Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

10am, Thursday, 12 November 2015

Spot-checking on the Dissemination of Committee Decisions and Late Committee Reports

Item number	7.6
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	All

Executive summary

Following the decision of the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee on 19 June, to strengthen existing arrangements and provide greater assurance with regard to the dissemination of committee decisions, a spot-check of actions has been undertaken by directorates to ensure that decisions are being effectively communicated to staff. This report initially focuses on the dissemination of relevant policies to staff.

An update is also provided on the number of late reports to all committees, covering the period October 2014 to October 2015, including actions taken by directorates to address the issue.

Links

Coalition pledges

Council outcomes

Single Outcome Agreement

Report

Spot-checking on the Dissemination of Committee Decisions and Late Committee Reports

Recommendations

1.1   To note the response to the staff survey on the dissemination of council policies.

1.2   To note that a spot-checking report would be presented to Committee on the dissemination of committee decisions twice a year.

1.3   To note the number of late reports and actions taken by directorates to address the issue as detailed in the appendix to this report.

Background

2.1   The Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee had previously agreed a revised approach for the dissemination and implementation of committee decisions by directorates.

2.2   It was agreed that an annual report outlining all decisions taken in the previous year and an update on the implementation of decisions and recommendations to discharge actions be presented to the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee, executive committees and the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee.

2.3   It was also agreed to introduce a spot-check on the dissemination of committee decisions with an update being provided to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee every six months. This is the first of these updates.

Main report

3.1   **Decision of Committee and Report**

3.2   Following the decision of Committee on 19 June 2014, reports have been submitted to the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee, executive committees and the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee outlining all the decisions taken by each committee over the previous year with an update on the implementation of decisions and recommendations to discharge necessary actions.

3.3   This report focuses on the dissemination of relevant policies to staff. The setting and agreeing of policies is one of the key functions of committees and focusing on this provides an effective way of gauging whether important decisions are being effectively disseminated to appropriate Council officers. An outline of the

procedure for the dissemination of existing and new policies to staff is outlined below.

Council Policies

3.4   As part of the compliance, risk and governance workstream within the Efficient Effective Transformation Programme, a review of council policies was undertaken in September 2013 to rationalise existing council policy, publish agreed policies on the council's website and ensure an appropriate process of update and review going forward.

3.5   As the initial step in rationalising Council policies, a policy register was developed and is available on the Council's website. To facilitate greater transparency, accountability and openness, the register has been aligned with the Council's publication scheme which is a mandatory requirement under freedom of information legislation. The policy register is maintained by the Governance Service and updated on a regular basis.

3.6   It is essential for good governance and the efficient and effective running of the Council that officers clearly understand the policies applicable to their role, and their responsibilities in relation to the implementation of Council policy.

3.7   To strengthen governance arrangements in this area, a policy framework has been developed to ensure all current council policies are corrected, revised and reviewed in a consistent manner and to an agreed standard.

3.8   Recently a webcast link has been added to committee action sheets to ensure that decisions can be easily viewed at the route source by action owners. This has helped ensure that information is not diluted when cascaded.

3.9   Directorates are responsible for the dissemination of policies to their staff and the process adopted by each can vary.

3.10   **Spot-Check of Policies and Staff Survey Results**:

3.11   An initial spot-check has been carried out on the dissemination to Council Officers of two Council policies by way of a questionnaire to randomly selected officers from two service areas. This was emailed to officers by Business Managers using the Survey Monkey platform. Results are detailed at paragraphs 3.12 and 3.13 below

3.12   **Policy 1 – Communities and Families – Policy to Prevent and Respond to Bullying and Prejudice Amongst Children and Young People using the Children & Families Service** (agreed at the Education, Children and Families Committee on 19 May 2015.)

	Yes	No
Are you aware of the policy	100%	0%

Have you read the policy?	75%	25%
To what extent would you agree or disagree that the policy is clear and easy to understand	Strongly agree – 25% Agree – 50% Neither – 25% Disagree – 0% Strongly disagree – 0%	

3.13 **Policy 2 – Corporate Operations - Data Protection Policy** (agreed at Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee on 30 September 2014)

	Yes	No
Are you aware of the policy	100%	
Have you read the policy?	100%	
To what extent would you agree or disagree that the policy is clear and easy to understand	Strongly agree – 0% Agree – 83.33% Neither – 0% Disagree – 16.67% Strongly disagree – 0%	

Survey Responses

3.14 Officers didn't highlight a main channel through which they were most likely to hear about their respective policy. It was indicated that they had heard about policies through a variety of sources, this included work colleagues, the Council's intranet, compliance training, line managers and emails from the Communications Service.

