



# ethical governance toolkit

ethical governance  
light touch health check

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# introduction

This document provides:

- 'getting started' guidelines on preparation for the light touch health check
- the various light touch health check materials and guidelines on how to use them.

The health check materials included in this document are:

- a light touch health check focus group programme (the programme)
- PowerPoint presentation – accessible on the website
- an ethical governance benchmark
- an action plan template.

The PowerPoint presentation, the ethical governance benchmark and action plan template are all materials to be used within the programme.

It is important to note that the light touch health check is a mechanism, which can be used to identify and discuss ethical governance issues in your authority, and is also a means for developing solutions. Its use requires significant input from attendees and facilitators. Using the light touch health check will not, in itself, guarantee improved ethical governance. Furthermore, achieving good ethical governance requires following through any solutions and maintaining good ethical governance requires regular monitoring and review.

It is recommended that authorities invest in external facilitators to undertake the light touch health check. This is

to ensure the diagnosis is carried out by a team of trained facilitators who will constructively challenge existing assumptions or cultural aspects within the council that can be difficult to uncover through self-diagnosis and review. Whilst this 'health warning' is important it is recognised that some authorities have well established democratic or member services functions, which could rise to the challenge of applying the health check through internal facilitation and review activity.

If councils use the toolkit internally there is no guarantee that the results of any diagnostic or light touch health check work will be considered as valid within the CPA inspecting framework although, such activity would generally be described as good practice.

Before any diagnostic activity is carried out it is essential that reviewers (whether external or internal) are familiar with the context of ethical governance issues such as the Code of Conduct. We recommend that you read the following Standards Board for England publications, which are available from the IDeA's website and also the Standards Board for England's own website:

- guidance on standards committees
- guide to part III of the Local Government Act 2000
- how do I register and declare interests, and register gifts and hospitality
- how to conduct an investigation
- how to make a complaint

- the case review
- lobby groups, dual-hatted members and the code of conduct
- local investigations
- the code to protect you
- standards committee determinations
- the local authorities (model code of conduct) order 2001.

## getting started

It is likely that the initial impetus to use the light touch health check will come from a referral from the council, for example, the chair of the standards committee, the monitoring officer, the leader or another senior member or manager within the council. Below are a series of stages that could then be followed in preparation for the light touch health check focus group(s).

- Organise an initial meeting, usually with the monitoring officer and/or the chair of the standards committee of the council to discuss the background of the request and agree expectations in terms of the issues covered and anticipated outcomes.
- A degree of judgement must be applied by practitioners using the light touch health check. The programme, PowerPoint presentation, the ethical governance benchmark and action plan template provided here will help you determine the content of the health check. As well as the initial meeting referred to above it is recommended that, in order to identify key issues to be covered in the light touch health check, you do the following:
  - » Undertake the Audit Commission self-assessment survey – this is optional but recommended as it would provide information on how the council complies with the Code of Conduct and other ethical governance systems and processes
  - » Undertake a desktop research exercise by reviewing key documents such as the council's Code of Conduct, member and officer protocols, registers of interests, member/officer training programmes (is ethics on the training agenda?), other corporate documents that help assess the corporate health of the authority such as a corporate plan or human resources strategy
  - » Conduct one-to-one interviews with key stakeholders using the questions under the 'questions and probes' section. A level of judgement needs to be made in terms of 'who are key stakeholders?' This is likely to include the chair of the standards committee, others members of the committee, the monitoring officer, the chief executive, the leader of the council, leaders of opposition groups
- Agree the duration of the light touch health check, including the number of one-to-one interviews and focus groups. The numbers and duration may be dependent on:
  - » the seriousness of any ethical governance issues
  - » the size of the council
  - » resources available
  - » any previous diagnosis and results.
- Agree who the audience will be – a list of usual participants is included in the programme example attached but is not exclusive.
- Construct your facilitation team where possible comprising a trained IDeA consultant, a monitoring officer from another council and a member peer (both of whom have been trained to apply the toolkit in local authorities other than their own). You would choose teams based on the type of council, political dynamics and availability.
- Agree and organise circulation of any relevant background documentation such as Code of Conduct, protocols etc.
- Draft a programme and send to key contacts within the council for agreement – sample programme attached.

