

# PAPER B

Purpose : for information

Committee : **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

Date : **23 JUNE 2004**

Title : **ETHICAL AUDIT**

## **REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER**

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### PURPOSE

1. To receive the summary of the completed questionnaires and agree further action to be undertaken to complete the audit.

### BACKGROUND

2. The Committee will recall that with the aid of a small Working Party we have been working on an Ethical Audit of the Isle of Wight Council to pursue the drive of improving the standards of ethics and probity within the Council.
3. I attach a copy of the analysis of the returned questionnaires. From this I think we can make the following conclusions:
  - a. The building blocks (ie policies and codes etc) for high and improving standards of ethics and probity are in place;
  - b. The knowledge of these building blocks, how to access them and from whom to seek advice needs some attention;
  - c. The perception is that there is poor regard of ethics and probity within the Council; however
  - d. This is not borne out by evidence of actual poor regard of ethics and probity; and
  - e. There is a clear need to tackle this poor perception.
4. In trying to assist with resolving the poor perception there is a need to identify why the perception is so poor. For example is this connected to past performance rather than current performance?

### PROPOSAL

5. To take this matter forward it is suggested that the Working Party interview a small number of individual members of the public to try and understand exactly what the issue is so that effect remedies can be identified and implemented.

6. It is suggested that the Chairman of the Standards Committee, with assistance from the Monitoring Officer (and one or two other Members of the Standards Committee) arranges to invite the following to be interviewed:
  - a. A member of the public;
  - b. The editor of one major local news media;
  - c. An experienced Member of the Council;
  - d. A senior trades union figure;
  - e. A representative of the business community; and
  - f. A representative of the voluntary sector.
  
7. It is estimated that interviews will last half an hour and will concentrate on testing the conclusion that perception of ethical standards is worse than reality and on identifying ways of improving perception.

RECOMMENDATION

8. That the interviews as set out above be conducted over the next few months and reported back to the next meeting of the Committee.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Members attendance figures as published in December 2003

Contact Point : Chris Mathews, ☎ 823280

JOHN LAWSON  
Monitoring Officer

## **ETHICAL AUDIT RESULTS**

**April 2004.**

This is an evaluation of the Ethical Audit that was carried out internally and externally by the Isle of Wight Council in March and April 2004.

140 questionnaires were returned to the council from Members and Officers, just shy of 50% of the paper copies sent out, 22 Members and Officers accepted our invitation to complete a copy on-line (16% of responses). Overall, 104 responses were received from Officers, and 26 were received from Members, there were also 10 respondents who failed to specify their position on the Questionnaire.

Members of the public were also invited to respond on line, however, only 5 did so.

Throughout the evaluation I have referred to Negative and Positive responses, negative responses are 'Not Really' and 'Not At All' whereas positive responses are 'Yes' and 'To A Large Extent'. 'No Comment' is neither a negative nor positive response, nor is it strictly a response, there was no box to tick for 'No Comment' it has just been labelled so where no response has been given.

This evaluation is divided into 3 parts, Part 1 deals with questions asked to Members, Officers and the Public, Part 2 deals with responses from Members and Officers only and Part 3 deals with responses from the Public.

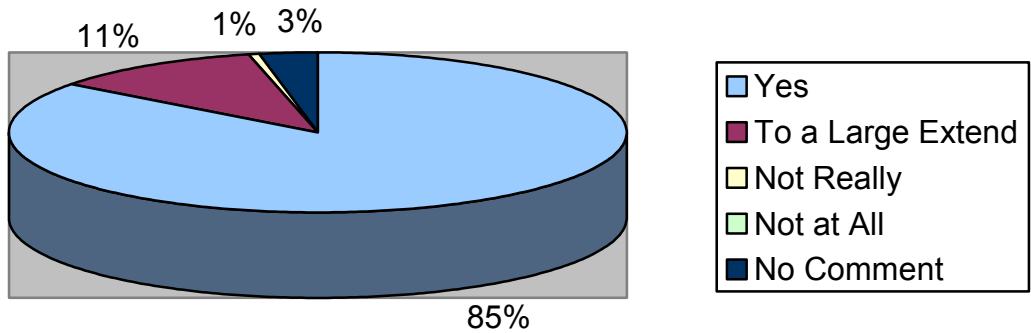
Following the evaluation of the individual questions, there are suggested improvements to the Questionnaire itself and its possible successors, and a conclusion looking into what was good, and what was bad about the results.

**Part 1.**

**Question 1.**

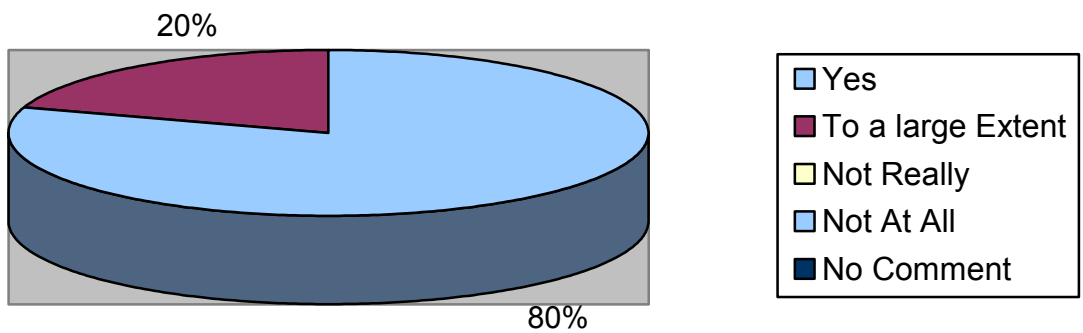
**Is it important for Local Government to establish and operate by a set of strong ethical values?**

**Member and Officer Response:**



Members and Officers clearly agreed with the external replies in the fact that it is of the highest importance that the Authority operates by set of strong ethical values. As we see below:

