Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

10am, Thursday, 20 April 2017

Spot-checking on the Dissemination of Committee Policies

Item number	7.5
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 policies are being effectively communicated to staff.

Links

Coalition pledges

Council outcomes

Single Outcome Agreement

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Report

Spot-checking on the Dissemination of Committee Policies

Recommendations

1.1 To note the response to the staff surveys on the dissemination of council policies and that further work was ongoing to improve communication methods.

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 policies with updates being provided to the Governance, Risk and Best Value. This is the third 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 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.

3.4 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.

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

Spot-Check of Policies and Staff Survey Results:

3.7 The most recent spot checking exercise in May 2016 focussed on 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.

3.8 The spot-checking exercise in this report has been undertaken using similar methods as outlined in paragraph 3.7 above, however an expanded sample size was utilised and questions were tailored to gain an understanding of officer's awareness regarding where to find policies. The selected policies were the Smoke Free Policy and the Information Rights Policy. Results are listed in paragraph 3.11 and 3.12 below.

3.9 The Smoke Free Policy was originally agreed at Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee in September 2015 and was recently reviewed in December 2016. The policy was communicated by the Health and Safety Team using the following methods:

   3.9.1 Messages via Manager's News, Newsbeat and an 'all staff communication' email;

   3.9.2 Display on the Council's public and intranet websites;

   3.9.3 Signage inside Council buildings, and at the entrances to the curtilage of Council buildings and public play parks;

   3.9.4 A smoke free poster campaign was run in Primary Schools and the winning design was used as the smoke free sign in schools and play parks. A media release on the new policy and winning posted was published in the local press.

3.10 The Information Rights Policy was a new policy when approved by the Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee in October 2016 and is part of a suite of information governance policies. It sets out the Council's approach to upholding the information rights of individuals.

3.11 **Policy 1 – Smoke Free Policy (94 respondents)** (agreed at Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee on 1 September 2015 – reviewed on 6 December 2016)

	Yes	No
Are you aware of the policy	77.66%	22.34%
Does the policy place any specific responsibilities or obligations on you in your role?	40.74%	59.26%
Do you know where you could find this policy if required	86.15%	13.85%
I understand the aims of the policy	Strongly agree – 51.85% Agree – 40.74% Neither – 7.41% Disagree – 0% Strongly disagree – 0%	
I understand the steps needed to implement the policy to ensure it is effective	Strongly agree – 38.46% Agree – 50% Neither – 3.85% Disagree – 0% Strongly disagree – 7.69%	

3.12 **Policy 2 – Information Rights Policy (77 respondents)** (agreed at Corporate Policy and Strategy Committee on 4 October 2016)

	Yes	No
Are you aware of the policy	37.66%	62.34%
Does the policy place any specific responsibilities or obligations on you in your role?	55.82%	41.18%
Do you know where you could find this policy if required?	85.19%	14.81%
I understand the aims of this policy	Strongly agree – 29.41% Agree – 64.71% Neither – 5.88% Disagree – 0% Strongly disagree – 0%	
I understand the steps needed to implement the policy to ensure it is effective	Strongly agree – 17.65% Agree – 82.35% Neither – 0% Disagree – 0% Strongly disagree – 0%	

Survey Responses

3.13 Awareness and understanding of the aims and steps required to implement each policy was generally high.

3.14 Awareness of the Information Rights Policy was less prevalent than the Smoke Free Policy, however further awareness raising initiatives have been organised for 2017. To ensure that the policy is visible, understood and followed, it will be included as part of the Essential Learning for All Council Employees Key Policies and Procedures Handbook. The policy also forms an important part of the Information Governance Annual Communication Plan for 2017 which is supplemented by training and awareness raising sessions for staff.

3.15 Almost all respondents directly impacted in their role by the policies indicated that they knew where they could find more information if required. This high awareness correlated with the original key aims of creating a central policy register; to foster greater transparency, accountability and openness for officers and members of the public.

3.16   The large volume of policies that impact upon individual officers can make it impractical to maintain a fully comprehensive detailed knowledge of all documents, however, the online register and existing framework allows for relevant policies to be easily accessed for more detailed inspection when required.

3.17   Respondents were invited to provide comments as to how policies or strategies should ideally be disseminated, answers tended not to vary from methods currently utilised by directorates. This included one-to-one briefings, emails, team meetings, mandatory training sessions and use of the orb intranet site. Alternative suggestions included the use of notice boards and newsletters.

3.18   As with previous surveys, a recurring theme was that a one-size-fits-all approach was not appropriate and that flexibility should be allowed when disseminating policies and strategies.

3.19   Feedback from this exercise has been recorded by the Governance and Democratic Services Team and will be fed into any immediate efforts to help refine and improve processes. The medium to long-term ambition of the service is to implement holistic reporting and Committee management software to help improve Committee decision dissemination and end-to-end report workflow. It is anticipated that this will provide a step-change in how decisions are notified and implemented at an officer level.

Measures of success

4.1   Sufficient knowledge of Council policies by relevant officers.

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 across the Council were consulted by anonymous questionnaire.

Background reading/external references

[Compliance, risk and governance programme: review of Council policy (Corporate Policy and Strategy 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](#)

[Minute of the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee 26 May 2016](#)

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Links

Coalition pledges	
Council outcomes	
Single Outcome Agreement	
Appendices	None