# light touch health check materials

The following materials, for use in a light touch health check, are included in this section:

- a light touch health check focus group programme
- PowerPoint presentation (introduction, the context of ethical governance, facilitated exercise)
- an ethical governance benchmark
- an action plan template.

The PowerPoint presentation, the ethical governance benchmark and action plan template are all materials to be used in sessions within the programme. Information on the materials, including an explanation on how to use them, is given below. This is followed by the materials themselves.

## light touch health check focus group programme

An example of a programme for a light touch health check focus group is provided below. The programme is a guidance framework on how to run a light touch health check focus group. Who attends should depend on what has been agreed – in some instances you may have carried out one to one interviews with key stakeholders so would be unlikely include them in this audience.

You may need to have more than one focus group to ensure that all of the necessary people are included in the light touch health check (we recommend between 12 and 20 people per focus group). It is also a matter of choice and judgement whether to restrict the focus group workshop

simply to the collection of data or to include an element of awareness raising. It is crucial however that participants understand what to expect through setting clear objectives at the start of the event.

Further information is provided on each of the sessions within the programme.

## powerpoint presentation (sessions 1, 2 and 3)

(The PowerPoint presentation can be accessed via the website on a PDF – you would need to contact the IDEa in order to receive a PowerPoint version)

### session 1: introduction

The first three slides outline the objectives of the day and rules of engagement.

### session 2: the context of ethical governance

This session provides the context for ethical governance. It covers the recent background leading up to the present arrangements, and highlights the links between ethics and corporate governance.

### session 3: facilitated exercise – the 10 principles of conduct in our authority

In this session attendees are asked to get into small groups and consider how the 10 principles of conduct in local government find expression in the authority. This is a warm up exercise getting the audience to think about ethics within the authority.

## ethical governance benchmark (session 4)

In session 4 the facilitator should facilitate a discussion using the outcome of any other diagnostic analysis that has been undertaken such as the Audit Commission's self-assessment survey.

If no previous diagnosis has been undertaken, then the facilitator could use questions from the benchmark. The benchmarking exercise will enable you to gain an indication of the extent to which an authority matches up to a range of desired behaviours. The benchmark is comprised of six main behaviours, which follow a similar framework to that of the Audit Commission self-assessment survey, but explores in greater depth the behavioural and roles and relationships aspects of the ethical governance framework. The six behaviours are:

- leadership – behaviour and styles
- communication
- relationships – roles and responsibilities
- accountability
- management of standards – systems, processes and risk management, conflict and whistle blowing
- team-working and co-operation – personal effectiveness and training and development.

Many aspects of local authority work can be described as 'ethical' – indeed, the whole public service ethos is based on a wish to do good. In an attempt to define what this means this benchmark offers some positive and negative behaviour indicators that might be observed in an 'ideal authority' or an authority that needs development and awareness raising of ethical governance issues.

While some behaviours, such as use of racist language and discrimination, will be wrong in all conceivable circumstances; others will be more dependent on the context. For example, the nature of political debate is such that members will occasionally challenge each other in a way that might be inappropriate in member-officer or member-public interactions. Nothing in this benchmark should be interpreted as a barrier to robust political debate. The benchmark, then, is not meant as a list of golden rules about behaviour, but is designed to:

- promote awareness about ethical behavioural issues
- serve as a basis for discussion in diagnostic workshops or interviews
- provide positive and negative behaviour indicators to compare against.

In the pages that follow, each behaviour is presented in the benchmarking exercise followed by a:

- broad definition of the behaviour

- questions and probes. Facilitators need to exert some judgement in terms of which behaviours and questions to focus. It is optional whether all questions are asked as the health check is designed to gather data to provide an overview of the current situation within the authority. Facilitators may choose to begin with more general questions such as the following:

- » what does your council do well/less well when it comes to ethics?
- » what sort of issues/problems arise that your standards committee has to deal with?

