

September 2008

## CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Suffolk Coastal District Council strives to adhere to the ten general principles set out in the Relevant Authorities (General Principles) Order 2001 which are those of openness, honesty and integrity, selflessness, objectivity, accountability, respect for others, duty to uphold the law, stewardship, leadership and personal judgement.

It will do this by carrying out its various duties and responsibilities in accordance with the six principles contained within the latest version of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework published in 2007. These are:

1. Focussing on the organisation's purpose and on outcomes for citizens and service users.
2. Performing effectively in clearly defined functions and roles.
3. Promoting values for the whole organisation and demonstrating the values of good governance through behaviour.
4. Taking informed, transparent decisions subject to effective scrutiny and managing risks.
5. Developing the capacity and capability of the governing body to be effective.
6. Engaging stakeholders and making accountability real.

### **1. Focus upon the Council's purpose and its outcome for the community**

Suffolk Coastal District Council expressly and explicitly commits itself to the adoption of policies, practices and procedures which ensure openness in all its dealings, subject only to the need to preserve confidentiality where it is proper and appropriate to do so.

The District Council has a Vision for its communities, and is committed to working towards the delivery of that Vision through:

- The Council's own strategies and programmes
- Partnerships with other agencies
- Articulating and promoting that Vision to other agencies
- Assisting others to deliver that Vision

Suffolk Coastal...where quality of life counts

The Council is also a key member of Local Strategic Partnership "*The Suffolk Coastal Partnership*", comprising representatives from the public sector, business community and voluntary sector that has developed a Community Strategy for the district. The strategy was launched in Spring 2003 and was reviewed in Autumn 2004 to ensure that progress is being made against the key objectives. During 2008 the Strategy is being updated to meet the government's guidelines on "Sustainable Community Strategies". The Strategy is not restricted to that which the Council can do or is responsible for, but is intended to assist, encourage and influence all relevant agencies to take appropriate actions to realise that Vision.

### Service Planning

The Council has adopted a number of priorities on which it focuses its attention, which form the Balanced Scorecard. The Council conducts an annual review of these objectives to ensure that they are still relevant and that we are continually looking to meet them.

Each service team has its own Scorecard which focuses the team on its objectives for the upcoming year and allows them to track their progress against achieving these. The scorecards are also used to influence the Council's budgetary process.

These, in turn, inform every employee's individual Personal Performance and Development reviews (iPAD) which demonstrate each employee's contribution to the achievement of the Council's Vision.

### Performance Management

The Service Team Scorecards contain performance information and performance targets. These comprise both nationally-stipulated and locally-developed performance indicators.

The key priorities from the Service Team Scorecards are monitored using the Corporate Scorecard and this is used by the Council's Corporate Management Team to monitor performance and determine improvement strategies

The Council monitors performance against all indicators annually, and carries out quarterly monitoring of selective, key indicators. Full reporting of the Council's performance against these key indicators is reported to Cabinet annually via the Best Value Performance Plan, and more regularly via the Quarterly Performance report.

### Partnership

The Council has established a number of mechanisms which help to guide the Council when reviewing services to determine whether it is appropriate for total or partial outsourcing of a given service to be explored.

The Council also has a commitment to working in partnership with other local authorities and relevant agencies where such partnership working will improve services and/or deliver greater financial efficiency. The Council works formally with neighbouring authorities to develop shared service delivery opportunities via the Suffolk Integration Group

The Council convened the Suffolk Coastal Local Strategic partnership to bring together the principal public sector partners in the District and also representatives of the business, voluntary and community sectors. This partnership is responsible for the Sustainable Community Strategy setting out the vision and priorities for the District.

The District council is committed to working with its partners to deliver the Local Area Agreement which contains priorities for improving services and tackling issues for the whole of Suffolk but also priorities identified in the Suffolk Coastal Sustainable Community Strategy

### The Council's Performance

Suffolk Coastal is committed to ensuring that its citizens are aware of its performance.

Every year, the District Council publishes a comprehensive Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) which contains information about the Council's activities, its performance against a number of key performance indicators and estimates of how it will perform in the coming year.

A summary of the BVPP is published each year with the Council Tax demand notice.

The Council also publishes a comprehensive Statement of Accounts every year. This is prepared in accordance with accounting rules and practices recommended by the Chartered

Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The Statement is also posted on the Council's website.

