

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

13 September 2010

Review of Online Standards Information

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update Members as to the nature of the standards information currently published on the Council's website.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 This report has been brought to the Standards Committee in accordance with the Committee's current Work Programme. Periodically the Monitoring Officer undertakes a review of the material currently published on the Council's website regarding standards issues and the ethical framework generally and reports back to the Committee on any possible gaps in publication.

3.0 REVIEW

Website

- 3.1 The standards documentation published on the Council's website is accessed via the "Council and Democracy" link on the Homepage. The "Council and Democracy" web-page directly links to the "Councillors, democracy and elections" web-page where there is a "Councillor Conduct" section, from which detailed information about the Standards Committee and the ethical framework generally can be accessed, on separate web-pages, relating to:

- The Adjudication Panel
 - sets out the role of the First Tier Tribunal and provides a link to the Tribunal's website;
- The Code of Conduct
 - contains the joint Leader and Chief Executive Officer standards statement;
 - sets out a summary of the Code's requirements;
 - the Code and the Council's supporting Guidance Protocol on the Code are available to download;
 - provides details of how the Register of Members' Interests may be inspected and provides a link to the online Register;
- The Principles of conduct
 - sets out the statutory principles in full;

- Standards for England
 - sets out the role of Standards for England and provides a link to its website;
 - sets out how a complaint that a Member may have breached the Code may be made;
- The Standards Committee (see paragraph 3.3 below)
- The Role of the Leader and Chief Executive Officer within the ethical framework
 - this web-page contains the Defined Roles Protocol re the roles of the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive Officer in relation to the ethical framework;
- The Monitoring Officer
 - sets out the role of the Monitoring Officer in supporting the Standards Committee and provides contact details for the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer;
- The Ethical Framework
 - sets out an overview of the Ethical Framework.
- A series of “Frequently Asked Questions” relating to the ethical framework, each of which links to an individual web-page with a model answer.

3.2 The website therefore now has a specific page dedicated to the Standards Committee itself (<http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=11139>), which sets out:

- the detail of the local complaints handling regime and how a complaint that a Member may have breached the Code may be made;
- the role of Standards for England and a link to its website;
- the membership of the Standards Committee and information about the Committee’s independent members;
- the Standards Committee’s Terms of Reference;
- details of the Standards Committee’s Complaints Sub-Committees and their respective Terms of Reference;
- details about Standards Committee meetings;
- information about the Monitoring Officer;

and the following documentation can be downloaded from the Standards Committee web-page:

- the latest edition of the Standards Bulletin;
- the latest Standards Committee Annual Report;
- the Standards Committee Jurisdiction and Assessment Criteria;

- the Standards Committee Complaint Assessment, Investigation and Determination Procedures.
- 3.3 The website also has a specific page dedicated to the Register of Members' Interests (<http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=8066>). This sets out the types of matters which must be registered and provides access to elected Members' and Standards Committee independent Members' individual registration of interests forms.
- 3.4 There is also now a direct promotional link (a picture on the right hand side of the web-page) to the 'Councillor Conduct' page from all Councillor related web-pages, to facilitate access to the standards information on the website. In addition, a promotion was also added to the main homepage for a month in May 2010, however promotions on the homepage cannot appear permanently as other services also need to highlight their current issues. However, the Council's Web Team will, from time to time in the future (for example if and when a new Code is introduced), include temporary promotional items highlighting the work of the Committee on the homepage's "In Focus" section, to highlight the standards regime and particular aspects of the Committee's work.
- 3.5 The profile of the ethical framework has also been raised by standards and ethics being specifically referred to in the portfolio of the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Affairs. This is highlighted in the Council's Constitution.

Intranet

- 3.6 More information about standards issues is now contained on the Council's Intranet, largely through the 'Managing Staff in the Workplace' intranet page. This provides, amongst other matters, links to the Council's Staff Charter and Officers' Standards of Conduct Procedure, which clearly define what the Council expects from its staff, and a link to the intranet 'Conduct and disciplinary' page (the aim of which is to help to maintain the required standards of officer conduct and behaviour throughout the Council and to ensure that any disciplinary action required is applied consistently and fairly).
- 3.7 The intranet 'Conduct and disciplinary' page also contains:
- in its introduction, the first part of the Council's statement re standards;
 - brief details of the Members' standards regime and a direct link to the 'Councillor Conduct' pages of the Council's website;
 - the standards statement re the role of senior managers in the ethical framework; and
 - the latest Standards Bulletin is available to download from the page.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 On reviewing the standards information published on the Council's website, the Monitoring Officer is satisfied that all the relevant and required documentation is available for public inspection, although some areas do require updating and some hyperlinks currently do not work. Priority will be given to this over the coming weeks.
- 4.2 The Monitoring Officer has looked at other authorities' websites' standards content, particularly those previously short-listed for the LGC Standards and Ethics award, and noted that they all follow a similar format to this Authority's content in terms of the information being published in the Council and Democracy sections of the websites. On comparison with these other authorities, the Council does appear to publish more, and wider, standards information on its website.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 That Members note this report.

5.2 That the Monitoring Officer updates the standards information currently published on the Council's website as necessary and reports back to a future meeting of the Committee.

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Background Documents:

NYCC website (www.northyorks.gov.uk)

25 August 2010