**Public Response:**



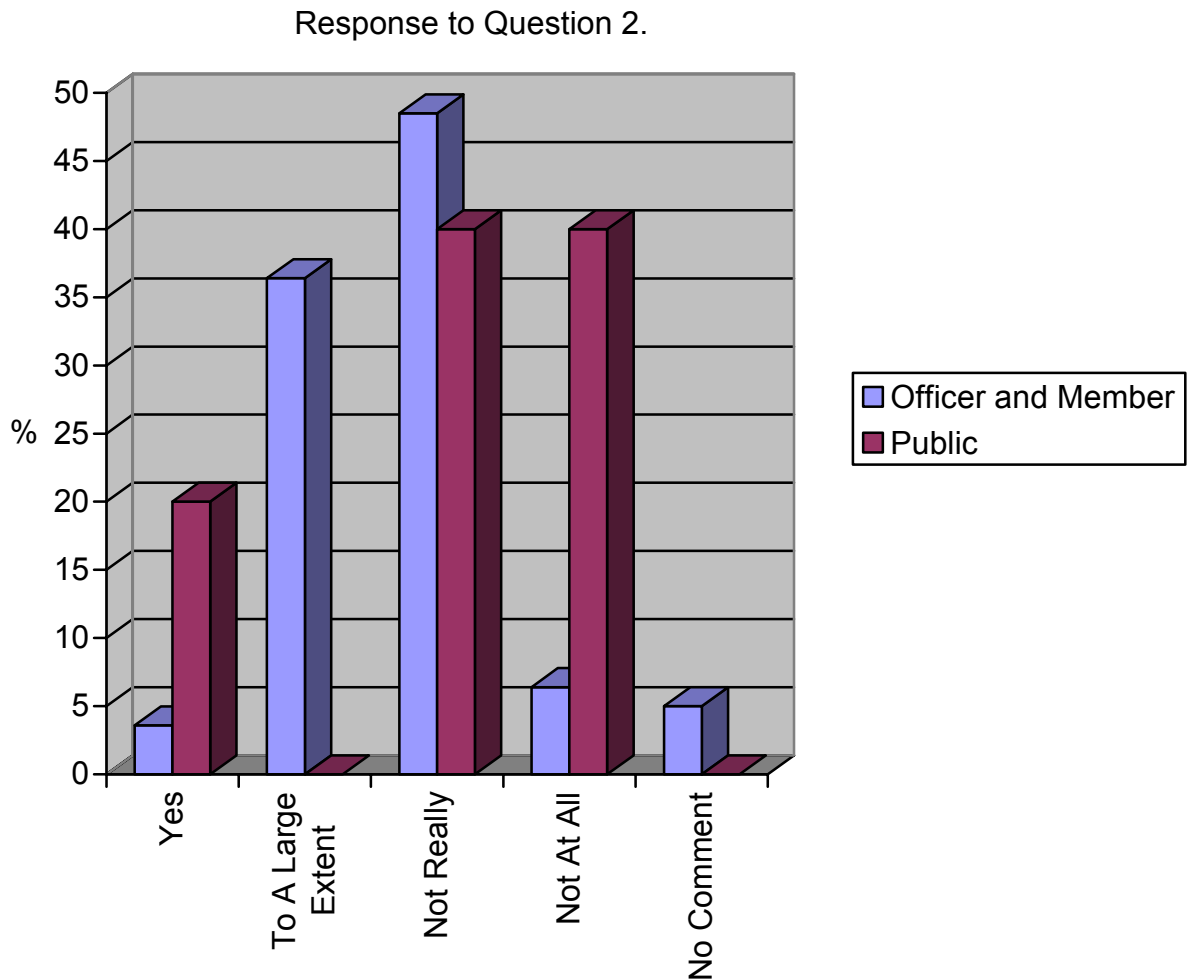
fact the total combined respondents for each category of answer reads like so:

In

	Yes	To a Large Extend	Not Really	Not At All	No Comment
Frequency.	124	16	1	0	4

Question 2.

**Do you think the public perceive ethical standards within the council to be good?**



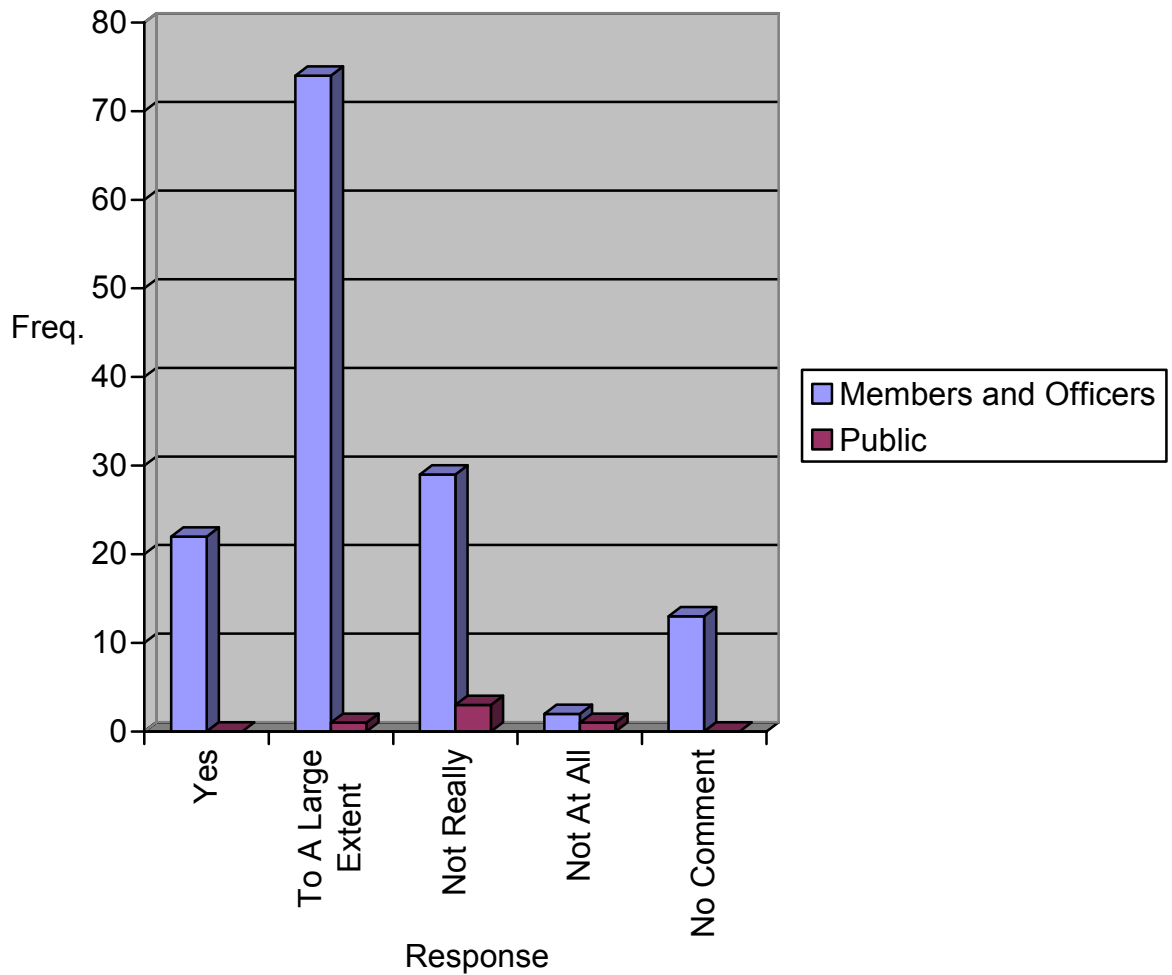
The similarities between the groups here are clearly limited, further more so by the fact that due to only receiving 5 replies from the public, 40% may not carry as much weight as it would if we had received 100 replies. It remains that two persons agreeing on a matter may be regarded 'as a fluke' rather than a fair representation of public opinion.

