



BGF-ES-KS-A23-L1

Members of Stevenage Borough Council

Better Governance Forum

7th Floor, NLA Tower
12-16 Addiscombe Road
Croydon CR0 0XT
Telephone 020 8667 1144
Facsimile 020 8667 8501
E-Mail info@ipf.co.uk
Web site: www.ipf.co.uk/governance

27 January 2003

Dear Member

Ethical Governance Audit

Following the report of the external auditor and a meeting of the Standards Committee earlier this month, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy has been asked to carry out an ethical governance audit of the Council and review the role of the Monitoring Officer.

We aim to be using in part the methodology defined in guidance from the IDeA as well as our own corporate governance publication, which was put together with SOLACE. In essence, the audit is a “reality check” designed to evaluate strengths and weaknesses, and then adjust rules, processes and practices accordingly.

In the new preface to the IDeA publication, the then Parliamentary under Secretary of State, Beverley Hughes MP, said:

“I hope that all authorities will undertake an Audit and act upon its results. The decision to do so requires a measure of courage, because those results may not always be comfortable, and the actions needed may not always be easy. But if the outcome is an authority that has done all that it can to live up to the expectations that people rightly place upon it, then that effort will have been worthwhile. Public trust is simply too valuable to take for granted.”

Our approach in working with the council on this is to be constructive and helpful and to suggest possible improvements that might benefit the council and how it works, and to evaluate our detailed analysis alongside views and ideas from all members and senior officers.

To this end, we ask that each member complete the attached questionnaires and return it in a sealed envelope marked EGA in the bottom left hand corner to the monitoring officer who will batch them together and send them unopened to our office on Monday 24th February. We do not envisage a need at this stage to interview members, but if anyone

Institute of Public Finance Limited (IPF)

Incorporated in England and Wales under registration number 2376684
Registered address – 3 Robert Street, London WC2N 6RL. VAT registration number GB 627 3907 25
IPF is a company owned by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

would particularly like to speak to an officer from CIPFA by all means notify Paul Froggatt so that a suitable opportunity can be offered.

The questionnaire will remain confidential to CIPFA and any report related to them will be strictly non-attributable.

I would like to reiterate that our approach is to be helpful and we look forward to receiving a good number of completed questionnaires to help with that aim and the completion by us of the overall task we have been commissioned to perform.

Thank you for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Keith Stevens
Associate to the CIPFA Better Governance Forum

**CIPFA Better Governance
Forum
Ethical Governance Audit
Members Questionnaire**

ISSUE 1

27January 03

- 3
- a) Do you consider the local community trusts its borough councilors?

 - b) What do you think has influenced this?

 - c) What could be done to increase such trust?
- 4
- What is your view (giving an example if possible) of the:
- a) Availability to staff and members of full, accurate and clear policies, guidance and advice on ethical issues and procedures?

 - b) Clarity, relevance and helpfulness of the council's constitution and related documents?

 - c) Council's attitude towards, and willingness to act on, criticism?

 - d) Ability of non-executive members to hold the executive to account and to include a meaningful input to policy development in various ways, including at council and via overview and scrutiny?

- e) Forward plan of key decisions
- 5 How could the clarity and operation of the following be improved (if at all)?
- a) Roles and responsibilities of members and staff?

 - b) Processes for policy development, implementation and review?

 - c) Decision making, monitoring and reporting processes?
- 6 Are the powers to exclude **press** and public fairly and properly used?
- 7 In relation to declaring interests, claiming expenses and receiving hospitality or gifts, do you consider that current internally laid down rules are:
- a) Reasonably clear

 - b) Followed?

8 Can you give one or two examples of how the authority has changed something in the light of a) internal or external comment and

b) correcting a probity matter which needed to be put right?

9 What formal training and development have you a) received

and

b) been offered by the authority in the last 3 years?

10 a) What advantages and/or disadvantages have you noticed since the introduction of the ethical framework?

10 b) Are there any changes you would like to see in the role of the standards committee and/or the monitoring officer?

Name (leave blank if you wish): Date: