

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

1 September 2008

Update re use of Ethics statements

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Members regarding the use made of the various Council statements regarding standards issues.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On the recommendation of the Standards Committee, the following statements regarding ethical issues have been agreed:

CEO and Leader general ethics statement

Standards of behaviour within the Council are regulated by national Codes of Conduct and the ethical framework introduced in 2002. The Council is proactive in promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct through its Standards Committee, which has a wide remit and full work programme.

Whilst standards of behaviour within the Council are excellent, there is no room for complacency. We fully subscribe to the principles underpinning the ethical framework and expect all Members and Officers to do the same. We are both committed to working together to lead by example and upholding the ethical wellbeing and effective governance of the Council.

JOHN WEIGHELL

JOHN MARSDEN

Leader of the Council

Chief Executive Officer

Council's statement re standards

North Yorkshire County Council believes in a strong ethical organisational culture. It aims to promote the highest levels of conduct by its members and officers, to increase public trust in the delivery of its vision and its objectives, by:

- (i) maintaining openness and transparency in conducting its business;**
- (ii) being accountable for all it says and does;**
- (iii) ensuring that everyone knows what is expected of them;**
- (iv) offering appropriate training and development programmes; and**
- (v) promoting the work of its Standards Committee.**

Council's ethical statement for stakeholders

North Yorkshire County Council believes in a strong ethical culture. The conduct of its members and officers in fulfilling their roles is regulated by national Codes of Conduct and a comprehensive complaints framework.

Standards of behaviour within the Council are generally excellent: the Council continues, however, to promote the ethical agenda to ensure the existing high standards are maintained; and the Leader and Chief Executive Officer are committed to working together to lead by example and to uphold the ethical wellbeing and effective governance of the Council.

In working with partners and service providers on Council business, the Council requires similarly high standards from those with whom it works.

Statement re role of senior managers in ethical framework

The Council's senior managers recognise the importance of the ethical agenda within the authority: they will ensure that those whom they manage are clear about their respective roles and what is expected of them; managers will also encourage and promote the highest standards of conduct amongst their staff, at all times leading by example. Managers will have due regard to the advice of the Monitoring Officer and the Standards Committee, and will seek such advice where necessary.

- 2.2 The Committee previously indicated it would like to be updated periodically on the use made of the various standards statements.

3.0 USE OF THE STATEMENTS

- 3.1 At the time of considering the statements, the Committee identified various ways in which they might be used to promote the ethical framework. It is fair to say that given the priority and magnitude of the work involved in the implementation of the new Code of Conduct last year and the new locally based complaints regime this year, work in promoting the statements has slipped in the work schedule.
- 3.2 Some limited work has, however, been undertaken for some of the statements and that is detailed below.
- 3.3 The standards pages on the Council's website are currently being reviewed in light of the new local ethical framework. The statements will be used where appropriate in the revisions to the webpages, which are also likely to be replicated on the Council's intranet.
- 3.4 The statements will be promoted more widely, in the ways previously identified by the Committee, over the coming months: this will be a priority during the Autumn. The statements will also be useful in implementing the Committee's Communications Strategy, which is currently the subject of further discussions with the Council's Communications Unit.

Council's ethical statement for stakeholders

- 3.5 The Committee previously agreed that the statement should be published on the Council's website and Intranet and also incorporated, where appropriate, into contractual and procurement documentation.
- 3.6 The ethical statement for stakeholders has been incorporated into work practices: it has been included in the Council's Procurement Manual and in some of the procurement precedent documentation:
- 3.6.1 Paragraph 8.8 of the Procurement Manual contains a section relating to fraud and corruption; it refers to the Council's Whistleblowing Policy and also headlines the key elements of the Council's Counter Fraud Strategy. The Council requires contractors to ensure awareness of these policies and a similar awareness on the part of their employees.
- 3.6.2 To complement the general material, the Council also includes, in model documents, a statement (in paragraph 8 of the Invitations to Tender introduction) to the effect that the Council believes in a strong ethical culture and again the Whistleblowing Policy is highlighted, along with the Anti-Money Laundering Policy. This is included in paragraph 8 of the proforma Invitation to Tender for Services.
- 3.6.3 The Procurement Manual is a document which is managed by the Northern Procurement Group (NPG) on the Council's behalf; it is regularly updated and is available on the Finance and Central Services' portal of the Council's website. All procurement champions - who form part of the Council's Corporate Procurement Group - are required to disseminate information about the Procurement Manual within their Directorates, including the contents of the Procurement Manual, and they are regularly updated about changes.
- 3.7 The ethical statement for stakeholders has not been included in the Council's Contract Procedure Rules as it is not practicable, nor appropriate, to include the statement in each and every contract. It is most appropriate to include the statement where the Council is seeking relatively high value quotations (£20k+) or tender exercises where the statement can be included in the instructions to tenderers (see paragraph 3.6.2 above).

CEO and Leader general ethics statement

- 3.8 This was used as a Foreword to a Standards Bulletin, circulated shortly after the statement was agreed.

Council's statement re standards

- 3.9 This statement was specifically published in the Council's weekly email newsletter 'Key Messages' on 21 September 2007.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Members will note that there is more to be done in utilising the agreed statements and this will be given priority over the coming months, as the new local ethical framework beds down within the authority.
- 4.2 A further report will be brought to a future meeting of the Committee, explaining the ways in which the standards statements have been used to promote the ethical framework.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Members are requested to note this report.

CAROLE DUNN

Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services) and Monitoring Officer

Author of report: Moira Beighton

Telephone: 01609 532458

Room 15

Background Documents:

Minutes of Standards Committee meetings

Minutes of County Council meeting on 18 July 2007

County Hall

NORTHALLERTON

8 August 2008