Having said that, the members and staff of the Isle of Wight Council do not appear convinced that the public has a perception of the Council abiding by a series of good ethical standards, with the majority, 48.6%, answering 'Not Really', and a tiny 3.6% replying with a definite 'Yes' that the Council is perceived in good light regarding this.

**Question 3.**

Do you believe standards of ethical conduct in this authority are high?

This question, in reflection to question 2, asked the individual for their own opinion, and not what they perceived the general public's opinion to be.



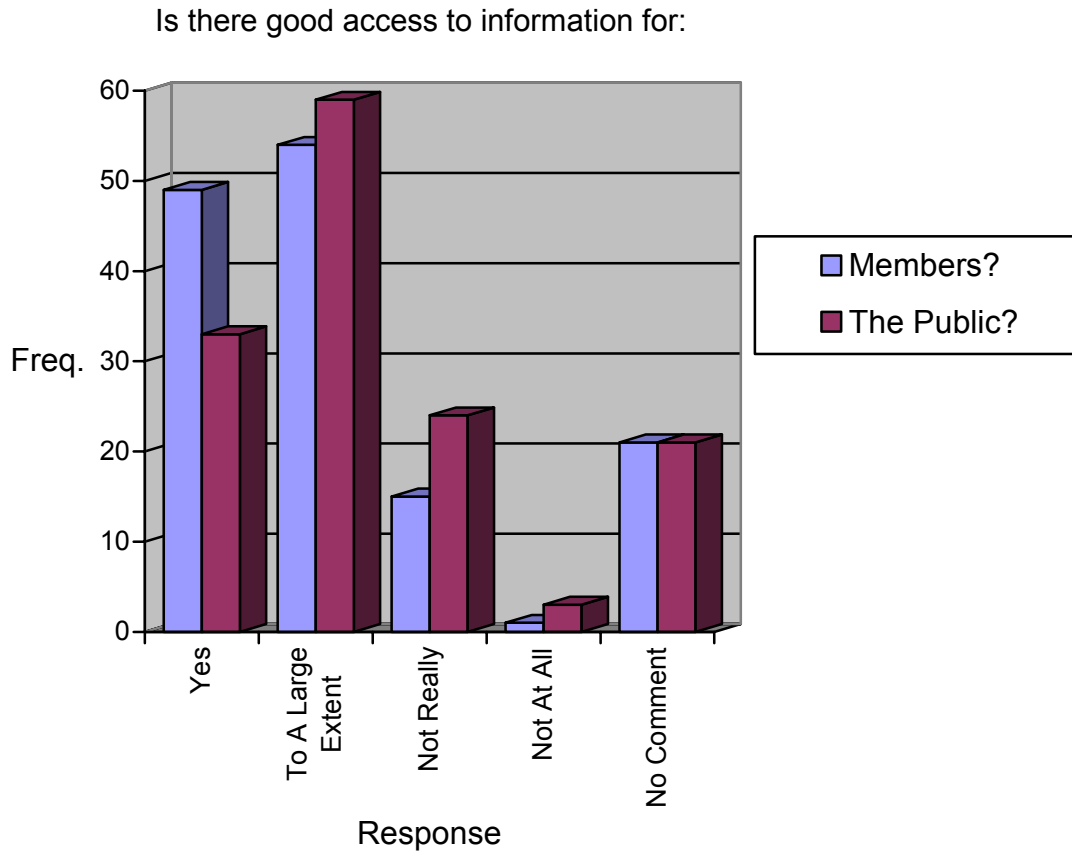
At first glance this appears to be a positive response to the question, the vast majority of staff and members view the Council as having good ethical standards. However, one fifth of respondents from within the Council still clearly feel that these standards could improve, suggesting that they are 'Not Really' of a high standard.

The response from the public reflected the view from the previous question, with negative responses.

Question 4 (a&b)

**Member/Officer Response:**

**Is there good access to information for Members/the Public?**

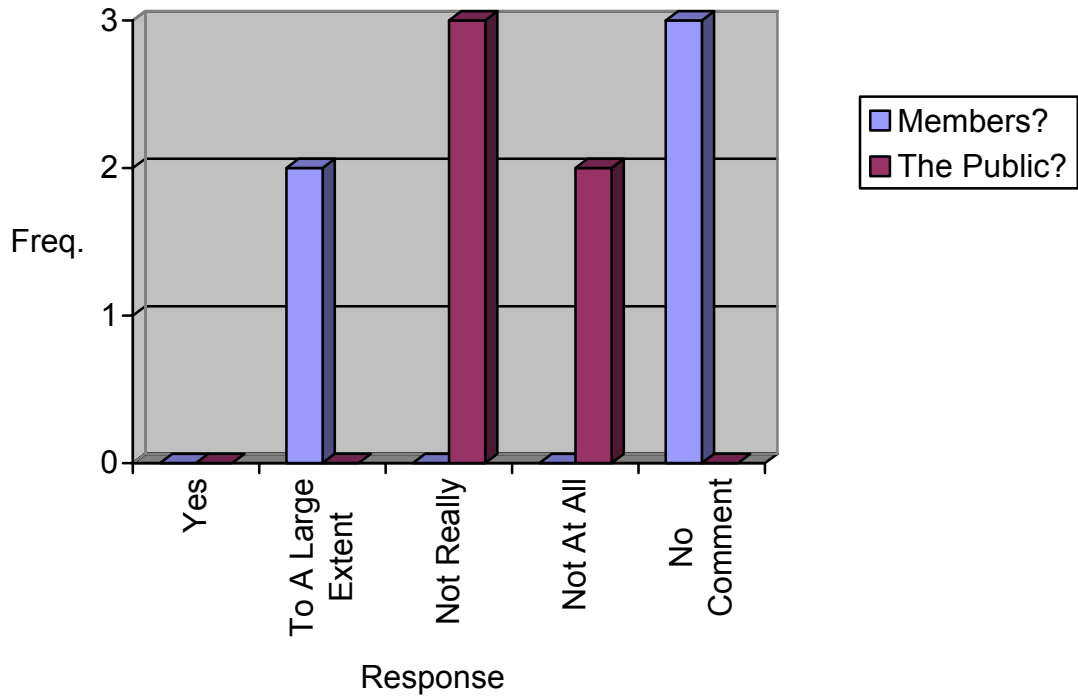


As we can see the amount of negative responses is outweighed dramatically by the positive responses, in fact, the number of persons who decided not to comment is almost identical to those who responded negatively (42:43 respectively).

