CODE OF
CORPORATE
GOVERNANCE

Introduction

Corporate Governance is the system by which local authorities direct and control their functions and relate to their communities. It is founded on the basic principles of openness and inclusivity, integrity and accountability together with the overarching concept of leadership. It is an inter-related system that brings together the underlying set of legislative requirements, governance principles and management processes.

Flintshire County Council recognises the need for sound corporate governance arrangements and over the years Members and senior Officers have put in place policies, systems and procedures designed to achieve this and the stewardship of the resources at their disposal. However, until recently these arrangements have tended to develop in an ad-hoc and uncoordinated manner. In adopting a Code the Council drew together all those elements of corporate governance which were already in place.

When the Code was adopted by the Council it was recognised that the first review of the Code would need to take into account certain modifications set out in proposed guidance which was at that time in draft format. That guidance has now been formalised and additional guidance received on governance issues. The guidance documents issued are as follows:-

- Delivering Good *Governance* in Local Government: Framework – CIPFA/SOLACE
- Delivering Good Governance in Local Government – Guidance Notes for Welsh Authorities – CIPFA/SOLACE
- The Annual Governance Statement – A Rough Guide for Practitioners issued by the CIPFA Finance Advisory Network

This Code recognises the greater emphasis placed upon corporate governance by the Welsh Government and the contents of the guidance documents. The Council's Corporate Governance arrangements are reviewed annually by way of a self-assessment. The self-assessment is undertaken by senior officers of the Council and following consultation with the Council's Corporate Management Team reported to the Council's Constitution Committee.

The Code forms part of the Constitution and will apply to all aspects of the Council's business. Members and staff of the Council will, in carrying out its business, conduct themselves in accordance with the high standards expected by the citizens of Flintshire and to the aspirations set out below.

1

The Code is based upon and reflects the various requirements that underpin the six core principles contained in the document entitled "Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework". Those six core principles are:-

- Focusing on the purpose of the Authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area.
- Members and Officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles.
- Promoting values for the Authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour.
- Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk.
- Developing capacity and capability of Members and Officers to be effective.
- Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountability.

Many of the requirements that underpin the six core principles are inter-related and the various sections of the Code need to be read together to obtain a full understanding of the arrangements in place. The Code specially identifies the actions to be taken for each of the six core interlocking principles governing our business.

The Executive in consultation with the Constitution Committee are responsible for approving this Code and the Chief Executive and Monitoring Officer are responsible for ensuring that it is kept up to date by way of annual reviews commencing in October each year.

1.   Focusing on the purpose of the Authority and on outcomes for the community and creating and implementing a vision for the local area

1.1   The County Council is committed through the carrying out of its general and specific duties and responsibilities and its ability to exert wider influence, to:-

- Work for and with its communities.

- Exercise leadership in its communities, where this is appropriate.

- Undertake an "ambassadorial" role to promote the well-being of Flintshire where appropriate.

- Engaging and working in partnership with other organisations and authorities for the benefit of its communities.

1.2   The Council will maintain effective arrangements:

- For explicit accountability to stakeholders for the Authority's performance and its effectiveness in the delivery of services and the sustainable use of resources.

- To demonstrate integrity and openness in the Authority's dealings with partnerships established with other public agencies and the private/voluntary sectors.

- To demonstrate inclusivity by communicating and engaging with all sections of the community to encourage active participation.

- The impact of the county vision as set by the Local Service Board (LSB) is monitored and reviewed by the LSB and the Council's Executive as each partner body translates the vision into its working and governance arrangements.

- Ensure that the partnership arrangements below the community strategy are supported by a common vision.

1.3 An audited and signed Statement of Accounts is published on an annual basis containing:

- A statement of responsibilities for the Statement of Accounts.

- A statement of compliance with International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS's) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) general accounting principles.

- A statement of accounting policies.

1.4 An Annual Governance Statement is presented to Audit Committee and Council for approval every September. Once approved the Statement is signed by the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive and Head of Finance. Statements are published annually explaining how the Council has complied with the Code and met the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2005.

1.5 The Council Planning Framework has been developed to incorporate both our accountability arrangements through i) annual and periodic reporting of performance and risk and challenges in relation to our administration and improvement priorities and our ii) internal structural arrangements to support improvement and change through strategies and plans such as the HR People Plan, ICT Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy. Both these elements of the Council Planning Framework are encapsulated within our Directorate Plans which include both the 'what and how' we plan to provide our services and the quarterly reporting of progress against these plans. The contents of the Council Plan (Governance) Framework have been agreed by Executive.

