 July 2009

Cabinet Report (14 July 2009) Surrey County Council - Diagnostic and Stocktake: Handover Report to new Chief Executive, Leader and Cabinet (www.surreycc.gov.uk)