**Question 4 (a&b)**

**Public response.**

**Is there good access to information for Members/Officers?**



Understandably the majority of the responses regarding access to information for members came back as 'No Comment'. Where as the response of access to information for the public would suggest that either better access needs to be created or better awareness of what is available needs to be made. Once again though, the return figures are too small to allow a reliable judgment.

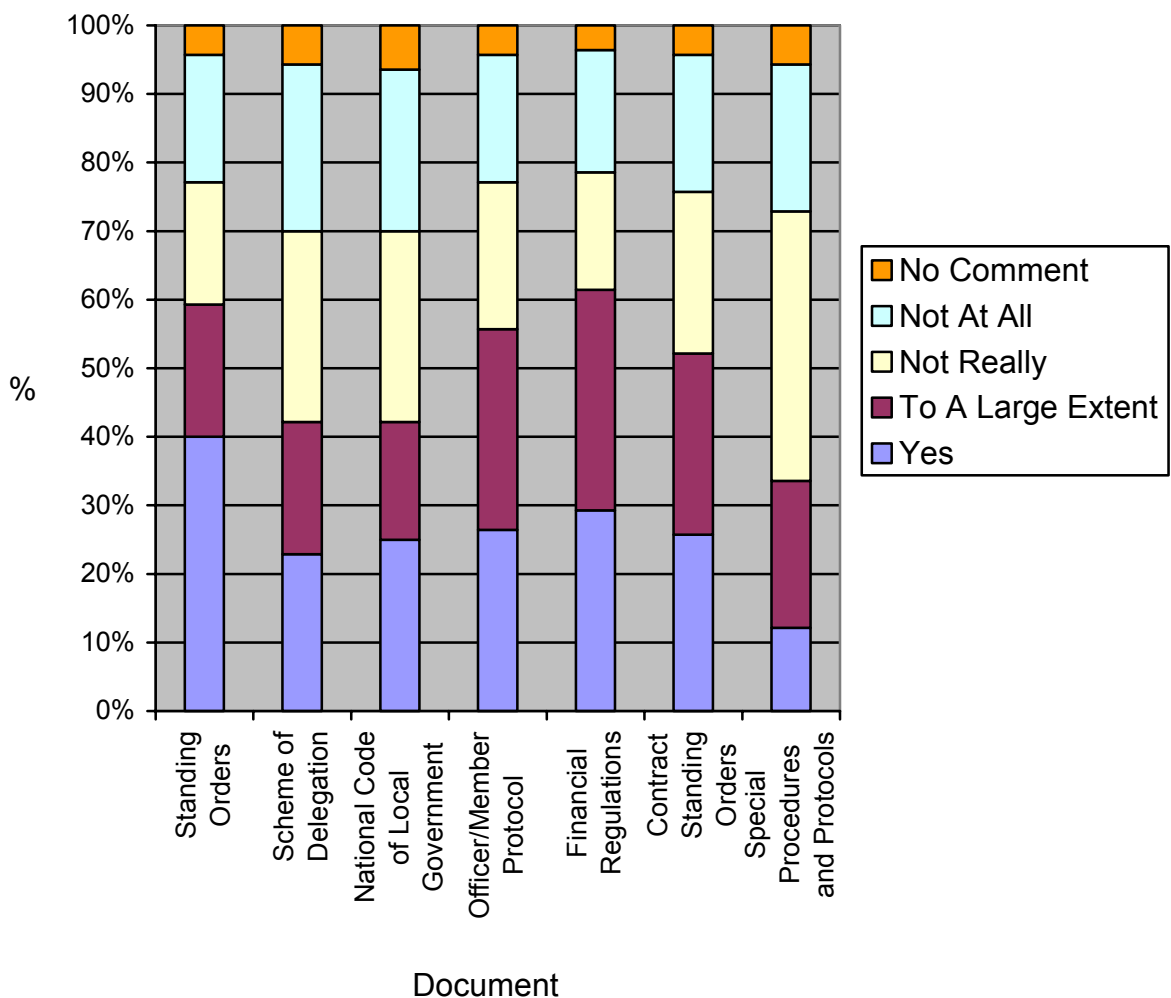


**Part 2.**

The Following questions were asked of Members and Officers Only.

**Question 5**

**Are you aware of and have a broad understanding of the following documents?**

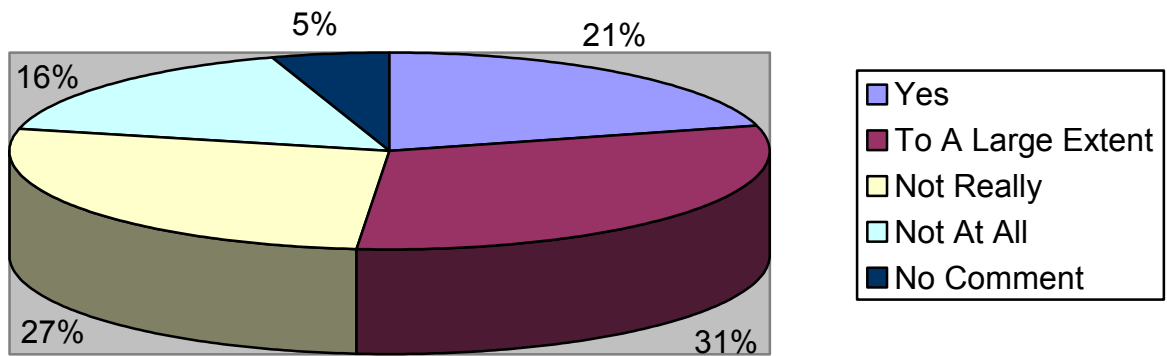


Looking at this graph as a whole suggests that about half of the Members and Officers who replied to this questionnaire have a fairly decent knowledge of these documents. With two exceptions the line between 'To A Large Extent' and 'Not Really' lies somewhere between 40 and 60%. It is also important to remember that in the above chart, the 'No Comment' section represents neither a positive nor negative response, and if removed each possible response is enlarged by 25% of the size of the 'No Comment' response and taking the line between the two groups ('Not Really' and 'To A