1.6 The medium term financial strategy was formally adopted by the Council in June 2011; the strategy has been translated into Welsh and has been published on the Council's website along with the Council priorities and improvement plan. The medium term financial strategy is a critical part of the Council's overall Governance Framework. It sets out the financial resource strategy by which the Council will deliver its vision as strategic objectives over the medium term. Its purpose is to enable the Council to plan ahead by identifying when new investment is required, where activity will increase or decrease and which new policies or targets (external or internal) will be set by the organisation.

Integral to the MTFS is the Medium Term Financial Plan which:-

i) Forecasts for a defined period available resources, financial pressures (which arise from conscious choice, or uncontrollable demand) and opportunities for efficiencies/savings for both revenue services and capital programme.

ii) Provides an analysis of the 'gap' between estimated future funding and expenditure.

iii) Identify specifics actions required to balance budgets and manage resources within the overall framework of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

1.7 The County Council's financial and operational reporting processes are independently examined by:

- The Wales Audit Office whose annual audit letter is presented to the Audit Committee and their audit certificate is included in the annual Statement of Accounts.

- Our own independent Internal Audit who report regularly to the Audit Committee including an annual report.

- Other external review agencies such as ESTYN and the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI).

1.8 The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees have a significant input into the review and development of service delivery issues. This role includes the examination of performance out turn and budget monitoring which assist in assessing success and failure. These are some of the checks and balances which have been put in place. External regulations add to the process through the publication of reports on service and performance.

1.9 Other ways in which the Council measures and monitors the quality of its services includes:-

- The development of quality assurance models.
- A more focused approach to audit and inspections.
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys.
- The CIPFA Benchmarking Club.
- Reports on performance indicators to Overview & Scrutiny Committees and the Executive.
- The Statement on Internal Control set out in the Annual Governance Statement.

1.10 The Council strives to ensure continuous improvement in the delivery of its services through performance measurement of and management, establishing service quality standards, creating clear lines of accountability and undertaking customer satisfaction surveys. The Council has introduced a procedure for dealing with Compliments, Comments and Complaints which enables complaints to be recorded on a central database and monitored corporately and within each directorate.

1.11 A central register of contracts and lists of defaults is being developed to assist in contract monitoring and review. In some areas the Council has put in place arrangements and backup capacity to respond to service or market failure.

1.12 A number of methods are employed to demonstrate value for money. The Annual Improvement Plan provides detailed information of the Council's plans and aims, performance and general progress towards improving the level of efficiency and effectiveness. An annual budget setting process is in place and all directorates have monthly meetings to review their budgets. The Terms of Reference of the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committees enable them to review, scrutinise, question and make recommendations in relation to their areas of activity including policy, finance, risk and governance.

1.13 The Council's Regulatory Plan produced by the Wales Audit Office and the Annual Audit Letter also review the Council's performance and value for money arrangements.

1.14 The environmental impact of the Council's policies, plans and strategies are identified on all committee reports. In addition, the Flintshire Integrated Tool provides an overview of the environmental, social and economic impacts during the development process of all new strategies, plans and policies as deemed as appropriate.

1.15 The Council has adopted the principle that in the conduct of public business and the administration of justice in Wales it will treat the Welsh and English languages on a basis of equality. The Council's Welsh Language Scheme sets out how the Council will give effect to that principle when providing services to the public in Wales, and in the conduct of its internal business. The Council has made a public commitment to monitor and review the implementation of its Welsh Language Scheme and to report annually to the Council's Executive and to the Welsh Language Board on its performance.

2. Members and Officers working together to achieve a common purpose with clearly defined functions and roles

2.1 The Council recognises the need to have effective political and management structures and processes to govern decision-making and the exercise of authority within the organisation. It has therefore established a number of arrangements to secure this.

2.2 The Council's Constitution includes the names and a description of the portfolios held by the Leader and other Members of the Executive. Their respective roles have been agreed and documented. Role descriptions have also been agreed for all chairmen and vice-chairmen of Overview and Scrutiny Committees, regulatory committees and Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees are similarly documented.

