

SC/006/11

Committee The Essex County Council and Essex Fire Authority Joint Standards Committee

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Ethical Governance Audit

1. Purpose of the Report

To update the Committee on the Ethical Governance Audit.

2. Background

Ethical Governance audit

During June and July the Council will be working with the Audit Commission to assess how we promote and ensure a positive ethical environment within the Council. This work forms part of a wider project which is reviewing the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements and follows up on an audit in 2010.

This Ethical Governance Audit will take place in two stages. In the first stage, all Members and a sample of officers are being asked to complete an online questionnaire. The Audit Commission will then conduct a series of interviews and focus groups between the 20th and the 26th of July for selected Members and officers.

Following the audit, the County's existing improvement plan will be based on the results and this will be taken forward by the Corporate Governance Steering Board, which is chaired by the Leader. The Ethical Governance Audit report shaped a significant portion of the work to improve ethical governance at ECC over the past 12 months. This has included:

- The Council adopted a **revised [Constitution](#)** on 14 December 2010
- **New code of governance intranet site: '[how we get things done](#)' has been developed for staff**, making all corporate policies and documentation easy to find and use.
- **The Council's following policies and procedures were reviewed, updated and re-launched:**
 - [Purchase cards](#)
 - [Gifts and hospitality](#)

- [Travel and subsistence](#)
- The **Members' Scheme of Allowances** was reviewed and updated in line with independent advice and agreed by Council in May 2010 – it can be found in [part five of the Constitution](#).
- **A follow-up Audit on members' expenses has been recently completed and achieved 'Substantial Assurance'**
- A new **Corporate Governance structure** has been set up.
 - I have placed Corporate Governance in the Leader's portfolio and I also chair the Corporate Governance Steering Board, on which the Chief Executive and Deputy Leader also sit.
 - **Governance Champions have been established** across the council, feeding into the new governance structure from each directorate.