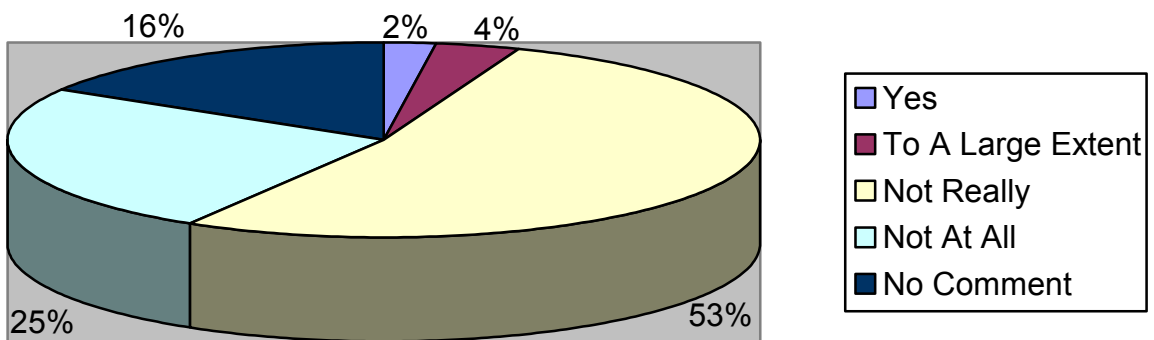
Large Extent') slightly higher, in most cases closer to 50% and in some taking it above the median line.

### Question 6

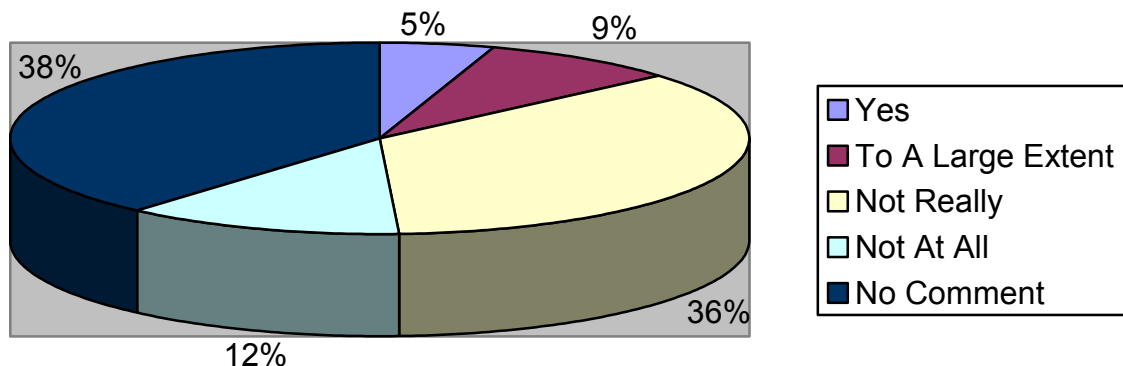
a) Do you know where you can put your hands on the above documents?



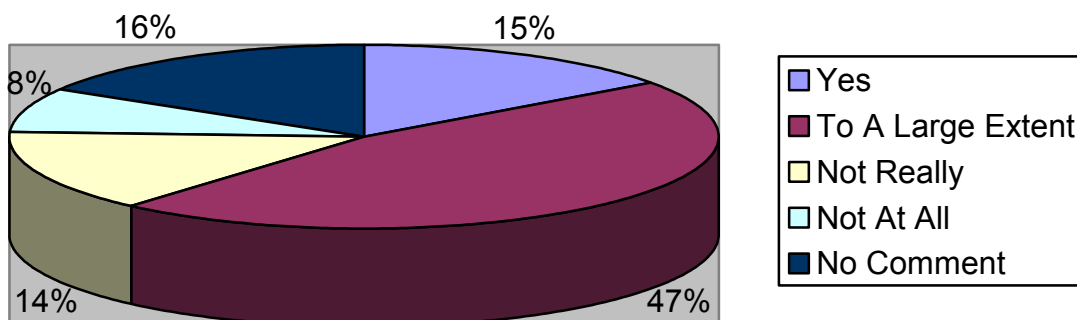
b) Are you aware of any significant ambiguities or omissions in any of these documents?



c) Do any of these documents provide you with a mechanism for improving the documents?



d) Are you satisfied with the present procedures leading to the selection and appointment of officers?



For the various above parts of Question 6, there are large quantities of 'No Comment'. This is to be expected however, as not all staff who were forwarded questionnaires would be in a position to answer these questions, having never been involved in the administrative or political side of the council.

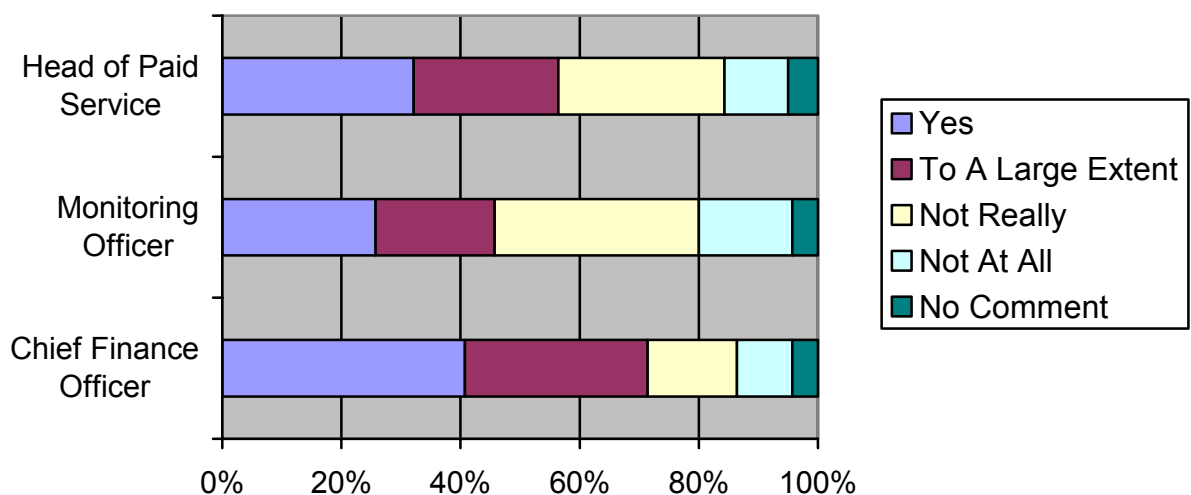
a), b) And d) all have favourable responses, suggesting that the majority know how to get their hands on the documents mentioned in Question 5, that they are not aware of any serious ambiguities or omissions in the documents and furthermore they are satisfied by the selection procedures for the appointment of officers.

