

**Meeting:** Standards Committee

**Date:** 20 January 2004

**ETHICAL GOVERNANCE AUDIT – IMPLEMENTATION**

(Chief Executive)

Author and Lead Officer – Paul Froggatt Ext.No. 2212

**1 PURPOSE**

To advise the Committee on progress in implementing the Ethical Governance Audit.

**2 RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That progress on implementing the Ethical Governance Audit and the adoption of the Standards Committee recommendations by the Full Council be noted.
- 2.2 That the review of the access to information provisions in the Constitution be deferred until the outcome of the Government's review of the relevant legislation is known.

**3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 At its last meeting this Committee received a report, which addressed in detail, most of the issues raised in the Ethical Governance Audit of February 2003. These largely involved changes to the Council's Constitution.

**4 DETAILS**

- 4.1 The various recommendations made by the Committee have been implemented as follows:-
- 4.2 Ethical Standards Issues
  - 4.2.1 The Member/Officer Protocol was adopted by the Full Council in November 2003 as was the reference to Section 117 of the Local Government Act 1972 in Contract Standing Orders.
  - 4.2.2 The appropriate amendments have been made to the anti-fraud and corruption policy.
  - 4.2.3 The Committee has considered in detail revisions to the Members Handbook and has suggested substantial changes, particularly to the style and presentation of guidance to Members. The media section has undertaken some of this work and mock-ups are currently being prepared by external printers. It is understood that these will be available in time for presentation to the Committee.

#### 4.3 Delegations to officers

- 4.3.1 The criticisms set out in the Ethical Governance Audit of the Officer Delegations have been fully accepted and addressed. A complete revision of officer delegation was adopted by the Full Council in September 2003 in a similar form to that approved by this Committee.

#### 4.4 Decision-making, the Council's standing orders and other procedural details

- 4.4.1 This Committee considered a number of detailed points in these sections of the Constitution and in November the Council adopted in their entirety the Committee's recommendations which are now incorporated in the current (4<sup>th</sup>) version of the Constitution.

#### 4.5 Access to information

- 4.5.1 The Committee was advised of the complexity of the law generally falling under the heading of Access to Information. Although the Constitution accurately set out those rules, (subject to the corrections which were implemented by the Council in November), the Committee supported the proposal to set out the rules in a clearer, more accessible way.
- 4.5.2 The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has now established a review group to consider this issue and it may well be that a draft order will be produced for consultation repealing some of the legislation relating to public access to meetings and documents. It is, therefore, proposed that the review of this aspect of the Constitution is delayed pending the publication of proposals of the ODPM.

#### 4.6 Publicity and guidance for making complaints

- 4.6.1 Earlier this year, the Council established a Customer Service Centre as the general interface with the public.
- 4.6.2 Advice is given to members of the public generally on complaints through the Customer Service Centre. As well as forms for the Council's internal complaints procedure and the Ombudsman advice leaflets and complaint forms, the new advice notes and complaint forms produced by the Standards Board for England are also displayed and members of the public will be directed to this complaint route, where appropriate.

### **5 IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are none specific.

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

- An Ethical Governance Audit of Stevenage Borough Council produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy March 2003
- New Council Constitutions Modular Constitutions for English Local Authorities Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions December 2000
- The Constitution of Stevenage Borough Council 4<sup>th</sup> Version November 2003