- Positive indicators and negative indicators. There is a section containing positive behaviour indicators in an 'ideal authority' and a section containing negative behaviour indicators in an authority where significant development and awareness raising would be required. Facilitators can use these indicators in two main ways:
  - » to benchmark the authority against the behaviour indicators.
  - » as a further prompt e.g. does anything like this happen in my/your authority?
- Notes box. Facilitators can make notes which describe the issues being revealed. There is an optional priority weighting column which may help facilitators organise the issues into priorities. Facilitators may prefer to record notes in a note book or on flip chart paper in groups.

## action planning template (session 5)

In this session the facilitator should identify, from discussion, the various action points that have emerged from the day. This session could be undertaken at the end of the day or in a further workshop. You need to facilitate agreement and a record of actions in a simple action-planning format.

## light touch health check focus group programme

Audience: standards committee chair and members, monitoring officer and other senior officers such as the chief executive and senior or corporate management teams, executive members, backbench members, relevant staff groups e.g. democratic or member services officers, other manager and staff groups, external partners. Duration: 9.30 – 1.00

| timing        | session title  | content   | materials  | lead facilitator   |
|---------------|--|---|--|--|
| 9.30–9.45     | session1: introduction   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• get people to introduce themselves and to say one thing they expect from the focus group workshop</li> <li>• provide objectives for the session</li> <li>• explain workshop ground rules and domestic arrangements</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tea / coffee</li> <li>• appropriate handouts</li> </ul>             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• external consultant recommended</li> </ul>        |
| 9.45–10.15    | session 2: the context of ethical governance                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PowerPoint presentation including background and definitions</li> <li>• gain an understanding about the background and development of the ethical governance framework</li> <li>• question and answer session</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• handouts</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monitoring officer peer where possible</li> </ul> |
| 10.15 – 11.00 | session 3: facilitated exercise – the 10 principles of conduct in our authority  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• facilitated exercise – definitions of 10 principles of public life, how do they find expression in this authority</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• activity PowerPoint slide</li> <li>• flip chart and pens</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• member peer where possible</li> </ul>             |
| 11.00 – 11.15 | comfort break  |   |  |  |
| 11.15 – 12.15 | session 4: benchmarking exercise/ consideration of any other diagnostic analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• if the AC self-assessment survey has been carried out facilitate a discussion around the key themes of findings e.g. staff not aware of standards committee roles etc.</li> <li>• if survey has not been completed facilitate discussion by asking questions that may be directly taken from the benchmark.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• flip chart</li> <li>• pens</li> <li>• post-it notes</li> </ul>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• external consultant and member peer</li> </ul>    |
| 2.15 – 1.00   | session 5: action planning to improve ethical governance                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• facilitate wider group discussion getting them to suggest next steps which could include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» report from diagnostic findings with recommendations such as:</li> <li>» wider awareness training for all members</li> <li>» training for officers and members on specific topics</li> <li>» development of protocols and the code of practice</li> <li>» more in-depth review, etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• flip chart</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• external consultant</li> </ul>                    |



# ethical governance toolkit

the context of ethical governance  
- a PowerPoint presentation

**Found on the ethical governance webpage 'what materials are available on the website'.  
This can be viewed on the website but for a PowerPoint version you must contact the IDeA**





# ethical governance toolkit

ethical governance benchmark

# leadership, behaviour and styles

## what do we mean by leadership behaviour and styles?

Providing visionary and charismatic leadership, being well prepared, able to create a culture of excellence and probity by acting as the public face of the council and a role model for others. Encouraging and promoting high ethical standards across the authority.

### questions and probes

1. What role does the chief executive play in ensuring that ethical standards are upheld?
2. What profile do the standards committee and monitoring officer have within the council?
3. To what extent are the diverse needs of the communities are taken into account when setting priorities?
4. Do council members and officers demonstrate that they mediate fairly between people with conflicting needs? Give examples of how they do/don't mediate fairly.
5. To what extent does the council follow legal process when balancing public need and council policy?
6. To what extent do senior members and officers display effective leadership in this council? Do you think they are a catalyst for change where necessary? Give examples.
7. Do members and officers show appropriate dignity and respect for all their colleagues and citizens of the area? Give examples of appropriate/inappropriate behaviours.

## what are the key positive indicators of an ideal authority?

### members and officers individually and collectively:

- are prepared to give a strong lead when circumstances dictate, but do not maintain personal control by imposing views and being overly directive
- are prepared to take difficult decisions when necessary rather than always courting short-term popularity
- act as a role model for appropriate behaviour, ethical practice and democratic process
- work to inspire trust in others and gain commitment to policies and decisions rather than simply dictating from the centre
- build strong relationships with senior officers and/or cabinet based on open communication, co-operative working and trust, and keep the interests of the community in mind when managing any personal conflicts
- have clearly defined descriptions of roles and responsibilities, including those of executive members and statutory officers, respect different roles and do not undertake inappropriate activities, e.g. inappropriate levels and types of decision making
- work across political and council boundaries to foster communication and encourage co-operation where appropriate

- aim to mediate fairly and constructively between people with conflicting needs
- campaign with enthusiasm, courage and persistence on behalf of others
- allow individuals to take action in respect of poor standards of conduct by others
- create a culture which, while taking proper account of risk management, encourages individuals to try out new ideas and take managed risks without fear of blame if things go wrong
- provide opportunities for non-executive members and junior staff to define what change means for them.

## what are the key negative indicators of an authority?

### members and officers individually and collectively:

- demonstrate undue partiality for own party members or service teams and use their position to promote their own agenda to the detriment of wider council needs
- behave defensively, avoiding making difficult or unpopular decisions and being unwilling to admit mistakes
- lack a clear understanding between their own role and that of subordinates, failing to delegate or make use of others' strengths
- show inconsistency in style and behaviour, failing to set an example for others

- 
- lack detailed knowledge of different council activities
  - do not see themselves as having a role, display little or no interest and concern or take little or no responsibility in ensuring appropriate conduct and high standards on the part of themselves and others
  - display no sense of collective responsibility for maintaining and encouraging high ethical standards
  - tend to make unrealistic promises and then fail to deliver on them
  - take short-term 'quick fix' approaches to policy formation, focusing on day-to-day issues rather than future needs and failing to see beyond the next election
  - are resistant to change and fail to draw on the experience of others (e.g. councils peer support).

notes

priority weighting  
(high, medium, low)

## what do we mean by communication?

Disseminating relevant information, policies, procedures and guidance on ethical standards to members, staff, the public, other individuals and organisations that the council is involved with and encouraging active listening, dialogue and feedback. Using appropriate language and checking for understanding. Communicating regularly with individuals and groups in the community, and making sure that people are informed.

## questions and probes

1. Do you feel there is sufficient guidance/advice available on ethical standards? Provide examples. Where would you go to obtain guidance/advice?
2. What are the standards committee and monitoring officer doing to promote high ethical standards? Can you give examples of where you feel the work of the standards committee has had a positive effect on the work of the council?
3. Do you think the public understand the ethical values of the council? If so how is this communicated to them?
4. Do you think that the stakeholders and or suppliers and contractors to the council understand its ethical values? How are the councils ethical values communicated to other partnership members?
5. What do you think the perception of the wider public is of the ethical standards in the council? Do you think

they differentiate between members and officers?

6. How do you think the council responds to criticism?
7. Do you think that communication between members is generally open and honest? Provide examples of when the communication is/is not open and honest.
8. Do you think communication between members and officers is open and honest? Provide examples of when the communication is/is not open and honest.
9. To what extent do you think members and officers respect confidentiality?

## what are the key positive indicators of an ideal authority?

### members and officers individually and collectively:

- respond promptly to enquiries from the public and other individuals or bodies
- have accurate and clear policies, guidance and advice on ethical issues available to all members and staff
- ensure good access to information for all members and the public, including appropriate policies and practice regarding exempt and confidential information
- communicate regularly with the community via newsletters, phone calls, accessible website and local media

- listening sensitively, checking for understanding and adapting style as necessary.

## what are the key negative indicators of an authority?

### members and officers individually and collectively:

- fail to respond promptly to communications from constituents, concerned individuals and other groups
- use jargon in order to look clever or exclude others from understanding decisions
- interrupt, appear not to listen and use language which is inappropriate to the circumstances or is insensitive
- use information dishonestly to discredit others
- consistently fail to participate in, or seek to dominate, meetings
- are not aware of key rules and guidance on ethical standards and/or sources of advice
- fail to act on public perceptions or concerns that ethical standards within the council are poor
- fail to encourage communication with the community or promote the council.

notes

priority weighting  
(high, medium, low)

# relationships

## what do we mean by relationships?

Building positive relationships by making others feel valued, trusted and included and by working collaboratively to achieve goals. Members and officers are clear about their roles and responsibilities. The chief executive is supportive of the monitoring officer and standards committee.

## questions and probes

1. How would you describe the relationship between the executive (cabinet) and the standards committee?
2. How would you describe the relationship between the standards committee and monitoring officer?
3. How would you describe the relationship between the chief executive and the standards committee and monitoring officer?
4. What do you think the public perception of ethics in the council might be?
5. What do you perceive the image of the standards committee to be in this council?
6. How are ethical issues reported to the executive?
7. What is the frequency of reporting to the executive?
8. In your view is there clarity between the roles and responsibilities of members and senior officers? Can you give examples of when there has/has not been clarity?
9. Are roles and responsibilities for members and officers clearly defined and does their behaviour indicate this?
10. Is there trust between members and officers? Can you give examples of where there has/has not been trust?

## what are the key positive indicators of an ideal authority?

### members and officers individually and collectively:

- demonstrate transparent relationships between the executive, senior management teams and the standards committee
- ensure that the council vision is underpinned by ethical values and statements that can be acted upon
- make others feel valued, trusted and included, recognising and including people from different backgrounds
- show by example commitment to diversity and human rights agendas
- maintain calm and focus when criticised or under pressure
- have transparent recruitment and appointment processes for both staff and members (for example in appointments to outside bodies) which are recognised throughout the council as having integrity
- ensure that non-executive members have a real ability to hold the executive to account and to make a meaningful input to policy development
- have relevant information about members and senior staff that is accessible to the public including, for example, up to date registers and declarations of interests
- maximise meetings held in public and limit the use of 'exempt information' provisions.

## what are the key negative indicators of an authority?

### members and officers individually and collectively:

- avoid contact and constructive discussion with the standards committee
- use divisive tactics to upset relationships, council policies and decisions
- are unclear as to who is responsible for what under the constitution.

notes

priority weighting  
(high, medium, low)



# accountability

## what do we mean by accountability?

The council having clearly defined and well understood roles and responsibilities for both members and staff and clear management processes for policy development, implementation and review, and for decision making, monitoring and reporting.

The decision making process should generally be transparent and decisions should be based on evidence and following appropriate debate. Decision-making should take heed of community need and local priorities, budgets and agreed protocols.

## questions and probes

1. Do you think that by their behaviour the majority of members and officers display an understanding of the importance of ethical standards in this council? Can you give examples?
2. Do you think there is a common understanding for members of the ethical values of this council? Can you give examples?
3. Do you think there is a common understanding for officers of the ethical values of this council? Can you give examples?
4. Do you think that the appointment of representatives of the council to outside bodies is carried out in an open and transparent manner? Can you give examples?
5. To what extent do non-executive members feel they can hold the executive to be accountable?
6. To what extent do members and officers understand the need for a register of interests?

7. To what extent do members of the public understand who is responsible for what in the council?
8. Do you think that the use of 'exempt information' is constructive or is it used to shield and hide debate?
9. Does the council maximise the opportunity to hold meetings in publicly accessible venues e.g. away from the guildhall? Can you give examples?
10. To what extent do members understand the roles of the statutory officers and know who they are?
11. Do you think that senior officers are accountable for the decisions they take? Can you give examples?

## what are the key positive indicators of an ideal authority?

### members and officers individually and collectively:

- show commitment to seeing problems through to the end
- deal promptly with the major issues and problems that span the council
- give a free rein to people where appropriate to resolve problems without interference, while offering appropriate support where necessary
- ensure that teams and individuals understand the parameters in which they make decisions and are accountable for these
- evaluate arguments according to evidence, making independent and impartial judgments based on sound rationale, evidence, good judgement and pragmatism but within the context of political beliefs
- are confident enough to change a decision which feedback demonstrates is not effective

- spend time and effort making sure they understand the implications and potential impact of a decision
- display well-founded confidence and trust in others' judgement and decision-making
- actively represent political group or service team views and values through decisions and actions.

## what are the key negative indicators of an authority?

### members and officers individually and collectively:

- keep a low profile, being invisible throughout the council, particularly at times of adversity
- delegate inappropriately and blame subordinates or use others as scapegoats when things go wrong
- invoke inappropriate use of the 'exempt information' provisions to restrict access to debate and decision making
- make decisions without taking advice or considering regulations and wider development frameworks
- fail to review their decisions on the basis of experience and to change them where necessary – e.g. saying 'I've made my mind up and that is final'
- operate in secret and fail to open processes and decision-making to others.

notes

priority weighting  
(high, medium, low)

# management of standards

## what do we mean by management of standards?

High standards are integral to the working of the authority and are 'designed-in' to the authority's constitution and relationships with stakeholders.

## questions and probes

1. Do you feel that members and officers have access to all the relevant information/guidance that they need to do the job properly? Can you give examples?
2. How easy is it to:
  - » declare an interest
  - » register an interest
  - » claim expenses
  - » offer and/or receive hospitality.

How clear are you clear about the systems and processes involved?
3. To what extent are ethics in the council assessed or monitored?
4. To what extent are members/officers aware of any protocols, for example member/officer protocols, IT, allowances and expenses?
5. Can you give examples of where a lack of guidance may have led people to fail to follow set procedures?
6. To what extent do you think that the council makes it clear to all of its suppliers/contractors the level of ethical behaviour expected from their employees?

7. To what extent do you think that suppliers/contractors are aware of the standards of behaviour expected of council officers and members?
8. Do all members and officers have a role to play in maintaining high ethical standards or is it just the responsibility of just the standards committee?
9. How easy is it for members or staff to invoke the whistle blowing policy?

## what are the key positive indicators of an ideal authority?

### members and officers individually and collectively:

- develop, promote and maintain high standards of conduct on an ongoing basis, ensuring ethical standards form part of the council's vision and strategy, are acknowledged and owned by members and staff and are 'designed-in' to the council's constitution, decision-making, overview and scrutiny procedures and relationships with stakeholders, including outside bodies and partners (e.g. in grant or contract conditions and partnership protocols)
- have mechanisms to ensure external suppliers and service providers are required, in their dealings with the council, to operate to public sector standards, e.g. not offering or providing inappropriate gifts or hospitality to members or staff
- understand and act on their judicial role in order to meet legal responsibilities (e.g. duty of care, corporate parenting)

- ensure recruitment and appointment processes comply with relevant standards, e.g. those of the Commission for Race Equality, Employers Organisation Conditions and District Audit, and are monitored and reviewed
- ensure key procedures and guidance, e.g. for declaring interests, claiming expenses, offers and/or receipt of hospitality, are well designed, up to date, easy to understand and operate and are followed
- have a confidential reporting mechanism which is widely known and understood and which has the confidence of members and staff.

### ethical and corporate systems and processes and risk management:

- undertake appropriate risk assessment to ensure that the ethical standards, procedures and processes they are required to operate, are relevant, appropriate and commensurate with the level of risk
- are able to demonstrate positive council trends and specific progress in implementation of the ethical framework and show evidence of plans for further improvement in key aspects
- recognise that situations of ethical ambiguity or conflict will occur and have the collective and individual ability to deal with these appropriately
- ensure individuals have an awareness of and sensitivity to problematic issues and situations, together with the ability to recognise those which are relevant to their circumstances.

### **managing ethical ambiguity and conflict and whistle blowing issues:**

- ensure clear arrangements and mechanisms are in place for dealing with difficult ethical situations and a willingness to use appropriate measures to deal with them e.g. referral to the Standards Board for England
- have well defined, objective and confidential arrangements in place for members and staff to obtain advice and guidance on e.g. the council's 'whistle blowing' policy or appropriateness of referrals to the Standards Board for England
- establish a mechanism for independent and objective mediation to manage conflict that officers and members can use without fear of reprisal
- establish arrangements for regular scrutiny and review of general or specific ethical issues affecting the council, its members and staff
- demonstrate evidence of learning from experience: the use of feedback, adapting behaviour, systems and procedures and prevention of reoccurrence

### **what are the key negative indicators of an authority?**

#### **members and officers individually and collectively:**

- take gifts and hospitality from companies that deal with the council

- believe that standards issues are separate from the mainstream activity of the council and are solely the responsibility of the standards committee and the monitoring officer rather than being owned by all members and staff
- assume that high standards will be maintained without conscious effort
- lack common understanding, or show evidence of widely differing views, within the council regarding conflicts of interest
- fail to make external partners and service providers aware of public sector rules and/or offer inappropriate gifts or hospitality.

#### **ethical and corporate systems and processes and risk management:**

- seem unable or unwilling to consider situations objectively and realise how they may be perceived by the public, the media, individuals or organisations with which the council is involved
- create an overload of unnecessarily complex, irrelevant or outdated practices and procedures
- show evidence that advice and guidance is poorly designed and lacks clarity or is absent resulting in failure to follow set procedures.

### **managing ethical ambiguity and conflict and whistle blowing issues**

- ignore problems or potential conflict, hoping the problems will simply disappear
- fail to maintain confidentiality, gossip about other people's problems or issues
- are seen to take sides and fail to see issues or problems objectively
- allow too many vexatious complaints to be referred to the Standards Board for England
- discourage people wanting to refer valid complaints to the Standards Board for England.

notes

priority weighting  
(high, medium, low)

# team working and co-operation

## what do we mean by team working and co-operation?

Engendering an expectation that members and staff will operate collectively to the highest standards of conduct and are actively encouraged to do so.

### questions and probes

1. Have you been part of an induction process, and did it include ethics and standards? If so, how useful was this?
2. Have you had any experience of a mentoring/buddying scheme for new members? If so, how useful was this?
3. Have you been offered/undertaken training relating to ethics and standards? If so, how useful was this?
4. Is training offered to key partners?
5. Do you feel that a 'public service ethos' is sufficient to maintain high ethical standards? Can you explain why/why not?
6. To what extent do you think that members of long standing hold the view that they do not need further training as they are experienced enough in the working of the council?
7. Do you feel there is a 'blame culture' in this council? If you do can you give examples?
8. Can you give examples of how high ethical standards are promoted by members?
9. How is misconduct dealt with and how is it reported?

10. Is there a confidential reporting mechanism in place in the council? If so, could you describe it?

11. To what extent do you have confidence in the confidentiality of the process?

## what are the key positive indicators of an ideal authority?

### members and officers individually and collectively:

- help to develop cohesion within own team and contributing to healthy communication between teams and the council
- work across group boundaries without compromising political values (members specifically)
- support and own team targets and ways of working
- share resources to support the achievement of partnership aims rather than being overprotective of their own budgets or powers
- show a real interest in their colleagues' issues and problems and recognise and celebrate others' achievements
- share responsibility for success and failure
- make sure that any interested individual or group, including those who may hold different views about the council's priorities and programmes, has an opportunity to understand and contribute to policy formulation, spending priorities etc
- remain open to new ideas even if they may appear

threatening (e.g. e-government) and aim to learn from others (e.g. other councils)

- are prepared to discuss their own successful ideas with colleagues from other bodies
- develop knowledge of council systems and input council views at area specific meetings (e.g. planning, licensing)
- encourage scrutiny and respond positively to feedback, challenge and ideas
- implement national legislation and guidance even where this does not accord with local political views.

