

MEMBERS ASSURANCE QUESTIONNAIRE

Governance Arrangements

We need your help to assess the strength of our governance arrangements. Councils are required to put in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs. **Governance is about how local government bodies ensure that they do the right things, in the right way, for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner.**

Governance comprises the systems, processes, culture, and values by which local government bodies are directed and controlled and through which they account to, engage with and lead their communities. Governance concerns everybody and covers the whole authority. Each authority is required to publish an Annual Governance Statement, describing its governance arrangements, encompassing such items as the policies, procedures, tasks, behaviours and other aspects of the organisation that together facilitate its operation. The Statement is a key corporate document. It's the culmination of the Authority's continuous review of its systems, policies and procedures. The process of compiling it is more important than the document itself.

How Can You Help?

As a Member led Council we need our elected Members to steer the improvement of our governance arrangements. We need to do this based on evidence. Key to our governance arrangements is effective decision making by Members, which should come from having a good understanding of the priorities and programme the Council has agreed and sound advice and information provided to them. But are the processes and procedures we have in place as good as they need to be? We want to test them by asking some elected Members to complete a questionnaire. We're asking Cabinet Members, Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of Committees and Leaders of Groups.

Because this is the first one, we want to keep it manageable and try out the questions. The completed questionnaires will be summarised and used as part of the evidence for the Annual Governance Statement. They'll be used alongside the Statements of Assurance we ask managers to provide. They have to sign to say they have reviewed all of the controls and are satisfied they are adequate to the task. They also have to identify areas for improvement and these are built into the planning for the forthcoming year.

We also draw on the opinions of external and internal audit and external inspectors, and quality marks we've been awarded as they're validations of policies and procedures in practice. The Statement is personally signed by the Leader of Council and the Chief Executive, and submitted to the Audit Committee before becoming part of the Statement of Accounts which is approved by full Council. Audit Committee oversee the process for reviewing our governance arrangements, so there is more information in the papers for their March 2010 meeting.

Next Steps

We've kept the questionnaire short and focused on a few areas first time around. Once you've filled it in you need to return it to Steve Crabtree, Chief Internal Auditor by 16th April 2010, although you can send it as soon as you've completed it. We would welcome your views on the questions and areas of governance that you think we should focus on next time.

	Question	Documents/actions etc that support this	Not at all	A little	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
1	Are you clear about the overall aims and objectives of the authority?	Ambition, focus and priorities in our Strategic Plan					
2	Are you clear about your role as a Councillor?	Constitution – is it clear					
		As ward Councillor					
		In your particular role (Chair or Vice Chairman of a Committee) – are you supported adequately?					
		When you're carrying out the business of the Council on external bodies / partner organisation – are you briefed well enough, are there the right feed back opportunities?					
3	Does the Council support you as a Member in developing your abilities to be an effective Councillor?	Through the Members development programme?					
		Through advice and support from officers?					
		Through opportunities for training and development?					
4	As a Council do you think we listen to our community and partners?	In dealing with competing demands and priorities from different sections of the community?					
		Are results of consultation appropriately used to inform decisions?					
		Does the Council work well with partners to solve mutual problems?					
		Does the Council use and share evidence to shape what is done?					
5	If you feel that in certain areas that things need to be improved, what would this look like to you						
6	Any other comments?						

Summary Results

21 questionnaires were completed.

	Question	Documents/actions etc that support this					
			Not at all	A little	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
1	Are you clear about the overall aims and objectives of the authority?	Ambition, focus and priorities in our Strategic Plan	-	-	-	12	9
2	Are you clear about your role as a Councillor?	Constitution – is it clear	-	-	-	13	8
		As ward Councillor	-	-	-	8	13
		In your particular role (Chair or Vice Chairman of a Committee) – are you supported adequately?	-	-	-	5	4
		When you're carrying out the business of the Council on external bodies / partner organisation – are you briefed well enough, are there the right feed back opportunities?	-	-	-	5	4
3	Does the Council support you as a Member in developing your abilities to be an effective Councillor?	Through the Members development programme?	1	1	9	9	-
		Through advice and support from officers?	-	-	-	12	9
		Through opportunities for training and development?	-	-	11	10	-
4	As a Council do you think we listen to our community and partners?	In dealing with competing demands and priorities from different sections of the community?	-	-	9	12	-
		Are results of consultation appropriately used to inform decisions?	-	2	5	14	-
		Does the Council work well with partners to solve mutual problems?	-	-	8	13	-
		Does the Council use and share evidence to shape what is done?	-	-	5	16	-

Improvements

- Improve public consultation. For example, our budget consultation appears to be 2 dimensional with leading questions on selected topics circulated to a very limited audience i.e. a waste of time and unreliable. Give people choices, and then heed them.
- Communication needs to be better, although the monthly Members Bulletins are well received.
- Further development is required of training arrangements.

Majority of responses praised / pleased with the level of support received to fulfil their role.

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