



## Governance and Audit Committee

Item

8

17 October 2017

Report of	Monitoring Officer	Author	Andrew Weavers ☎ 282213
Title	Review of the Council's Ethical Governance Policies		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

### Executive Summary

This report requests the Committee to review the Council's updated Ethical Governance policies. These are the key policies which set out the standards of conduct and integrity that the Council expects of councillors, staff, partners, suppliers and customers when conducting Council business. They contain procedures for dealing with breaches of the policies and processes to be followed.

The report also provides recommended that Full Council includes the Code in its Policy Framework which comprises all of the Authority's key polices.

### 1. Decision(s) Required

1.1 To review the following revised policies:

- Anti-Fraud and Corruption
- Whistleblowing
- Anti-Money Laundering
- Covert Surveillance
- Information Security
- Data Protection
- Income and Debt

and to recommend to Council that they be approved for inclusion in the Council's Policy Framework.

### 2. Background

- 2.1 The Council is committed to maintaining the highest standards of governance including the elimination of fraud and corruption and to ensuring that all activities are conducted ethically, honestly, openly and accountably so as to protect public safety and public money.
- 2.2 A varied range of policies and procedures form the Corporate Governance framework and a selection of these relate to Ethical Governance - those specifically regarding conduct and integrity.
- 2.3 The Ethical Governance policies set out the standards of conduct and integrity that it expects from staff, elected members, suppliers, partners, volunteers and the public. Breaches of the policies will be pursued and procedures have been introduced to enable

any person to raise genuine concerns they may have about the conduct of anybody acting for or on behalf of the Council.

- 2.4 At its meeting on 21 October 2015 full Council adopted a statement of intent in relation to both Ethical and Corporate Governance which gave a high organisational commitment to zero tolerance of fraud, corruption and bribery. The Ethical Governance policies were also adopted as part of the Council's Policy Framework.

### 3. Review of Ethical Governance Policies

- 3.1 The Anti-Fraud and Corruption, Whistleblowing, Anti-Money Laundering, Information Security, Data Protection and Health & Safety policies were last reviewed by this Committee at its meeting on 11 October 2016.

The following table indicates the number of times a policy was invoked in the past year and where appropriate whether it was effective

<b>Policy</b>	<b>No. of times invoked during 2016/17</b>	<b>Whether procedures effective</b>
Anti-Fraud and Corruption	2	Policy procedures correctly followed including reporting to Police.
Whistleblowing	1	Process followed leading to referral to HR
Anti-Money Laundering	none	
Covert Surveillance	none	
Information Security	none	
Data Protection	1	Policy procedure was correctly followed including referral to the Information Commissioner who was satisfied with the Council's actions.

The above policies have been reviewed to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and no changes are proposed to the above policies which are appended to this report.

- 3.2 The Monitoring Officer writes an annually to both Members and Officers reminding them of their obligations regarding the Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistleblowing policies.
- 3.3 The Covert Surveillance Policy was last considered by the Committee at its meeting on 7 March 2017 when it was updated following the results of an Office of Surveillance Commissioner inspection. The policy is included here for completeness. The Council has not sought any authorisations for the use of covert surveillance in the past year.
- 3.4 The only change to the Anti-Money Laundering Policy has been to include the disclosure form as an appendix for completeness. However, new regulations have been introduced which may require the policy to be subsequently reviewed once it is clear how they may impact on Local Authorities.
- 3.5 The Income and Debt Management Policy was approved by the Committee at its meeting on 7 March 2017. The policy clearly demonstrates how the Council will process income and recover debt. The policy introduced the Council's preferred payment methods which are now being promoted by services where possible and we are seeing reductions in the more expensive payment methods such as Cheques and Post Office Payment Cards. The preferred payment types are Direct Debit, Direct Data (which includes BACs payments),

Debit Card (Online and Automated Payment line) and Standing Orders. The policy also introduced revised debt write off limits which supported efficiencies within the management of accounts and debt recovery processes. There has been a significant reduction in the amount the printing and paper used where an electronic process has now been established.

- 3.6 The policy is proving effective however a change is proposed to the Housing Benefit Overpayment collection process contained at section 8 of the policy which is appended to this report. This would help to speed up the recovery process whilst reducing print and postage costs. The change removes a reminder and pre-legal letter, whilst using electronic communications such as text messaging and email to support a final reminder letter.

#### **4. Strategic Plan References**

- 4.1 The manner in which the Council governs its business is an underpinning mechanism in the Council's Strategic Plan aims to set out the direction and future potential for our Borough.

#### **5. Publicity Considerations**

- 5.1 The Council's ethical governance policies will be published on the Council's website.

#### **6. Financial, Equality, Diversity and Human Rights, Consultation, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management Implications**

- 6.1 None.