However, c) is more negative, as a massive 48% chose 'Not Really' or 'Not At All', whilst 38% chose not to comment, leaving only 14% for positive responses. It is possible though that many have ticked negative responses by default, it appears the vast majority may not know the answer to this question, and those who choose to tick a response when they don't know, will prefer to choose a more neutral answer, such as 'Not Really' as opposed to committing themselves to strong leading replies such as 'Yes', 'Not At All' or 'To A Large Extent'. This theory is supported by the fact that 36% of persons who responded 'Not Really' did not answer 'No Comment' to

any questions. There were 31 people in total who left no questions blank and never gave 'No Comment', of these 31 people, 18 of them replied 'Not really' to Question 6c), or 58%. Although this does not, and cannot prove anything due to the anonymous nature of the Questionnaire, it does suggest that 'Not Really' is the choice for the respondent whom is unsure of how to answer.

### Question 7

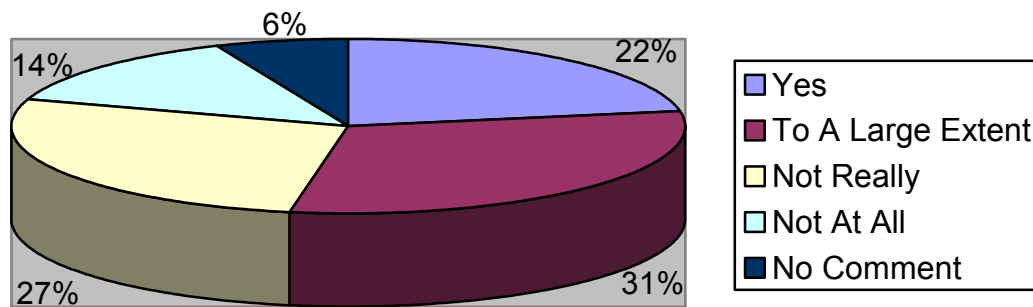
**Do you have a reasonable understanding of the role of the following statutory officers?**



We see above that an average of over 50% know the roles of the before mentioned officers. Again it is worth remembering though that due to the anonymous nature of the Questionnaire we do not know the role of the respondents, with a minimum of 80% of the returned questionnaires being randomly sent out within the council (20% of returned Questionnaires were returned by email, so we do not know if these were sent out or filled in on-line), it is very likely that many respondents would never have had the need to know whom these Officers are, especially, as is reflected in graph above, the Monitoring officer, whose main responsibilities lay with the members of the council. This is not to say of course whether they do or do not need to know who the above officers are, but nor is it to say whether or not the information is there if the respondent wishes to find out.

### Question 8

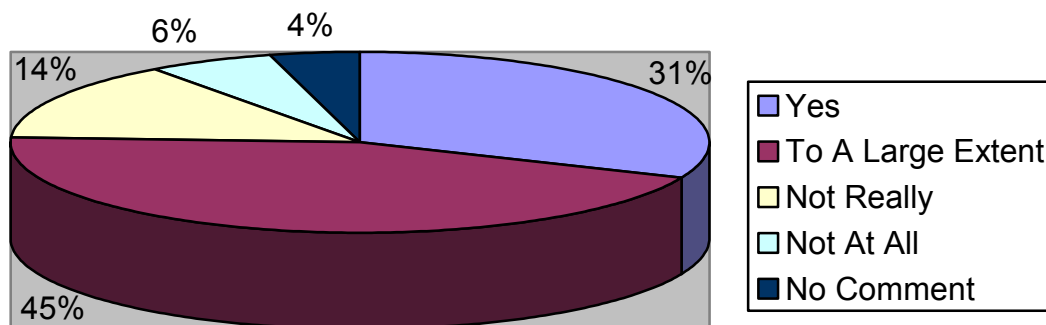
**Do you have a good understanding of the processes for the conduct of local authority business?**



In hindsight this Question was maybe too broad to be effective, the term 'local authority business' can cover any amount of activities by the Council, and it is extremely unlikely that one person can have extensive knowledge on how the entire authority is run. As discussed in Question 6c) the possibility is that with such a broad question, those who were unsure would be inclined to tick the 'Not Really' response. In which case a positive reply of over 50% is still relatively successful.

**Question 9**

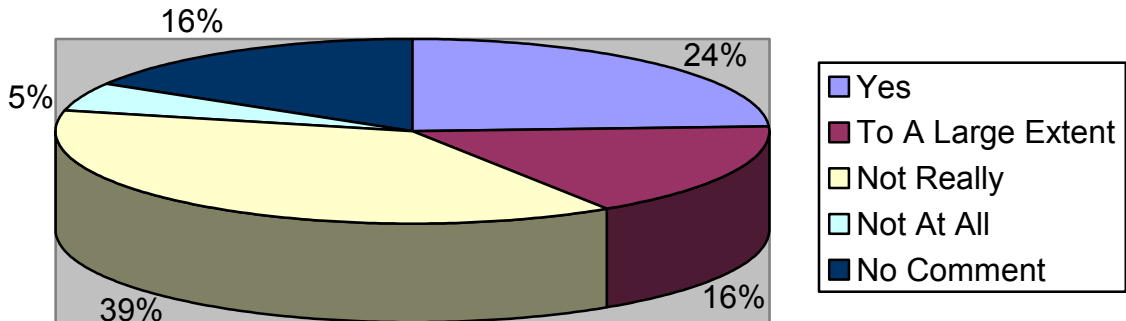
**Do you receive clear information about the work of the Council which is relevant to you?**



The result to this question is possibly more important and more telling than the results to Question 7, the overwhelming evidence here is that the members and officers of the Isle of Wight Council receive clear information about the work of the council as is relevant to them. Even compared to question 5, this is a very positive response; in Question 5 between 40%-60% of Respondents were familiar with certain documents, bearing in mind that some of these documents may have had no bearing on the individual and their position within the council. The above chart shows that 76% of respondents are satisfied with the information they receive regarding their position within the Council.

**Question 10(a)**

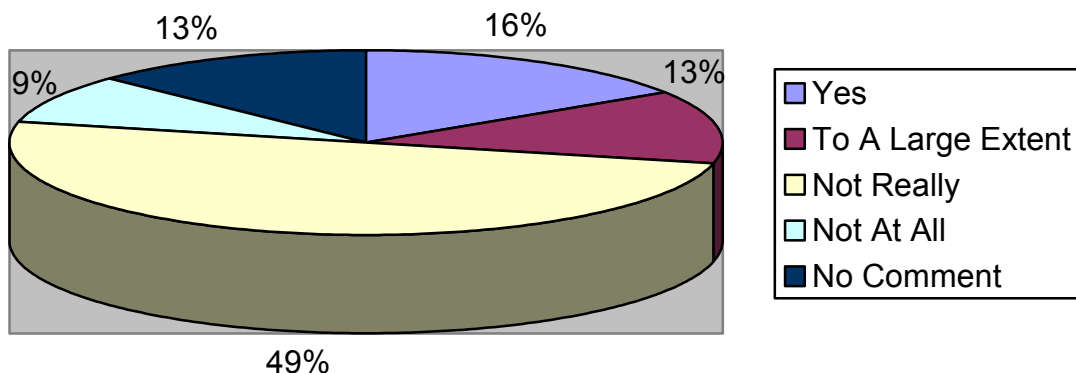
**Do you think there is any complacency about standards of conduct within Members?**



- 40% of Respondents believe that there is a level of complacency within Members.
- There were 26 Responses in total from Members of the Council, meaning that over 30% of the Members believe there is complacency amongst Members about standards.
- 42% of Officers believe there is some level of complacency amongst Members regarding standards.