### Financial Planning

The Council's medium-term financial plan incorporates its revenue budget over three years and a capital investment programme over five years. The capital investment programme contains plans based on a number of assumptions that are refined each year. The objectives of the Council's medium term financial planning are to:

- represent the financial expression of the Council's aims, objectives, policies and priorities and to provide financial and, where necessary, other resources to deliver them;
- ensure that the Council sets a balanced and sustainable budget over the medium term;
- focus and re-focus the allocation of resources properly to reflect the Council's priority areas;
- monitor and manage financial resources effectively to ensure that spending and commitments do not exceed forecast available resources; and
- plan the level of local taxation in line with levels that the Council, Government and the Community regard as being necessary, acceptable and affordable to meet the Council's aims and priorities.

## **2. Performing effectively with clearly defined roles and functions**

The governing body of an organisation has overall responsibility for directing and controlling that organisation. In local government the governing body is the full Council.

### Clarity of Role and Purpose

The Council believes that a necessary prerequisite of effective governance is clarity with regard to the roles of the various elements of the Council.

### Non-executive functions

Non-Executive functions are those specifically required by statute or designated by the Council to be non-executive functions.

The Council has a number of regulatory committees and sub-committees that make quasi-judicial decisions concerning non-executive functions that cannot be dealt with by the Cabinet, such as Development Control, Licensing & Health and Rights of Way. Chairmen of the committees are elected annually by the committee members to manage its business and provide leadership and direction.

Except for matters under the responsibility of the committees, all decisions relating to non-executive functions are delegated to the Chief Executive and Heads of Service.

Non-executive functions can be delegated by the Council to officers.

### Executive "Cabinet" Functions

Executive functions are all those functions which are not non-executive functions and will be exercised by either the Cabinet as a whole, individual Cabinet members or officers. Most day to day decisions are made by the Cabinet which is headed by the Leader of the Council, or by individual Cabinet members with each Cabinet member having their own area of responsibility. Cabinet members are advised by the relevant Strategic Director or Head of Service before exercising their delegated powers. Decisions have to be made within established Council policies and procedures and inline with the Council's overall policies and budget. Decisions which are outside the budget or policy framework are referred to Council.

Council meets once a month to give individual Councillors the opportunity to raise important issues and to underpin policy formulation and performance review as well as holding the Cabinet to account for its actions, policy and direction and considering reports from the Leader of the Council and the Chairmen of the scrutiny committees. It is also the responsibility of Council to approve the Council's Policy Framework and for adopting and changing the Constitution.

The Leader of the Council may delegate or withdraw a delegation of an Executive function to an officer by giving notice to the officer in question, the Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer.

Full Council - meets monthly - its core roles being:

- a) to agree the Council's Budget and Policy Framework,
- b) to monitor the Cabinet and to hold it to account, and
- c) receiving reports from portfolio holders.

Cabinet – meets regularly to discharge its key roles of providing strategic leadership to the authority, and of ensuring that the authority successfully discharges its responsibilities.

Two Scrutiny committees – The Community Customers and Partners Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Services Scrutiny Committee meet regularly to scrutinise the Cabinet's decisions, to monitor performance, and to review policy.

Regulatory Committees - The Development Control Committee and area sub-committees, Licensing and Health Committee and Rights of Way Committee discharge the Council's key (non-executive) regulatory functions.

Standards Committee – promotes high standard of conduct by officers and members, advise on various issues, grant dispensations to councillors, deal with local assessment of complaints against members, and hearings against members.

Task Groups – these can be permanent standing groups such as the Grants, Shared Services, Policy Development or Governance Task Groups or can be task and finish Groups such as Green Issues, Local Development Framework and ICT. They meet in public, do not have the authority to make decisions but make recommendations to Cabinet. Task groups can also be temporary task and finish groups dealing with a specific issue.

All member-level bodies meet periodically according to a schedule of meetings agreed by the Council each year, usually in March, for the coming municipal year. This is published on the Council's website, [www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk](http://www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk).

The Council's Constitution clearly sets out the respective roles of full Council, Cabinet, the scrutiny committees, the regulatory committees, the Standards Committee and officers.