2.3 Job descriptions are in place for all Senior Officers of the Council and have been reviewed as part of the Council's restructuring programme.

2.4 The Constitution includes a Delegation Scheme which identifies those decisions

reserved to the County Council and local choice issues which can be decided by either the County Council or the Executive at the Council's discretion. Local choice issues are reviewed at the Council's Annual Meeting. The Delegation Scheme identifies those general and specific delegated powers given to Chief Officers, Heads of Service and other Senior Officers and is subject to frequent review.

2.5   The Council has appointed a Chief Executive as Head of the Paid Service and responsible for all aspects of operational management. The Head of Finance is responsible for ensuring that appropriate advice is given on all financial matters, for keeping proper financial records and accounts and for maintaining an effectual system of internal financial control fulfilling the Council's requirements under Section 151 of the Local Government Act 1972 and Section 114 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The Head of Legal & Democratic Services has been designated at the statutory Monitoring Officer and is accountable for the statutory requirements of that role under Section 5 and 5(a) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. The three Statutory Officers consult each other as required by their statutory roles and meet regularly to consider the work of the Executive.

2.6   The Council has put in place a number of mechanisms to ensure effective communication between Members and Officers in their respective roles. A Protocol on Member/Officer Relations provides guidance for Members and Officers covering the more common situations that tend to arise. The Protocol encourages the establishment of sound and effective working relations for engendering mutual respect and the observance of the highest standards of behaviour and courtesy towards each other. It gives advice to Officers on the information that Members are entitled to expect, for the purposes of undertaking their various roles. It includes a section relating to communications and emphasises the need to maintain confidentiality where such an expectation exists. It also recognises the need of Members to be apprised of local issues affecting their Ward including public meetings and consultation exercises.

2.7   Briefing sessions are provided to Chairs and Vice-chairs of Committees in advance of committee meetings and wider briefings are organised from time to time with Group Leaders, members of the Executive and Ward Members in relation to specific issues.

2.8   There is an annual review of Members' allowances at the Annual Meeting and further reviews during the course of the year where appropriate. The Members' Allowance Scheme is set out in the Constitution.

2.9   The terms and conditions and the remuneration of Officers are negotiated nationally. However a job evaluation exercise covering former manual and former administrative, professional, technical and clerical staff is underway pursuant to a single status agreement. The project is central to the development of an equality proofed pay structure and is reaching its final stage. A review of second tier officer terms and conditions through a HAY job design and evaluation exercise has been undertaken.

2.10   The Chief Executive leads the management of the Council through its Corporate Management Team which through the review of the Council Plan, Directorate and Service Plans, is responsible for communicating the Council's shared values with the community and the Council's partners. It communicates these through:-

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- o Partnership working
- o Reports to the Council and its committees and the Executive
- o Meetings with the Flintshire Joint Trades Union Council
- o Meeting of the Joint Consultative Committees
- o Flintshire Focus
- o Team Talk and Team Brief
- o Staff appraisal process
- o Senior Management Team and other team meetings

2.11   Following the Annual Meeting of the Council, Members from all political groups were nominated to undertake roles on various outside bodies. Guidance has been provided to assist Members in carrying out those roles and responsibilities and separate guidance for those nominated as company directors. Whenever a new partnership is created, care is taken to ensure that its legal status is clear, that it has appropriate terms of reference and that representatives are aware of the extent to which they can bind the Council.

3.   <u>Promoting values for the Authority and demonstrating the values of good governance through upholding high standards of conduct and behaviour</u>

3.1   The County Council recognises that the openness, integrity and accountability of individuals within a local authority form the cornerstone of effective corporate governance. Also the Council's reputation depends on the standards of behaviour of everyone in it, whether Members, employees or agents contracted to it.

3.2   Members and Senior Officers are therefore expected to maintain shared values and exercise leadership by conducting themselves as role models within the County Council to follow. As a result:-

- The Council has a Code of Conduct governing the behaviour of all Members and co-opted Members of the County Council. This Code requires all Members to declare personal (and prejudicial where appropriate) interests in any matters which come before them for consideration. Where the interest is prejudicial Members must withdraw from the room where the discussion is taking place unless they have received a dispensation from the Standards Committee. Interests must be declared in all meetings including informal meetings with Officers and in correspondence.

- The Code applies to Members in their dealings with other organisations to which they have been nominated except where that organisation has its own separate code when that code will apply.

