Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

10am, Thursday, 26 May 2016

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

Item number	7.4
Report number	
Executive/routine	
Wards	All

Executive summary

The Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee on 19 June 2015, agreed to strengthen existing arrangements and provide greater assurance with regard to the dissemination of committee decisions. This report provides a spot-check that actions have been undertaken by directorates in order to ensure that decisions are being effectively communicated to staff.

An update is also provided on the number of late reports to all committees, covering the period November 2015 to April 2016, including actions taken by directorates.

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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 and that further work would be undertaken to improve communication methods.

1.2   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 second of these updates.

Main report

Decision of Committee and Report

3.1   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.

3.2   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

3.3   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.

3.4   As the initial step in rationalising Council policies, a policy register was developed and is available on the [Council's website](#).

3.5   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. This is covered as part of induction for new employees of the Council. All existing council employees need to refresh their knowledge and understanding of key policies and procedures on an annual basis. Work has been underway to improve the approach to this essential learning for Council employees in recent months and will be implemented in May 2016.

3.6   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.

3.7   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 to officers.

3.8   Directorates are responsible for the dissemination of policies to their staff.

Spot-Check of Policies and Staff Survey Results:

3.9   An initial spot-check of policies was carried out and reported to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee in November 2015. This focussed 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. In both cases, results highlighted that officers surveyed were aware of the policy and only a very small minority disagreed with the statement that the policies were clear and easy to understand.

3.10   A second spot-checking exercise has been undertaken using similar methods as outlined in paragraph 3.9 above, however an expanded sample size was utilised and questions were tailored to gain a more qualitative understanding of how decisions are communicated to, and understood by, officers of the Council. For

this exercise, one policy and one strategy were chosen and aimed to focus on service areas not previously tested. Results are listed in paragraph 3.11 below.

3.11 **Policy 1 – Resources Directorate – Avoidance of Bullying and Harassment at Work Policy (10 respondents)** (agreed at Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee on 4 August 2015)

	Yes	No
Are you aware of the policy	80%	20%
If Yes to above, have you read the policy?	71.4%	28.6%
To what extent would you agree or disagree that new and revised policies have been communicated effectively in the past	Strongly agree – 0% Agree – 44.4% Neither – 33.3% Disagree – 22.2% Strongly disagree – 0%	

3.12 **Policy 2 – Place Directorate – Corporate Asset Strategy 2015-19 (74 respondents)** (agreed at Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee on 12 May 2015)

	Yes	No
Are you aware of the policy	54.2%	45.8%
If Yes to above, have you read the policy?	53.3%	46.7%
To what extent would you agree or disagree that new and revised policies have been communicated effectively in the past	Strongly agree – 0% Agree – 10.9% Neither – 42.2% Disagree – 39.1% Strongly disagree – 7.8%	

Survey Responses

3.13　Respondents highlighted that they had a good understanding of the aims of policies and how this would inform or change their day-to-day working. Officers were likely to learn about policies from a multitude of sources rather than an individual avenue. 42.9% of those surveyed indicated that they currently found out about policies through the Council's intranet (the Orb) and 28% when notified by line-managers, other highlighted mediums included searching the policy register, and through discussion with colleagues.

3.14　Of those that were aware of the Corporate Asset Strategy, 41.9% had been notified through a communications email linked to the Orb, while 45% advised by their line manager.

3.15　Staff were asked an open-ended question regarding how policies or strategies should ideally be disseminated, answers focused on the primary role of the line manager and favoured the utilisation of the e-mail format and a link on the orb. This correlates strongly with the procedure identified by respondents as their current method of receiving information regarding policies and strategies.

3.16　Suggested alternatives from the survey included making policies part of the Professional Review and Development (PRD) process, face to face meetings and mandatory training sessions

3.17　A recurring theme was that a degree of flexibility should be allowed and that the dissemination of policies and strategies should be managed in a job or role specific way which is easy to understand. The lack of access to ICT systems for many workers was highlighted as significant as this could hamper effective communication.

3.18　The survey results and in particular suggestions from staff will be shared with colleagues in Strategy and Insight and Communications to ascertain how the dissemination of policies and strategies can continue to be improved.

Late Committee Reports

3.19　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. Following this a number of positive improvement measures were put in place regarding the report writing process and to avoid late reports.

3.20　Eight late reports were reported with reasons to Committee on 12 November 2015 covering a twelve month period.

3.21　Committee Services staff have tracked the number of late reports to committees, and the reasons given for their late submission over the previous 6 months. This information has been attached at appendix 1.

3.22 For the six month period, running November 2015 to April 2016 inclusive there were six late reports. Out of the six late reports there were a variety of reasons for them being late. These included ICT disruption and awaiting the conclusion of review and consultation exercises. In one case a report was ultimately withdrawn from the agenda by the relevant director. Although any number of late reports is not desirable, six late reports in a six month period 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 further reduce the number of late reports.

3.23 It should be noted that reports late reports are only those that were circulated with the agenda when circulated three clear days before the meeting. It does not count those reports that were delayed longer than the expected completion date. This report also does not include those reports that were marked 'to follow' on an agenda planning meeting agenda.

Council Transformation Programme and new IT contract

3.24 The ongoing Transformation Programme has presented new opportunities to utilise and improve the reporting process and oversight of Council decision making. The formation of a Committee Business Support team will provide a streamlined enhanced committee report planning and support service and improved communication.

3.25 The awarding of the contract for IT services from 1 April 2016 to CGI has already provided advances in terms of IT software and processes. The council website is currently being migrated to an open source format expected to allow flexibility and transferability with forward thinking software. A scoping exercise and draft business case for a holistic Committee support, report management and publishing system is being progressed and is expected to provide significant cost and efficiency benefits. It is expected that real benefits will be achieved to improve the reporting process and ensure elected members have the maximum time available to consider 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 Place and Resources 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

Minute of the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee 12 November 2015

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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	08.12.2015	Education, Children and Families	Communities and Families	Short-Life Working Group: School Admissions/Appeals	1	ICT disruption resulting in delays
2	08.12.2015	Education, Children and Families	Communities and Families	Admission to Mainstream Schools	1	ICT disruption resulting in delays
3	08.12.2015	Education, Children and Families	Communities and Families	Children & Families Revenue Grants to Third Parties 2016-2019	2	Report subsequently withdrawn from the agenda by the Executive Director of Communities & Families on 07.12.15.
4	15.03.2016	Transport and Environment	Place	Delivering the Local Transport Strategy 2014-19: Parking Action Plan	2	Department received a significant number of responses to the consultation and had several discussions with Councillors in relation to this report
5	15.03.2016	Pensions	Resources	Investment Strategy Review – Lothian Buses Pension Fund	1	The reviews concluded at the meeting of Investment Strategy Panel on 9 March, hence the reason for these papers being available later than the other papers.

6	15.03.2016	Pensions	Resources	Investment Strategy Review – Scottish Homes Pension Fund	1	The reviews concluded at the meeting of Investment Strategy Panel on 9 March, hence the reason for these papers being available later than the other papers.