

# NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## STANDARDS COMMITTEE

14 January 2008

### **Citizens' Panel Questionnaire**

#### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide Members with the full report of the results of the questionnaire regarding the ethical framework circulated to the Citizens' Panel in August 2007.

#### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Members will recall that following the publication of an article in the NY Times, awareness of standards issues affecting the Council was to be tested through the Citizens' Panel by means of a questionnaire.
- 2.2 A questionnaire on standards matters was produced and formed part of a wider questionnaire distributed to the Citizens' Panel in August 2007.
- 2.3 At the Committee's last meeting on 1 October 2007, Members were informed of the preliminary results arising out of the questionnaire consultation.

#### **3.0 UPDATE**

- 3.1 NWA, the company responsible for collating and analysing the responses to the questionnaire has compiled its final report. An extract from the report, incorporating all pages relating to the standards part of the questionnaire, is attached at Appendix 1 for Members' consideration.
- 3.2 I would particularly draw Members' attention to the following areas of the report:
- 3.2.1 The panel size was 2027 members. A total of 1,477 questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 73%. Responses were 'weighted' to make the achieved sample representative of the county, in terms of age, gender and district.
- 3.2.2 97% of respondents believe high ethical standards and good systems of governance are important.
- 3.2.3 64% believe that generally standards of behaviour from Members and officers are high, whereas one in ten feel they are not very, or not at all, high and over a quarter are unsure.
- 3.2.4 45% were unaware of the statutory principles. Over half of the respondents were aware, to varying degrees.
- 3.2.5 Almost half (48%) were aware that there was a Code of Conduct for Members. Of those respondents, most knew some detail of the Code (only 17% were not aware of any specific requirements) but only 60% (30% of the total sample) were aware that penalties can be imposed.
- 3.2.6 Only 1% of respondents had consulted the Register of Members' Interests. 63% found the process easy whilst 24% found it not very, or at all, easy.

3.2.7 Knowledge of the Standards Committee and the Standards Board is low: only a quarter of all respondents were aware of the Standards Committee (with 30% of them being unaware of any of the Committee's responsibilities) and only 22% of all respondents were aware of the Standards Board.

3.2.8 10 respondents (less than 1%) had made a complaint against a Member in the previous 12 months: of those, only 3 were satisfied with the process; 6 were dissatisfied and 1 unsure. Of the other respondents who had not made a complaint, only 16% felt they would know how to do so.

3.2.9 83% of respondents felt that Members and officers should be judged broadly by the same standards, with 9% thinking that employees should have higher standards and 4% thinking they should have lower standards.

3.2.10 Only 13% of respondents felt the Council promotes standards issues well.

3.3 Members can see that there is still some work for the Committee to do in raising awareness of the Code of Conduct and the ethical framework, along with awareness of the Committee's existence and its specific role.

3.4 Appendix 3 of the final report sets out the responses to open questions posed in the questionnaire. In relation to standards, the only open question related to what more could be done to publicise the Council's work on standards issues. There are numerous responses and suggestions, which can be mainly grouped as follows:

- Documents sent to residents (separate from other Council material)
  - eg flyers, leaflets, notes, posters, circulars, bulletin, letter to constituents, local booklets, information and link on letterhead,
- Documents sent to residents with other Council material
- Reports in local newspapers/media
- Reports in NY Times
- Internet/Council website
- During elections/on election literature
- Notices in Council buildings
- Notices in libraries
- Council's Annual Report
- Other miscellaneous methods
- No need to publicise/not important

3.5 Members may wish to consider how these results might inform the Committee's future work. Many of the suggestions re promotion/publication of standards issues are already encompassed within the Committee's Communications Strategy Action Plan and will be considered as part of the Committee's ongoing Work Programme. In addition, the issues would, to a certain extent, also be covered by the action points arising out of agreement of the Council's statement re standards of conduct. In respect of the latter it was agreed that in order to publicise the statement, the following forms of publication could be undertaken:

- Key messages emails
- Intranet
- Website (as well as in the Councillor Conduct section of the site)
- County Talk newsletter
- NY Times

- in the induction pack for new employees as a standard statement about the culture of the Council
- Members' Digest
- Provide in Council Offices and libraries
- Provide copies in Citizens' Advice Bureaux
- Ensure the statement is provided on notices and leaflets published by NYCC

Most of the above action points are yet to be addressed, so more information (over and above the statement itself) could be included in the publicity.

- 3.6 Members are requested to consider the issues arising out of the results of the Citizens' Panel Questionnaire and how they may best be addressed. Members may feel there is merit in reporting the results of the questionnaire to Management Board.

#### **4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 That Members note the contents of this report and consider ways in which the results of the questionnaire might inform the Committee's future work.

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Background Documents:  
None

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