3.15 When asked how the dissemination of policies could be improved, answers included the addition of an executive summary, a summary of changes, line manager briefings, examples of good practice, workshop sessions and a checklist for senior managers.

Future Spot-checking Exercise

3.16 The intention is to widen the spot-checking of the dissemination of Council decisions for future reports. Future spot-checks will make use of a variety of methods, including staff workshops and surveys, this will also focus on a wider range of actions than this policy-specific update. This will be used as an integral tool to improve the knowledge of staff and to improve internal communication.

3.17 Results show that there is a good understanding of these policies but future exercises will have to be widened in scope to provide more useful data.

Late Committee Reports

3.18 The committee report process can often be complex involving officers and a range of internal and external partners. At the request of the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee in October 2014, the Clerk wrote to directors to notify them of members' concerns regarding the late submission of reports.

3.19 Following this a working group was established between directorate business managers and Committee Services staff with the purpose of delivering efficiencies and a more consistent reporting process. Reducing the number of late reports to committee a key objective of this group. A number of positive measures were identified and these were reported to the Committee on 19 October 2015:

   a. The implementation of a report checklist

   b. Improved report writing guidance

   c. A refreshed report template

   d. Increased channels of communication and shared working methods

   e. Removal of duplication where possible.

3.20 Committee Services staff have tracked the number of, and reasons given for, the late submission of reports to committees over the previous 12 months. This information has been attached at appendix 1.

3.21 For the initial 12 month period, running October 2014 to October 2015 there were 10 late reports. Out of the 10 late reports there were a variety of reasons for them being late. These ranged from urgent items, partner contributions and up-to-date required information being provided after the publication of papers. Although any number of late reports is not desirable, 10 late reports in a year does not appear to indicate a poor culture or process, however, further work will be undertaken as part of the project to improve the report process, to reduce this number of these late reports.

Measures of success

4.1 Sufficient knowledge of Council policies by relevant officers.

4.2 Reports submitted to committee within required timescales.

Financial impact

5.1 There are no direct financial impacts as a result of this report.

Risk, policy, compliance and governance impact

6.1   The improvements in business processes help ensure increased transparency and assurance across the Council's decision making processes.

Equalities impact

7.1   There are no direct equalities impacts as a result of this report.

Sustainability impact

8.1   There is no direct sustainability impact as a result of this report.

Consultation and engagement

9.1   Officers from Corporate Operations and Children and Families were consulted by anonymous questionnaire.

9.2   Officers from across all service areas have been involved in improving the reporting process and ensuring that late reports are reduced.

Background reading/external references

Compliance, risk and governance programme: review of Council policy (CP&S Committee 3 September 2013)

Minute of the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee 19 June 2014

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Links

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Appendices	1 – Late Committee Reports

Appendix 1 – Late Committee Reports.

	Date of Committee	Committee	Service Area	Report Title	No of days late	Reason why late
1	27.11.14	Finance and Resources	H&SC	Adult Social Care Budget Pressures 2014/15	5	The Item was not originally on the agenda and was ruled urgent by the Convener
2	06.02.15	Police and Fire	SfC	Community Policing SLA; Performance Update	1	Police Scotland had additional details to add to the report but could not do this till the day of circulation. Director approval was then required.
3	23.04.15	Governance, Risk and Best Value	CG	Whistleblowing - Monitoring Report	5	Discussions were ongoing regarding the content of the report.
4	25.08.15	Transport and Environment	SfC	Transport for Edinburgh - Proposed Annual Performance Report	1	This report was generated by TfE and required annual report and account information, which resulted in a delay to the report.
5	25.08.15	Transport and Environment	SfC	Public Utility Company Performance 2014/15 – report by the Acting Director of Services for Communities	1	This was a year end report, which required information from the PU companies before it could be analysed and written.
6	25.08.15	Transport and Environment	SfC	Services for Communities Financial Monitoring – Month 3 2015/16	2	Report needed to be consistent with a report going to Finance and Resources committee the same week, and was delayed by that report. There were also ongoing discussions with members over the make-up of Services for Communities contribution to the Health and Social Care overspend.
7	25.08.15	Transport and Environment	SfC	Delivering the Local Transport Strategy 2014-2019 – Draft Parking Action Plan	1	Ongoing survey work and data analysis had to be completed before recommendations of report could be finalised. Given the political sensitivity and potential for reputational damage it was deemed safer to delay the report rather than go ahead with incorrect information.

8	15.10.15	Governance, Risk and Best Value	CG	Monitoring Officer Investigation: Cameron House	1	Approval of report needed to be confirmed