



STANDARDS COMMITTEE
17 February 2012

ELECTED MEMBERS' INTERESTS

PURPOSE OF REPORT: The Standards Committee to consider the Internal Audit report and completed Management Action Plan on Elected Members' Interests, attached as Appendix 1, and make recommendations to Council as appropriate.

Background

1. As part of the 2011/12 annual Internal Audit plan a review was undertaken to review the current processes in place for Members of Surrey County Council to declare and record relevant personal interests.
2. Under the Members' Code of Conduct there is a formal requirement placed on elected members to:
 - Declare relevant personal interests when attending meetings of the council; and
 - Register personal interests in a formal written record that is accessible to the public.
3. The Register of personal interests ("the Register") requires completion within 28 days of election, and amended thereafter as new disclosures become relevant or old disclosures need to be changed.
4. On an annual basis Members are also required to complete a return stating 'Related Party Disclosures': this is in accordance with IAS24, in which the council is required to disclose material transactions with related parties in the audited Statement of Accounts. Such declarations cover not only the member but also close members of their family, and might be made where either holds a senior position of control or influence in an organisation that the council has dealings with.

Conclusions

5. Taken as a whole the audit concluded that the present arrangements do satisfy the minimum legal requirements, although improvements to the various processes can be made and a number of inconsistencies and apparent mistakes have been identified within the Register.

6. For this reason the overall opinion given by Internal Audit was one of Some Improvement Needed - a few specific control weaknesses were noted; generally however, controls evaluated are adequate, appropriate, and effective to provide reasonable assurance that risks are being managed and objectives should be met.

Financial implications

7. None.

Equalities Implications

8. None.

Risk Management Implications

9. Failure to transparently declare interests may lead to a reduction in public confidence in the governance arrangements of the Council.

Recommendations:

The Committee is requested to consider the Internal Audit report attached as Appendix 1 and make any recommendations to Council as appropriate.

Next steps:

Any recommendations will need to be reported to the Council and incorporated into ongoing arrangements for declaring interests after the implementation of relevant provisions of the Localism Bill in 2012.

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Sources/background papers:

Surrey County Council Register of members' interests
Surrey County Council Related Parties Disclosure returns
Internal Audit report 'Elected Members' Interests' January 2012