**Question 10(b)**

**Do you think there is complacency about standards of conduct within Officers?**

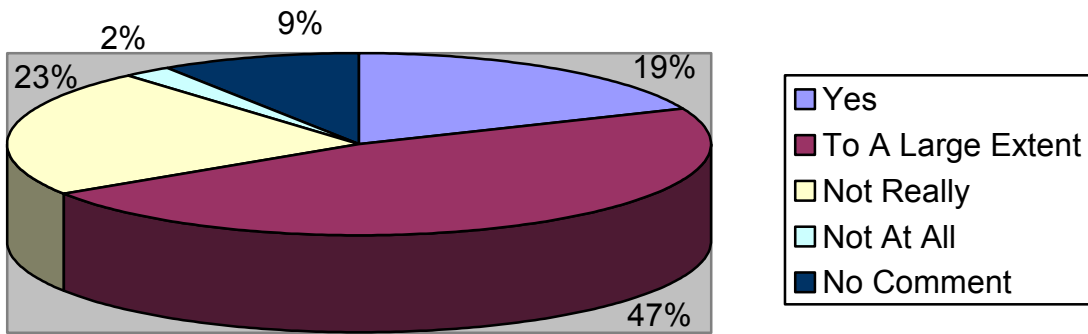


- 29% of Respondents believe that there is a level of complacency within Officers.
- 38% of Members feel that there is complacency amongst Officers.

- 114 Officers Responded, 26% of who feel that there is complacency amongst Officers regarding Standards.

**Question 11**

**Do you think Members see themselves as having a role in ensuring good conduct and high standards on the part of others?**

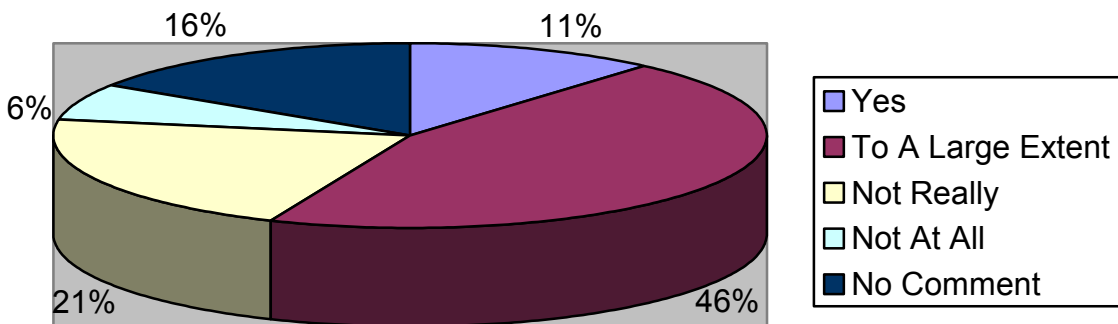


66% of the respondents think that Members see themselves as having a role in ensuring good conduct and high standards on the part of others.

85% of Members responded positively to this question.

**Question 12**

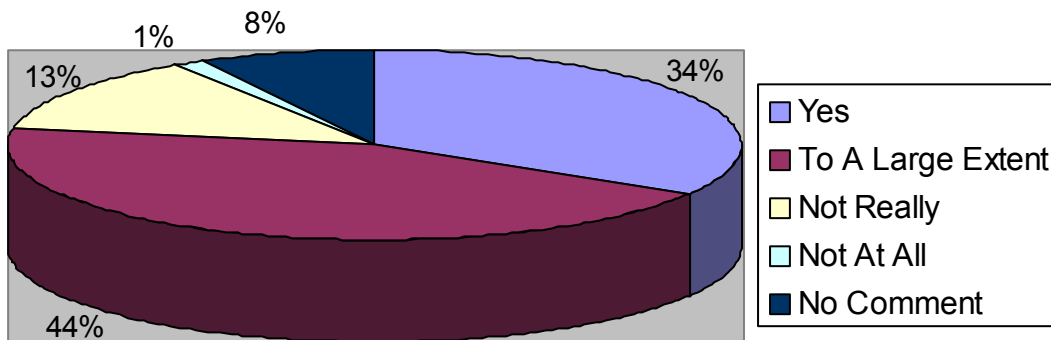
**Are Members clear as to their own role and accountabilities?**



A generally positive response to this question, with 67% replying with 'Yes' or 'To A Large Extent', the next highest response was 'No Comment' which may have received such a response from those in the Council whom do not have contact with the Members and are therefore unable to confidently answer the question, in fact 86% of 'No Comment' replies come from Officers. This leaves 'No Comment' responses from just 3 Members.

**Question 13**

Do you think Officers see themselves as having a role in ensuring good conduct and high standards on the part of others?

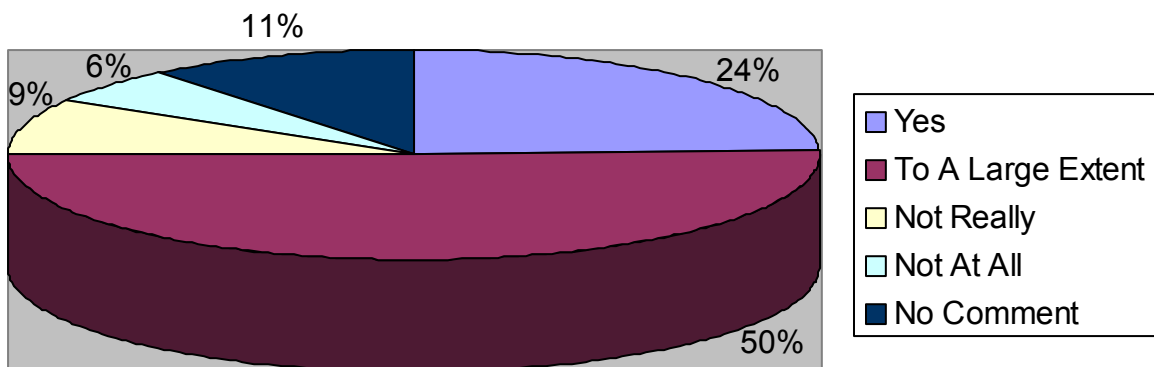


This question also received a very positive response, with only 14% supplying a negative response.

