

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

1 September 2008

Communications Strategy

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To update Members regarding issues arising out of the results of the Citizens' Panel survey on standards matters, in light of the Standards Committee's Communications Strategy.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At the Committee's meeting on 14 January 2008, it considered the full report of the results of the Citizens' Panel survey regarding standards issues. Members requested that consultation take place with the Communications Unit regarding the results and how they might inform the future work of the Committee in light of its Communications Strategy.
- 2.2 The full report of the Citizens' Panel survey and the Communications Strategy were forwarded to the Communications Unit for their views. The Council's Head of Communications attended the last meeting of the Committee on 2 June 2008 and presented a paper concerning standards communications issues, on which Members offered their views. It was agreed that Members would feed back any further comments to the Monitoring Officer, after which she would liaise further with the Head of Communications and an update report would be brought back to a future meeting.

3.0 UPDATE

- 3.1 The Monitoring Officer and Head of Communications have further discussed the standards' communication/publicity issues and an update is set out below for Members.
- 3.2 The June edition of County Talk, the staff newsletter, which reaches all staff with their payslips, included an article on ethical conduct. It covered the principles of the Code of Conduct and explained briefly how complaints that Members may have breached the Code are now handled.
- 3.3 The August edition of NYTimes, the Council newspaper, also included an A to Z guide to Council services. Within that A to Z there were contact details for the 'Ethical standards and monitoring officer', as part of a larger listing of council services.
- 3.4 Consideration needs to be given as to whether a specific article should be proposed for inclusion in a future edition of NYTimes, explaining the recent changes to how complaints are investigated and determined. July 2007 was the last time that an article on standards issues was included within the newspaper.
- 3.5 The Standards Board for England has recently produced guidance for local authorities' press offices, which provides advice on how to manage local media interest in Code of Conduct investigations and hearings, and is based on the Standards Board's press policy.

- 3.6 With the development of the Council's intranet currently underway, information will be provided on ethical standards and the Code of Conduct as part of the wider information available to staff. The intranet is scheduled to be launched in November 2008. In addition, the standards information on the website will be regularly reviewed to ensure it is up to date.
- 3.7 Further consideration needs to be given as to whether any media activity is required and how the ethical statements of the Council's Leader and Chief Executive Officer may be used in the future. The latter issue is the subject of a separate report to this meeting of the Committee. As that other report highlights, promotion of the work of the Committee and the standards regime has slipped in the work schedule, given the magnitude and priority of the work involved in the implementation of the new Code of Conduct and local complaints regime. Communication/publicity issues will be given priority over the coming months.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Members are requested to consider the issues raised in this report. Any necessary revisions to the Committee's Communications Strategy in light of Members' comments, will be brought to a future meeting of the Committee.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 That Members consider the issues raised in this report.

CAROLE DUNN
Head of Legal and Committee Services
and Monitoring Officer

HELEN EDWARDS
Head of Communications

Background Papers:

Minutes of Standards Committee meetings on 14 January 2008 and 2 June 2008.

County Hall
NORTHALLERTON

20 August 2008