- A supplementary Code has been adopted to deal specifically with planning matters.

- We have also established a Standards Committee including three independent members, one of whom is the Chairman of the Committee, with the responsibility for monitoring the operation of the Members' Code and providing training and guidelines on it to all Councillors.

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- Officers are subject to a Code of Conduct which includes a wide range of standards of behaviour required of them. These standards include requirements to perform their duties diligently, to respect the dignity and rights of the public, customers and other employees at all times; and to serve the public courteously, efficiently and impartially. There are other requirements relating to the use of Council resources, gifts and hospitalities, outside commitments, conflicts of interest, confidentiality, political neutrality, relationships with Members and general conduct.

3.3 The Leader and Executive have set up a number of advisory boards to assist in the development of policy and the development of services.

3.4 The County Council has in place a timetable of meetings which seeks to ensure that the roles described above can be exercised effectively. The full County Council is scheduled to meet every 10 weeks, special meetings also take place when they are required, Executive meets every four weeks and each of the seven Overview and Scrutiny Committees meet regularly several times a year. Details of Overview & Scrutiny work is contained in an annual report reported to Council each year and available on the Council's website.

3.5 The County Council has adopted an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy which is reviewed and updated periodically. Its key elements are:-

- To promote a culture of honesty and opposition to fraud and corruption within the Council.

- To provide arrangements whereby concerns can be raised with senior Officers on a confidential basis.

- To ensure arrangements are in place for the prevention of fraud and corruption within the Council, including internal control mechanisms and effective recruitment procedures.

- To set up basic principles to apply where instances of fraud are detected, including the involvement of the Police and the taking of disciplinary measures.

- To remind staff to be alert to possible causes of fraud and corruption.

3.6 Processes are also in place to ensure the continued operation of arrangements for ensuring that Members and employees are not influenced by prejudice, bias and conflicts of interest. In particular:-

- Members receive advice on a regular basis from the Standards Committee on the application of the Members' Code of Conduct.

- A Code of Planning Practice has been adopted.

- A Protocol has been agreed and published giving guidance to Members on dealings with Developers and Contractors.

Deleted: A total of 71 formal meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees were held in 2009/10 together with 5 site visits and numerous meetings of Task Groups, Workshops and Seminars. Full details are provided in the Overveiw & Scrutiny Annual Report considered at the County Council meeting of the 29 September, 2010.¶

- A Members' Register of Interests is maintained.

- There is a formal opportunity for Members at the beginning of all meetings to declare interests.

- Officers are required to register any interests, gifts and hospitality on registers kept by their Heads of Service. Members of the Corporate Management Team and Heads of Service should inform the Monitoring Officer of any interests, gifts and hospitality they receive which will be kept on a central register.

3.7 The requirements and terms of the various codes and policies are drawn to the attention of those who need to know about them in a variety of forms:-

- Through formal Member training, in the case of the Members' Code of Conduct.

- Through publicity of the Officers Code of Conduct, Whistle Blowing Policy and Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and the County Council's intranet site.

- Through the County Council's staff induction programme.

3.8 In addition to the Codes of Conduct and Protocols referred to above, the Council seeks to maintain high standards in the conduct of its business and avoid prejudice, bias and conflicts of interest through:-

- The adoption and publication of an Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy and the provision of training.
- The adoption of a Strategic Equality Plan through the Codes of Conduct, Protocols referred to earlier.

- Through the adoption and monitoring of the Council's Welsh Language Strategy and Policy.

3.9. The Local Service Board have developed a Strategic Partnership Governance Framework that considers:

- Procedures for forming or joining any Strategic Partnership
- Strategic Partnerships Agreements
- Performance Management
- Risk Management
- Resource Management
- Information Sharing and Communication
- Annual Partnership Review / Self Assessment

The purpose of this is to provide a consistent approach to Strategic Partnership Governance.

This Framework is now being used by:

- Children & Young Peoples Partnership
- Community Safety Partnership (for both Flintshire and Wrexham)
- Local Safeguarding Childrens Board (for both Flintshire and Wrexham)
- Flintshire Housing Partnership
- Health, Social Care & Well-being Partnership
- Regeneration Partnership
- Youth Justice Service Executive Management Board

4. Taking informed and transparent decisions which are subject to effective scrutiny and managing risk

4.1 The Council has also adopted a Constitution which:-

- Clearly defines those functions which are reserved to the full Council for decision, those decisions which will be taken by the Executive or its individual members, and those which are delegated to senior Officers. In this respect, the basic principle on which these rules are established is that the full Council sets the strategic direction through the adoption of policies and the budget, the Executive takes major decisions within the overall policy and budget framework and helps to develop new policies and Officers take the day to day decisions within the policy and budget framework.

- Established through the six Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Co-ordinating Committee a robust overview and scrutiny role. These bodies have between them powers to review and scrutinise decisions relating to any of the Council's activities, including considering policy issues referred to them by the Council or the Executive.

- Sets out clearly the role of the Leader and Executive and in particular makes it clear that they are responsible for providing effective strategic leadership to the Council and for ensuring that the Council successfully discharges its overall responsibilities for the activities of the organisation as a whole.

- Ensures through Financial Procedure Rules and the Scheme of Delegated Powers that there is effective control over the day to day conduct of the Council's business by requiring Member approval for non-routine decisions or decisions outside defined parameters.

- Makes clear the role of all Councillors both in their formal decision making/ policy development role and as local members and ensures through the Members' Allowance Scheme that they are properly remunerated for this work.

4.2 The Constitution sets out the responsibilities and procedures for decision making. Decisions which can be taken by the Executive, Overview and Scrutiny and other committees and full Council are clarified in Part 3 of the Constitution. The fundamental principles to be applied in all decision making are as follows:

o Proportionality (ie. the action must be proportionate to the desired outcome).

o Due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers.

- o Respect for human rights.

- o A presumption in favour of openness.

- o Clarity of aims and desired outcomes.

- o Consideration of alternative options.

- o Recording reasons for the decision, including details of any alternative options considered and rejected.

- o In addition the Council's policies and protocols set out the processes that must be followed in decision making eg. in relation to planning applications processes are detailed in the Flintshire Planning Code of Best Practice.

4.3 The Constitution sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. The Constitution is divided into 19 articles which set out the basic rules governing the Council's business. More detailed procedures and codes of practice are provided in rules and protocols at the end of the Constitution.

4.4 The decision making process is clearly explained on the Council's web site.

4.5 The Constitution contains comprehensive Contract and Financial Rules governing the process to be adopted in conducting the Council's business; these are further supported by more detailed local codes, protocols and notes of guidance.

4.6 The Constitution sets out clear protocols and codes of conduct to ensure that the implications of supporting community political leadership for the whole Council are acknowledged and resolved, including:

- o Members' Code of Conduct
- o Standards Procedures
- o Pre-election Protocol
- o Code of Conduct on Planning Matters
- o Protocol for Overview and Scrutiny Committees
  - • Attendance of Members and Officers at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings
  - • Dealing with minority reports within Overview and Scrutiny
  - • Executive Members attending meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees
  - • Members placing items on an agenda of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- o Local Member/Officer Protocol

4.7 In addition, the Employee Induction Handbook contains policy statements and guidance on:-

- o Equalities

11

- o Harassment
- o Speaking up about wrongdoing (Whistle Blowing)
- o Violence at Work
- o Health and Safety at Work
- o IT Code of Practice

4.8 The Council has an Audit Committee consisting of 7 Members, politically balanced with a Chairman and Vice-Chairman from the main opposition group. It meets on a regular basis and is advised by the Council's Internal Audit Manager, and is normally attended by representatives of the Council's external auditors. All Members receive training and it is a requirement that only named and trained substitutes are allowed.

The Committee's role and functions are to:

- Review the effectiveness of the Council's systems of internal control and risk management.
- Oversee the financial reporting process to ensure the balance, transparency and integrity of published financial information.
- Monitor the performance and effectiveness of the internal and external audit functions within the wider regulatory context.

4.9 The Audit Committee is further supported in the discharge of its functions by:-

- Having appropriate arrangements in place for delivery of an adequate and effective Internal Audit function and ensuring adequate reporting arrangements to safeguard its independence.
- An up to date risk based Internal Audit Plan.
- Systematic Risk Assessments in all areas of the Council's activities.
- Clear Terms of Reference.
- External Auditors who annually consider the Council's approach to legality, its response to major legislation and any matter of legality relevant to the Audit of financial transactions and the outcome is considered by the Audit Committee.
- Appropriate training for Members of the Audit Committee.

4.10 The Council has identified and evaluated its Strategic Risks in a risk register entitled Strategic Assessment of Risks and Challenges. This document provides the foundations for both the Council Plan and the Regulatory Plan. It defines and details the priorities for change and improvement and is supported by our business planning processes and disciplines of service planning, risk management and financial monitoring and review.

The Strategic Assessment of Risk and Challenges comprises three tiers:

1. **Community Leadership** – critical local issues which cannot be solely delivered by the Council (e.g. affordable housing, Community Strategy review, public health and primary health care).

2. **Council Delivery** – public service issues which are largely within the control and responsibility of the Council (e.g.

housing, school buildings, waste management).

3.   **Council Governance** – issues of organisational governance and management (e.g. finance, human resources, information and communications technology.

4.11   The Council has a Whistle Blowing Policy which is reviewed and updated periodically. All members of staff have access to the policy which aims to:-

- Encourage staff, contractors and suppliers and partners to feel confident in raising serious concerns and to question and act upon concerns.

- Provide avenues for people to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken.

- Ensure that people receive a response to their concerns and that they are aware of how to pursue them if they are not satisfied.

- Reassure those raising concerns that they will be protected from possible reprisals or victimisation if they have a reasonable belief that they have raised any concern in good faith.

4.12   The Council actively recognises the limits of lawful activity placed upon them whilst also striving to utilise powers to the full benefit of their communities through:-

- Legal advice in the preparation of Council, Committee and Executive reports.
- The availability of legal advice at meetings of the Council, the Executive and Statutory Committees.
- The pro-active work of the Council's Legal Service and its close working relationship with service managers.
- Professional development and training (including multi-agency training for Children's Services staff in particular).
- The Council's policies and protocols set out the processes.

4.13   The Overview & Scrutiny function has developed as a critical friend, providing constructive challenge in order to contribute to continuous service improvement. This role is discharged both through consultation by the Executive and directors and also through the 'calling in' of Executive decisions by the 6 functional Overview & Scrutiny Committees. Each of those Committees engages in performance monitoring and management through the consideration of appropriate items such as performance indicators and out turns and risk issues. The work programmes of Overview & Scrutiny are updated and published on a regular basis and there is a dedicated team of Officers to support the function.

4.14   Regulatory Committees will take decisions based upon detailed reports with any late information being referred to in the minutes. Overview and Scrutiny Committees when undertaking work requested by Council or the Executive or when undertaking their own investigations will agree reports containing the evidence which was considered to be material.

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4.15   The Executive and County Council reports will contain all the information, evidence and comments needed to take decisions. The decisions made by Officers under delegated powers will be documented on files or where of a significant nature be incorporated in Delegated Action Forms which will be reported to the Executive for information purposes.

4.16   The Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer are available to give advice to Members and staff on conflicts of interest that might arise from time to time. Guidance is also available on the Council's Infonet.

4.17   We have a set of customer care standards supported by a complaints procedure supported by a central database system which aims:-

- To make it easy for anyone to make a complaint or a compliment.

- To solve problems as close to where they occur as possible, and pass back compliments to the right people.

- To prevent problems happening again and also encourage good practice.

4.18   Monitoring of the arrangements set out above is carried out in a number of ways, particularly:-

- Through the Corporate Complaints Officer in the case of compliments, comments and complaints.

- Through the Standards Committee, in the case of the Members' Code of Conduct.

- Through the Monitoring Officer, in respect of the Whistle Blowing Policy.

- By Internal Audit, in the case of the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy.

4.19   Members' Services provide a service to Members who seek information concerning ward issues.

4.20   The Council has developed a separate complaints handling system for social services matters with three stages. The final stage involves an appeal to an Independent Panel.

4.21   There are statutory appeal processes involving independent panels for school exclusions and admissions.

5.   **Developing capacity and capability of Members and Officers to be effective**

5.1   Generic one day induction sessions are provided for all new employees in groups. Those induction sessions include modules comprising equalities and diversity awareness, customer care and corporate governance.

5.2   After County Council elections every 4 years a Member induction programme is devised and delivered. The Council ensures that both Members and Officers have the skills required to undertake their roles and that those skills are developed on a continuing basis to improve performance through:-

14

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- The development of a new recruitment and selection process for the appointment of Officers.
- Staff appraisal which should identify training and development needs.
- Induction training for officers
- The development of management/behavioural competencies
- Development and training programmes, including those provided by professional organisations for both Members and Officers
- Member induction training.
- A mentoring system for Members
- An annual Member Development Programme
- The Council's Member Development Strategy
- Training on the Members' Code of Conduct
- Specific training for Members on planning, licensing, audit and risk management.

5.3   The Council benefits from its membership of the Welsh Local Government Association which provides support and assistance over the whole range of Council functions, partnership working, policy development and liaison with the Welsh Assembly Government.   CIPFA/SOLACE, ACSES and other professional associations also assist and support statutory and other service officers in performing their roles.

5.4   A People Strategy Framework which aims to ensure that employees deliver services that meet existing and future demands has been developed and there is an Officer in each department responsible for co-ordinating the Plan and monitoring progress in relation to annual staff appraisals and half yearly updates.

5.5   The Council wishes to encourage individuals from all sections of the community to engage with and contribute to and participate in the work of the Authority and seeks to achieve this aim through:-

- It's Community Strategy and its review through extensive consultation.
- Supporting Communities First programmes to enable people to participate effectively in their own communities.
- The development and implementation of a consultation and engagement framework and guidelines/policy document.
- Undertaking biennial resident surveys.

5.6   The Council ensures that career structures are in place for all staff and encourages participation and development through:-

- o development of a Corporate Performance Management framework
- o development of a People Strategy
- o restructuring of the Council's senior management
- o continuous professional development

6.   **Engaging with local people and other stakeholders to ensure robust public accountabilities**

6.1 The Council will enhance arrangements to demonstrate the levels of accountability in the provision of services through:-

- The Community Strategy
- Clear statements of roles and accountabilities in job descriptions of staff
- Clear statements of the roles of Members in their various offices
- Unambiguous provisions in partnership and service level agreements
- Terms of reference of committees
- Directorate and Service Plans

6.2 The vast majority of reports are considered in public and in the rare cases where this is not the case, the Legal Officer advising the Committee follows a process in which he/she is required to demonstrate that appropriate criteria have been taken into account in considering the public interest test and the Committee has resolved to exclude the press and public.

6.3 The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees produce an annual report on their work which is considered by the Council.

6.4 The Council has established clear channels of communication with all sections of the community and other stakeholders and put in place proper monitoring arrangements to ensure they operate effectively.

- We have many ways of communicating with our citizens and stakeholders and the Corporate Communications Team has developed a Communication Strategy, including:

    o Publications and leaflets
    o Website
    o Flintshire Focus
    o Your Community, Your Council – household newsletter
    o Established links and regular meetings with local interest groups/forums such as Older Peoples Forum, Schools Forum
    o Public Question Time
    o Invitation to members of the public to submit issues they consider should be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committees
    o The Overview and Scrutiny Team has in recent years given presentations about Overview and Scrutiny to local schools and Town and Community Councils.

- Recognising the value of media as a method of communicating information to the public and using news releases, statements and media briefings to do this.

- Consultation on the budget process with local stateholders (residents and businesses) to help shape its budget proposals.

6.5 The Council continues to focus on five key areas of internal and external communication, namely workforce communication, media relations, public information and promotion, consultation and corporate identity.

16

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                     │         LOCAL SERVICE BOARD              │
                     │           COUNTY VISION                  │
                     │        (Community Strategy)              │
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| Children and Young People's Partnership - 'Making a Positive Difference' Plan 2011 - 2014 | Health, Social Care and Well-Being Partnership – Good Health Good Care Strategy 2011 - 2014 | Voluntary Sector Compact | Community Safety Partnership – Strategic Plan 2008 - 2011 | Flintshire Housing Partnership | Flintshire & Wrexham Local Safeguarding Children Board Strategic Plan 2011 - 2014 | Regeneration Partnership | Youth Justice Board – Youth Justice Plan |

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                     ┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
                     │            Improvement                   │
                     │               Plan                       │
                     │                and                       │
                     │   Council (Plan) Governance              │
                     │            Framework                     │
                     └─────────────────────────────────────────┘

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                          │      Directorate        │
                          │        Plans            │
                          └────────────────────────┘

                          ┌────────────────────────┐
                          │       Service           │
                          │        Plans            │
                          └────────────────────────┘
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