The Constitution also:

- i) sets out clear processes and procedures for policy development; decision-making; reporting of decisions; scrutiny of decisions, and call-in
- ii) contains procedure rules governing the conduct of the Council's business
- iii) contains financial procedure rules governing management of the Council's finances
- iv) sets out the roles and powers of the Head of Paid Service, Chief Financial Officer and Monitoring Officer, and their statutory duties with regard to the operation and management, financial management and ethical behaviour of the Council and its officers
- v) includes a Protocol moderating the relationship between elected members and officers, and
- vi) contains a Scheme setting out allowances and expenses payable to elected members in the discharge of their functions.

Part 3 of the Constitution sets out a detailed scheme of delegation which clearly identifies those matters which Council has delegated to its officer team.

Complete and up-to-date Job Descriptions and Person Specifications are in place for all the Council's staff, setting out *inter alia* the purpose and key responsibilities of each employee.

The staff remuneration is in accordance with a pay structure approved by the Council. The placing of individual posts on that structure is governed by job evaluation. The Council has implemented "Single Status", and as part of that has re-evaluated all relevant posts by reference to the job evaluation scheme published by the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Services. Those posts whose conditions of service are governed by the Joint National Council for Chief Officers of Local Authorities have been re-evaluated by reference to the Hay Group job evaluation scheme.

The Council recognises that its success is dependent on having well trained employees who have access to ongoing learning and development opportunities to help them meet the Council's objectives. Through training and development and the annual appraisal process officers are trained to be more effective, motivated and confident in their ability to provide good quality services and meet future challenges.

The training and development provided reflects corporate objectives and vision for change, and is linked to the Council's competencies. Creative means of providing training and learning within existing budgets is considered including web based training, home learning and interactive resources. A culture of learning and continuous improvement is promoted. Officers are empowered to recognise responsibility for their own development by working with their manager to develop their knowledge, skills and potential. Equality of access to training and development is monitored.

An extensive programme of elected member training has been delivered in connection with the migration of the Council to Executive Arrangements and the provision of remote-access IT links to all councillors.

### **3. Promoting Values for the whole organisation and demonstrating the values of good governance through behaviour**

In England the Local Government Act 2000 outlined 10 principles of conduct for use in local government bodies. This Council's code of conduct and practices endeavour to reflect each of the 10 principles.

#### Ethics and Probity

The Council's Standards Committee, which comprises members of the Council, independent persons, and representatives of town/parish councils in the district, has overall responsibility for promoting high standards of conduct by councillors and officers.

It does so by agreeing and promoting awareness and understanding of:

- A code of conduct for Members
- A code of Conduct for Officers

The Council also has in place a Fraud and Corruption Policy aimed at ensuring adherence to the highest standards of ethics and probity.

The Council also has in place and promotes a Whistleblowing Policy which was prepared in response to the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) otherwise known as the "Whistleblowing Act". This Act sets out a framework for raising genuine concerns about malpractice and guarantees full protection to workers who raise such issues responsibly.

This policy applies to all employees, members, suppliers, individuals on work experience, training or educational placement, agency staff and those contractors working for the Council. The Policy also applies to organisations working in partnership with the Council.

In order to ensure that members and officers understand and respect each others' role, the Council has also agreed a Member-Officer Protocol (which forms part of the Council's Constitution).

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services holds the role of "Monitoring Officer". She has the task of advising the Council should it propose to do anything which is illegal, improper, unethical, contrary to any code of practice or would amount to maladministration.

#### **4. Taking informed transparent decisions subject to effective scrutiny and managing risks**

##### Openness and Accessibility

Suffolk Coastal complies with the spirit and the letter of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, and the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (Fol Act). The Fol Act, which came into force on 1 January 2005 significantly improves the public's rights to access information maintained at the Council. Compliance with the Fol Act contributes significantly towards providing an open and transparent Council.

Suffolk Coastal has agreed that, except where exempt or confidential information is being considered, all meetings of the Council, Cabinet, Committees etc, will be held in public. In the spirit of the Fol Act 2000, Suffolk Coastal will construe the definition of "exempt or confidential information" tightly, so that the public will only be excluded from the minimum number of items.

Agendas and reports are sent in paper version only to those members of the committee, task group etc, all other member receive the agenda and reports by electronic means. Minutes are sent out to all members by electronic means.

Agendas for all Council member-level bodies will be posted on the Council's website [www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk](http://www.suffolkcoastal.gov.uk) on the day that they are posted to members etc.

Where decisions are based on officer reports, these reports (except where they include exempt or confidential information) will be posted on the Council's website on the day that they are posted to members etc.

Regulations made under the Local Government Act 2000 provide certain minimum standards for the recording of executive decisions or key decisions taken by officers. For the convenience of members of the Council and for the public, Suffolk Coastal will (except in cases of extreme urgency) only publish this "Decision Notice" on a Thursday, and will post this notice on the Council's website immediately.

### Complaints

Individuals have the right to complain to:

- (i) the Council itself under its complaints scheme (a copy of which can be obtained from the Council Offices during normal office hours).
- (ii) the Local Government Ombudsman after using the Council's own complaints scheme;
- (iii) the Local Assessment Sub-Committee of the Council's Standards Committee about a complaint of breach of the Councillor's Code of Conduct.

### Risk Management

Suffolk Coastal District Council is risk-aware and takes every possible precaution whilst managing the public money within its control. On occasion it may be necessary to take an acceptable level of risk, and where this occurs the Council has processes in place to mitigate any risk. The Council also takes all reasonable steps to minimise the risk of loss, damage or injury to its staff and to members of the public visiting its buildings and other property.

The Council recognises that it needs to maintain a high level of public confidence in its decisions and its role as a provider of services.

To facilitate this it:

- Will maintain high standards of public accountability and openness;
- Comply with legal requirements;
- Safeguard public and staff health and safety, so far as is reasonably practicable and;
- Maintain systems to identify acts or omissions which would increase the Council's risks

A totally risk-averse approach is not appropriate if the authority wishes to deliver efficient and effective services to its public and to exercise proper community leadership of the Suffolk Coastal District. Accordingly, where the adoption of a risk-averse approach is not relevant, the Council will include in its decision-making processes an assessment of the nature, probability and impact of potential risks, and weigh them against the potential benefits of alternative courses of action.

It also seeks to manage such risks. Such management may include:

- controlling them through seeking specialist advice or adopting rigorous controls;
- transferring risk (e.g. by insurance) and;
- sharing the risk (e.g. by entering into partnership arrangements).

### Internal Controls and Procedures

- Suffolk Coastal maintains rigorous and effective systems to monitor financial transactions. Clear and effective Finance Procedure Rules are contained in the Council's Constitution.
- It takes a medium-term view of its financial planning to ensure that resources are likely to be available to meet future demands and as part of the Constitution has a robust budget and policy framework.

- It ensures, so far as is practicable, that its policies and decisions are published. It complies with the Freedom of Information Act by producing a Publication List and Record Management Policy
- It maintains a culture of compliance with legal requirements, and the Legal Section has the express role of ensuring that the Council is aware of its legal obligations.
- It endeavours to be open, accessible and accountable in all its dealings and it maintains and publicises procedures so that individuals feel secure in reporting perceived wrongdoing.
- It maintains codes of ethical conduct and offers guidance to members and staff on standards of good behaviour.
- It ensures, so far as is practicable, that its policies and decisions are publicised.
- It adopts standards for the maintenance of its buildings, property, plant and equipment and vehicles which ensure that they are as safe as is reasonably practicable.
- It uses Balanced Scorecards, Business Case Appraisals, a Competency Framework and Personal Performance Development Plans to attempt to ensure that adequate staff resources are available to deliver the Council's programme and that those staff are adequately supported and trained.
- It maintains effective Emergency Planning arrangements, and exercises and trains its staff in responding to potential civil emergencies, so as to ensure that the authority has the capacity to assist its communities to cope with and recover from disaster.
- It reviews and monitors potential risks to the Council via regular meetings of the Corporate Risk Management Group and management of the Corporate Risk Register.

## **5. Developing the capacity and capability of the governing body to be effective**

### Member Training

The Council runs induction training for new members and has been running a number of member sessions to enhance their knowledge and skills. These sessions have been on a range of topics including the state of the district report, G.I.S., performance management, diversity and various I.T. topics.

In May 2007 the Council adopted the revised Code of Conduct for Members and training on the new Code was given for all members.

### Officer Training

The iPADs also identify officer development needs and contribute towards the formulation of the Council's Corporate Training Programme.

### Equality issues

The Council works to the Equality Standard for local government and is currently at level 2.

It has Race Equality, Disability Equality and Gender Equality schemes which link into an overarching "Services for All Policy". The Services for All Policy is overseen by the Services for All Working Group, which meets every two months, is chaired by the Portfolio holder for Customers and Partners, and is attended by officers from all service areas in the Council. The purpose of the Services for All policy is to set out the Council's commitment to ensuring

that individuals or groups are not discriminated against for any reason, in employment, access to services, contracting or partnering arrangements, consultation and involvement. It is about improving how people can work together by valuing their similarities and differences.

## **6. Engaging stakeholders and making accountability real**

The cornerstone of Suffolk Coastal's accountability is its commitment to ensuring that citizens are aware of its activities, and have access to information about the decisions which the Council is taking. This Council takes an active and planned approach to engage with the community to ensure effective and appropriate service delivery. The Council aims to consider those institutional stakeholders to whom the authority is accountable and assess the effectiveness of the relationships and any changes required.

The Council adopted the Communication Strategy in October 2003 which is currently in the final stages of a review.

### Channels of Communication

The Council's website details agenda, reports and minutes, which are also accessible at the Council offices in Woodbridge.

The District Council also delivers a newsletter "*CoastLine*" to every household in the district. *CoastLine* is issued four times a year, currently in March, July, October and December.

### Consultation

The Council will comply with the following principles when consulting the public on proposals.

Consultation by the Council with its residents will be:

- (i) Representative – so that the views of those consulted really do represent those of the wider community
- (ii) Reliable – so that findings from consultation can be relied on within certain limits of confidence
- (iii) Sensitive to trends – so that the Council will know whether or not it is improving over time
- (iv) Actionable – so that the Council has a chance to make the changes or improvements that residents want to see.

The aim and purpose of the Suffolk Coastal Partnership is to encourage extensive participation by key stakeholders in shaping a Vision for the district and in influencing future District Council Strategy.

In addition, the Scrutiny Committees have the power to seek the views of, take evidence from and co-opt members of the public/stakeholders when carrying out investigations, policy reviews etc.

Suffolk Coastal is one of the partner sponsors of "*Suffolk Speaks*", a citizens' panel which is consulted periodically about issues affecting the district.

The Council makes effective use of technology to engage with residents and users of its services. Examples include online Local Development Framework consultation and the budget web chats.

Consultation is also a key element of the Best Value Review process to which the Council's functions are subject. The interim consultation strategy was adopted by Cabinet in 2007.

### Liaison

The Council holds periodic meetings with the Suffolk Coastal Business Forum to ascertain the views of that section of the business community in the district which the Forum represents on the Council's activities, and annual service and financial proposals. Additional meetings are held from time to time with representative bodies or individual businesses in key employment sectors, including agriculture, power generation, transport and communications, to discuss issues of concern and priorities.

The Council also undertakes regular liaison with representatives of service users. These include welfare agencies in connection with housing and housing benefit services.

Periodic meetings are held with the Suffolk Coastal Greenprint Forum to ascertain their views on sustainability.

Parish Liaison meetings are held with town and parish councils throughout the district each year. The local councils are grouped into 3 area liaison meetings, the North, Central and South West, to discuss items that are important at national, district and local level. Parishes can ask for ad-hoc liaison meetings if they have an important matter.

### Public Accessibility/Participation

The Council now operates a system of town and parish council liaison meetings allowing debate on current issues with the parish and town councils plus an exchange of views on matters of local interest.

Members of the public are not permitted to speak at any formal meeting of the Council, most of its committees or at Cabinet. However the public are allowed to speak at meetings of the Rights of Way Committee, the Development Control Committee and the Area Development Control Sub-Committees. Codes of Good Practice and Public Speaking Procedures for these Committees etc are included within the Constitution.

Members of the public are encouraged to contact their local councillor on any matter concerning the District Council's activities or any other matter affecting the district. From 2008 members of the public will be able to get issues considered by scrutiny committees through the "Councillor Call for Action" and local petition initiatives.

Local Government is accountable in a number of ways. Elected local authority members are democratically accountable to their local area and this gives a clear leadership role in building sustainable communities. All members must account to their communities for the decisions they have taken and the rationale behind those decisions. All authorities are subject to internal and external reviews. They are required to publish their financial statements and encouraged to prepare an annual report. The Council is also subject to many national standards and targets. Both members and officers are subject to codes of conduct. Additionally, where maladministration may have occurred, an aggrieved person may appeal either through their local councillor or directly to the ombudsman.

As part of the budget preparation process the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive will take part in webchats with residents of the District to discuss issues that are relevant to the budget.

## Internal Audit

The Council maintains a small independent internal audit team, which acts in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations and CIPFA Code of Practice. Internal Audit is an assurance function that provides an independent and objective opinion to the organisation on the control environment comprising risk management, control and governance, by evaluating its effectiveness in achieving the organisation's objectives. It objectively examines, evaluates and reports on the adequacy of the control environment as a contribution to the proper, economic, efficient and effective use of resources.

Internal Audit's reports and findings provide a significant contribution towards the Council's obligatory Annual Governance Statement, Statement of Internal Control and Annual Statement of Accounts.

The Internal Audit team has direct access to, and freedom to report without fear or favour, to all officers, members and those charged with governance.

Corporate Governance is the system and processes by which local councils lead, direct and control their functions, improve their services and relate to their communities and partners.

Internal and External Audit review the Council's Corporate Governance arrangements and determine whether it can be demonstrated that the underlying principles and dimensions of good governance are being complied with.

There are five main corporate governance dimensions, namely, community focus, service delivery arrangements, structures and processes, risk management and internal control and standards of conduct.

External audit (see below) reports annually on the adequacy of internal audit arrangements.

## External Audit

The Council's activities are also monitored by auditors appointed by the Audit Commission. Their responsibilities are set out in the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and of Audited Bodies and their audit work is determined by the Code of Audit Practice.

These documents can be found on their website ([www.audit-commission.gov.uk](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk)).

The present Code of Audit Practice requires the external auditor to:

- Provide an opinion on the Council's financial statements;
- Draw a positive conclusion regarding the Council's arrangements for ensuring value for money in the use of its resources; and
- Provide an opinion on the Council's Best Value Performance Plan.

The external auditors also have responsibilities outside the code in regard to grant claims, whereby they are required to certify grant claims at the request of grant paying bodies.

They also issue periodic reports to chief officers on matters which they have considered, and also publish an annual Management Letter which is issued to all members of the Council and is posted on the Council's website.

All external audit findings are drawn to the attention of, and recommendations agreed with, relevant staff, and, where appropriate, members. The implementation of agreed recommendations is monitored during the following audit.

#### Other Inspections

For the last couple of years, services which have been the subject of Best Value Reviews have then been subject to independent inspection by the Best Value Inspectorate. Inspection reports are summarised in the BVPP, and are publicly available.

Suffolk Coastal, along with all other principal local authorities, will be subject to a Comprehensive Area Assessment, undertaken principally by the Audit Commission Inspection Service. This will endeavour to give the public an overall view of the performance of the authority, and will influence other audit and inspection regimes. The results of the assessment along with the Council's improvement plan based on the recommendations of the Audit Commission findings will be publicly available.

The Department of Work and Pensions and its Benefit Fraud Inspectorate also carry out periodic reviews of the accuracy of the Council's Housing and Council Tax Benefit processing, and the effectiveness of measures in place to prevent and detect benefit fraud. Major inspection reports are publicly available.

The Food Standards Agency undertakes inspections of local authority food enforcement services. An audit of the controls on imported food of non-animal origin by Suffolk Coastal Port Health Authority was carried out in March 2004 and the inspection report and action plan are publicly available on the Food Standards Agency website.

The Food and Veterinary Office of the European Commission carry out regular inspections on the control of imported animal products at the Felixstowe Border Inspection Post. An inspection was carried out in November 2006 and the inspection report and action plan are publicly available.

The Office of the Surveillance Commissioner inspects local authorities with regard to the operation of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000. An inspection was carried out in January 2008 and the inspection report and action plan are publicly available on the Council's website.

In accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 this Council must have a publication scheme which is a public commitment to make certain information routinely available. All publication schemes must be approved by the Information Commissioner and the information contained within a scheme should be reviewed by authorities regularly to ensure it is accurate and up to date. During 2008/09 the Information Commissioner will review the Council's publication scheme.