

**WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**15<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 2007**

**1. ETHICAL GOVERNANCE TOOLKIT**

Joint report of the Clerk and the Monitoring Officer.

**RECOMMENDED**

- (1) THAT the Standards Committee consider the appropriateness and merits of the various elements of the ethical governance toolkit and decide which aspects, if any, they wish to explore further with a view to possible implementation in 2007/08.

**2. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report is submitted to inform the Committee of the availability of a number of tools designed to improve the ethical framework of the Authority.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Audit Commission, the Improvement and Development Agency and the Standards Board for England have jointly launched a toolkit to help local authorities to assess how well they are meeting the ethical agenda and to further improve their arrangements.
- 3.2 The toolkit consists of the following four elements, each of which is administered by the Audit Commission or the Improvement and Development Agency:

Self-Assessment Survey (Audit Commission)

Full Audit (Audit Commission)

Light Touch Health Check (Improvement and Development Agency)

Developmental Workshops (Audit Commission or the Improvement

and Development Agency).

3.3 The self assessment survey assesses awareness of ethical issues.

3.4 The full audit involves an in-depth assessment of the Authority's:

- compliance with the Code of Conduct;
- arrangements for local determinations and investigations;
- the roles and responsibilities of standards committees;
- monitoring officer roles and responsibilities;
- chief executive roles and responsibilities;
- protocols and constitution;
- arrangements for promoting confidence in local democracy;
- understanding of ethical issues and behaviours.

3.5 The light touch health check is a quick assessment of the following behaviours of the Authority:

- leadership;
- relationships;
- communication;
- accountability;
- management of standards;
- team working and co-operation.

3.6 The developmental workshops use ethical scenarios and are designed to improve awareness and understanding of ethical issues facing the Authority.

3.7 It is stated that the ethical governance toolkit will enable authorities to have a better understanding of:-

- how well they are meeting the ethical agenda;
- where they can make improvements;
- how they can address issues;
- how well they are meeting CPA benchmarks
- how they can help ensure that high standards of ethical governance are sustained.

3.8 Further it is said that failure to achieve high ethical standards has

consequences for members, councils and local government including:-

- loss of credibility and confidence in individual members, councils and local democracy by the public;
- investigation by the Standards Board for England or Councils;
- potential litigation and costs of defending a challenge;
- poor decision-making.

3.9 It is recommended that to get the full benefit of the toolkit trained practitioners from either the Audit Commission or the Improvement and Development Agency are used.

### **Suggested Approach**

3.10 It is likely that the revised Code of Conduct for Members and the Employees Code of Conduct will be issued shortly and will require adoption and the delivery of related training. Similarly there will be legislative changes to the remit of the Standards Committees and the Committee will have to be trained to deal with initial referrals, investigations and hearings. It is therefore anticipated that the next few months will be busy for the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer.

3.11 Standards Committee might wish to receive further detailed information on certain aspects of the ethical governance toolkit so that it has a better understanding of the diagnostic and training tools available. Following consideration of this information it can then decide which elements to deploy within the Authority.

## **4. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY**

In preparing this report, an initial Equality Impact Assessment is not required and has not been carried out, as the matters contained in this report will not lead to and do not relate to a policy change.

## **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 It is not a legal requirement to utilise the ethical governance toolkit

although given its promotion by the Audit Commission, the Improvement and Development Agency and the Standards Board of England it is likely to feature in audits and inspections. The recent research into standards committees and monitoring officers showed that over a quarter of respondent monitoring officers had used some of the toolkit and over half plan to use it in the future.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no resource implications arising directly from this report although when implemented all elements of the ethical governance toolkit will have financial and resource implications which can be detailed in a further report dependant upon the elements the Standard Committee wishes to explore further.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**NEERAJ SHARMA**  
**MONITORING OFFICER**

**SUSAN PHELPS**  
**CLERK**