### personal effectiveness – training and development:

- deliver an induction programme for both members and staff which incorporates ethical standards and seeks to integrate them into all aspects of induction
- recognise the need for, and are committed to, training and development in relation to ethical standards
- offer training which tackles difficult issues, such as conflicts of interest, handling demands for special treatment, relationships with contractors, or lobbying by third parties and give participants the skills to deal with real-life situations
- where requested, provide appropriate training and guidance for key partners, suppliers, service providers and other stakeholders to build awareness of the council's ethical ethos and practice.

## what are the key negative indicators of an authority?

### members and officers individually and collectively:

- demonstrate inconsistent values, lack integrity and tend to say what others want to hear
- fail to make sure they have sufficient knowledge of the leading political manifesto, values and objectives
- put personal motivations first, 'going native' or failing to challenge the controlling group through a desire not to rock the boat
- act alone and consistently fail to support colleagues in public forums
- are overly reliant on others and tend to back down when challenged
- are adversarial in style, being inappropriately aggressive and confrontational when challenged
- engage in political 'blood sports' at the expense of working constructively for the good of the council and abuse scrutiny processes for political gain.

### personal effectiveness – training and development:

- create a perception that the council ignores misconduct or fails to deal with it properly
- are reluctant to take action in respect of misconduct because of lack of confidence in the system

- show an absence of structured training and development and over-reliance on 'on the job' learning from colleagues
- are unwilling to participate in training and development
- take all credit for successful initiatives for themselves and refuse to accept their share of blame for unsuccessful actions
- get too protective and defensive about their own portfolio/department and fail to take an authority-wide view
- do not engage in community activities, 'hiding' in the civic buildings rather than being available in the community, waiting to be approached and being difficult to contact (e.g. saying 'I'm not your councillor' or 'I'm not the officer dealing with this') and failing to communicate and explain council vision and policies
- only listen and make themselves available to favoured groups within the community rather than the community as a whole and seem unwilling to listen to alternative views and solutions
- create a 'them and us' attitude to members, officers, non-cabinet members, partners or external councils and agencies etc.
- place political or personal gain before collaborative working
- are unavailable or evasive to external agencies or the media that are holding the council to account on general or specific issues.

notes

priority weighting  
(high, medium, low)



### action planning template (session 5)

In this session the facilitator should identify, from discussion, the various action points that have emerged from the day. This session could be undertaken at the end of the day or in a further workshop. You need to facilitate agreement and a record of actions in a simple action-planning format. An example of how this might be done in two stages is provided below.

#### stage 1: identifying issues

| action                             | method                           | who  | resources   | by when   | outcomes   | evaluation                     |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|---|---|--|--------------------------------|
| What improvements need to be made? | How will the action be achieved? | Who will take responsibility for action? (named individuals) | What resources are required to achieve improvement? | What is realistic? (need to consider the appetite for change) | What will change and improvement look and feel like? | How will success be monitored? |
|                                    |                                  |  |   |   |  |                                |
|                                    |                                  |  |   |   |  |                                |
|                                    |                                  |  |   |   |  |                                |

**stage 2: prioritising actions**

| behaviour                       | issues identified | priority<br>(high, medium, low) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| leadership                      |                   |                                 |
| relationships                   |                   |                                 |
| communication                   |                   |                                 |
| accountability                  |                   |                                 |
| management of ethical standards |                   |                                 |
| team working and co-operation   |                   |                                 |