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Senior Officers of Stevenage Borough Council

**Better Governance Forum**

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27 January 2003

Dear Officer

**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 officer 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 24<sup>th</sup> February. We do not envisage a need at this stage to interview officers, but if anyone 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 questionnaires will remain confidential to CIPFA and any report related to them will be strictly non-attributable.

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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  
Senior Officers  
Questionnaire**

ISSUE 1

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## ETHICAL GOVERNANCE AUDIT MEMBERS QUESTIONNAIRE

- 1
  - a) Is your view of the promotion of high standards by members and senior managers that there is active encouragement or complacency or something in between?
  
  - b) Are you satisfied with the information and any training received related to ethical standards?
  
  - c) Is there anything more you think could be done to promote high ethical standards within the Authority?
  
- 2
  - a) Who do you think should “own” the ethical framework?
  
  - b) Is there a good knowledge and practice of high ethical standards by members and officers?
  
  - c) What are the good and bad features in this regard?
  
- 3
  - a) Do you consider the local community trusts its borough councillors?

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 Does the council operate in accordance with its defined roles for members and officers, and the responsibilities, policies, procedures, protocols and codes laid down in the Constitution and elsewhere?
- b) What improvements could usefully be made to the roles and procedures etc laid down?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c) What is working well, and not so well, under the new decision making, overview and scrutiny and ethical conduct arrangements prescribed by the Local Government Act 2000?
- 7 Are good ethical standards “designed in” to the authority’s procedures and relationships with outside bodies, partners, contractors and grant receivers, and how could they be improved?

- 8
- a) 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
- a) Do you consider that most staff are fairly familiar with the Whistleblowing policy?
  - b) Is sufficient training provided to staff on issues relating to ethical standards?
  - c) Do you consider that the authority is open and enables the public to be sufficiently informed?
  - d) Does the authority have clear lines of accountability and responsibility?
- 10
- a) What advantages and/or disadvantages have you noticed since the introduction of the ethical framework?
  - 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: .....