

<b>DECISION-MAKER:</b>	STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	CHAIR'S MEETINGS WITH CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
<b>DATE OF DECISION:</b>	18 APRIL 2011
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	THE CHAIR OF STANDARDS AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

<b>STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY</b>
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Not applicable.
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### **BRIEF SUMMARY**

Discussions with the Chief Executive and the Leader of the Council have been held, as suggested in the Ethical Governance Review. These discussions have identified possible needs for the Committee to consider the impact on our governance of increased partnership working, changes in government policy affecting the work of the Committee, and the behaviour and attendance of Councillors at meetings and training events. The Committee is asked to consider these matters and seek further information as appropriate.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- (i) that the report be noted;
- (ii) that the Solicitor to the Council be asked to arrange a briefing on the partnership arrangements already in place and those known to be developing, so that members can better understand the governance issues;
- (iii) that the Committee gives consideration to whether action is needed to improve Councillors' behaviour and attendance at meetings and training events; and
- (iv) that the Solicitor to the Council be asked to prepare a briefing paper on possible changes in regulations affecting matters such as audit, ethics and probity.

### **REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. To enable the Committee to fulfil its role in ensuring a good standard of governance and accountability.

### **DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)**

2. Members will recall that in 2009 the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) undertook a 'light touch' Ethical Governance Health Check of the City Council. The findings were positive, and the report included a number of suggested ways of building on what had already been achieved. One of those was that the Chair of the Standards & Governance Committee could hold regular discussions with the Leader and the Chief Executive, "to review progress and to consider any adaptations of the Committee's work plan." This was in order to "help promote the work of the Committee and to ensure its work

is aligned to the needs of the Council." I therefore met with the former CEO on 5 July 2010 and the former Leader on 8 July, and subsequently with the current CEO on 5 January 2011 and the current Leader on 7 January.

3. The IDeA report made considerable mention of raising the profile of the Standards & Governance Committee. However, given that the Council achieves a good standard of governance with a relatively low-profile Standards & Governance Committee, I have not felt it necessary to pursue that aim beyond the submission of an annual report to the Council – which itself was another of IDeA's suggestions. The 2010 annual report reflected this "if it ain't broke don't fix it" approach, and the Committee endorsed it at the time. My discussions with the Leader and the CEO have been in much the same vein, therefore, with the emphasis being on aligning the Committee's work with the needs of the Council, rather than on promoting the work of the Committee.
4. One of the themes to emerge from my discussions was the potential impact on our governance arrangements of increased partnership working. This is a developing area, and members may want to consider how we address it. My inclination is to ask the Solicitor to the Council to arrange a briefing on the partnership arrangements already in place and those known to be developing (such as the Local Enterprise Partnership), so that members can better understand the governance issues.
5. Councillors' attendance at meetings and training events, and behaviour in meetings, were identified as matters the Committee should consider, although not by all those I spoke with. As an Independent Member I have little basis for taking a view on this and I would welcome views from Councillor members of the Committee.
6. The Scheme of Delegation, which was approved last year by the Committee and which significantly raised the threshold for officer-level decision-making, was flagged as something the Committee should keep its eye on, but this was already in our thinking.
7. The other main theme to emerge was about the impact on our governance of Government policy, particularly proposals to change the standards and audit regimes, and actions to substantially reduce public expenditure. Both of those carry some risks and heighten the need for vigilance at local level about probity issues. It would be helpful to have a briefing paper on possible changes affecting matters such as audit, ethics and probity. Regarding expenditure reduction, I do not suggest that we need to take particular action, but rather that we note the even greater importance, in these circumstances, of documents such as our Statement of Internal Control.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Capital/Revenue**

8. Officer time in preparing further reports.

### **Property/Other**

9. None.

## LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

### Statutory Power to undertake the proposals in the report:

10. Section 111 Local Government Act 1972 and Local Government Act 2000

### Other Legal Implications:

11. Not applicable.

## POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS

12. None.

<b>AUTHOR:</b>	Name:	Brian Hooper		
	Independent Chair of the Standards and Governance Committee			

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

**Non-confidential appendices are in the Members' Rooms and can be accessed on-line**

### Appendices

1.	None.
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### Documents In Members' Rooms

1.	None
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### Integrated Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject/recommendations in the report require an Integrated Impact Assessment to be carried out.	No
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### Other Background Documents

Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
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1.	None	
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### Integrated Impact Assessment and Other Background documents available for inspection at:

<b>WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:</b>	None
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