

13. COUNCIL'S CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE - ANNUAL REVIEW OF COMPLIANCE 2013/14

The Council Executive considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Chief Legal Officer advising of the outcome of the annual review of the council's compliance with its Code of Corporate Governance.

The Chief Legal Officer advised that, during the latter part of 2013/14, Internal Audit had conducted a review of services' compliance with the council's Partnership Working Guidance. Implementation of any improvement identified in the report would form part of the work of the Corporate Governance Working Group in 2014/15. In relation to arrangements for reporting on the activities of significant outside bodies, and/or those with elected member representation, the review had found that there were still improvements required to the reporting arrangements and reminders had been issued to Heads of Service which had resulted in all relevant report requirements being met.

It was noted that each item in the revised Code required to be assessed across three factors – approach, deployment and review. Governance Champions for each Head of Service had assessed each requirement of the Code in turn and used a scoring scale (from 0 to 4) for each of the three categories. The scores obtained were shown in Appendix 1 to the report. A comparison of the scoring for 2012/13 and 2013/14 was examined within the report.

The council's Code of Corporate Governance required an annual statement of compliance to be made by the relevant responsible officer on a number of issues. The annual statements, with the exception of 'Freedom of Information' and 'Councillors' Code of Conduct' were contained in Appendix 2 to the report.

A number of specific issues of a governance nature addressed during 2013/14 were examined in the report. These were:-

- 1) Risk Management and Business Continuity Planning
- 2) Review of Corporate Delegation Template
- 3) Protocol for Complaints regarding Conduct of Councillors
- 4) Training on Corporate Governance Matters
- 5) Identification of Potential Governance Issues

Finally, the Chief Legal Officer reported that the following activities would be pursued by the Corporate Governance Working Group in 2014/15 to further improve governance requirements across the council:-

A review with the Governance Champions to ensure the consistent application of evidence across service areas. This would ensure that any areas for improvement within service areas were highlighted for future action.

A review of the scores for 2013/14 to identify appropriate standards where evidence of compliance could be improved further.

An investigation of the possibility of streamlining the scoring system to facilitate a consistent approach to assessing the evidence of compliance across services.

Implementation of any improvements identified in Internal Audit's report on compliance with the council's Partnership Working Guidance.

A review by Internal Audit of another section of the Code to maintain awareness of its provisions and improve compliance with them.

Benchmarking the council's approach to corporate governance with other councils.

It was recommended that the Council Executive:-

1. Note that the evidence of compliance with the standards of the Code had been strengthened and the standards continued to be substantially met in 2013/14.
2. Note the changes for future years to the statements on anti-fraud policy and benefit fraud, and on corporate procurement, as set out in section D11 of the report.
3. Agree that the focus in 2014/15 should be on the actions identified in section D13 of the report to further improve the levels of compliance with the Code's standards across the council.
4. Agree that the report be referred to the Audit and Governance Committee for consideration.

The Council Executive expressed its thanks to the Chief Legal Officer and his team for their work on maintaining a good Corporate Governance record.

Decision

To approve the terms of the report.