The spread of replies between Members and Officers is surprisingly even, for each category, there is between 16% and 19% of Members responses.

#### Question 14

Are Officers clear as to their own role and accountabilities?

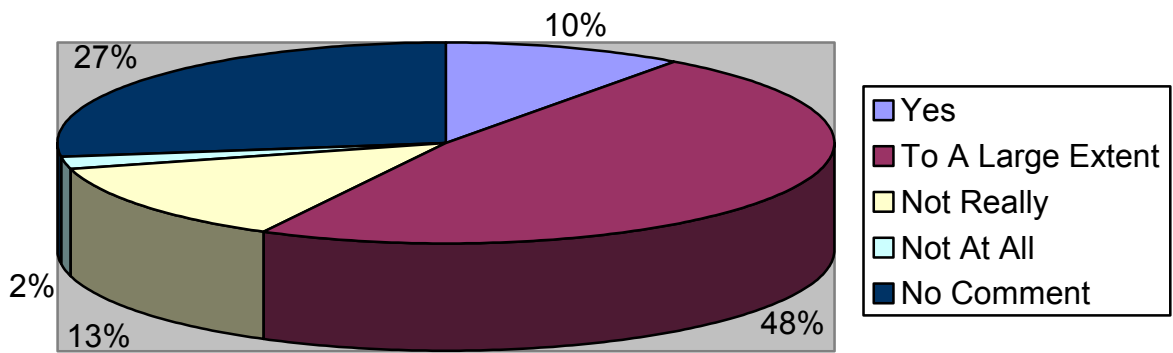


Again, this question received a very positive response, with 74% agreeing that Officers are clear as to their own role and responsibilities.

#### Question 15

In respect of ethical governance are the Council's practices and procedures relevant, up-to-date and clear?

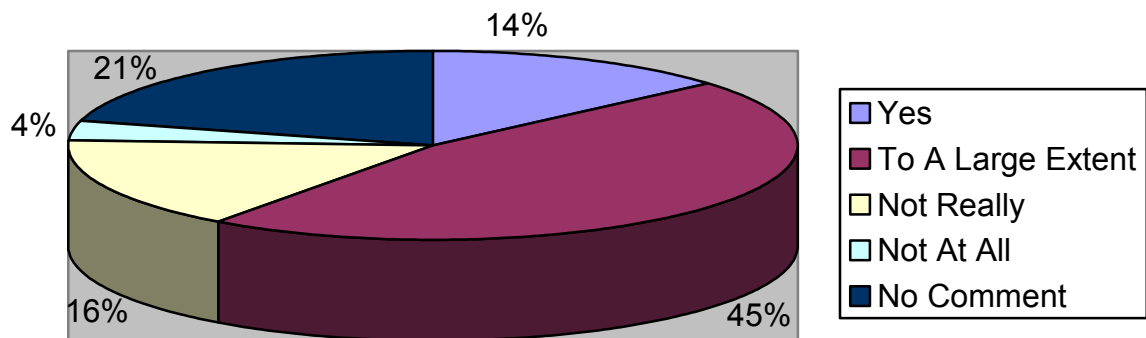




Again there is a very large positive response for this question, however what is more noticeable is that there is also a very large percentage of 'No Comments'. This would indicate that a large percentage of the Council's Officers and Members are not familiar with the Council's practices and procedures regarding ethical governance. Although notably, only 12% of Members marked 'No Comment', whereas 31% of Officers chose to make 'No Comment' for this question, suggesting that it is primarily Officers that need to be made more aware of certain Council procedures and Practices. Alternatively this suggests that Members, and Officers in particular do not read the documents frequently enough to know if they have been updated, as far as the respondent knows, the documents are up to date and is again unable to commit to a leading response suggesting otherwise.

### Question 16

**Do you think the Council consistently follow such proper procedures?**

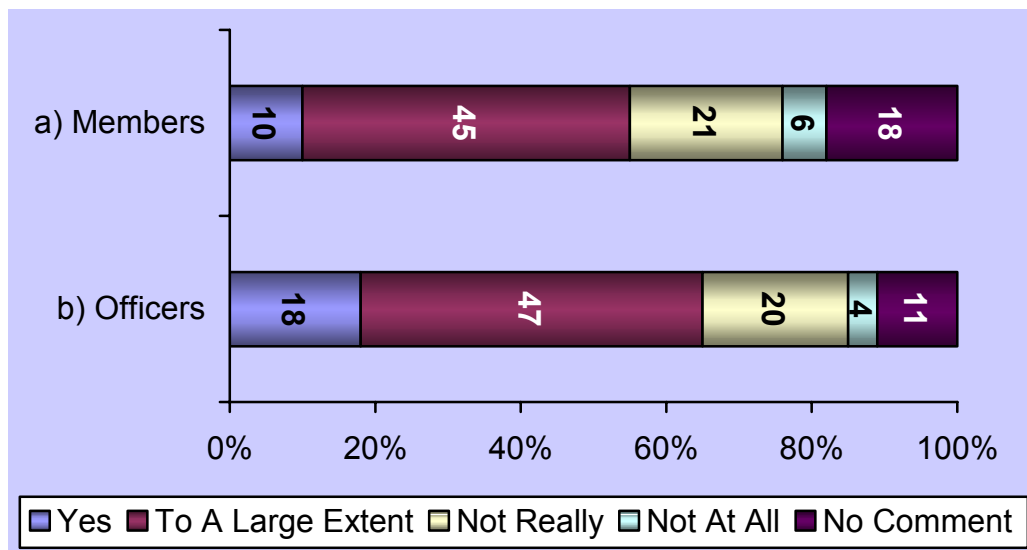


Again in Question 16 there is a large positive response, very similar to Question 15, and again there appears to be a large amount of 'No Comments', which could be expected following Question 15. However it is a smaller percent of responses with 'No Comment' than Question 15, whereas common sense would suggest that those who were unable to comment for Question 15 should also be unable to comment for Question 16.

Of those who responded with 'No Comment' for Question 15 (38 in total), 9 chose to mark positive responses (24%) and 3 chose to mark negative responses (8%) for Question 16. This would suggest that the results to this question are not ultimately reliable, with some persons who indicated in Question 15 'No Comment' (and in the comments box for Q.15 added 'Don't know' on 20 occasions – 7 of which then responded to Q16) then replying to Question 16. At minimum this fact questions the validity of 5% of the response at a maximum it invalidates 9% of responses.

### Question 17&18

**Do you think Members/Officers have a common understanding on how to deal with conflict of interests?**

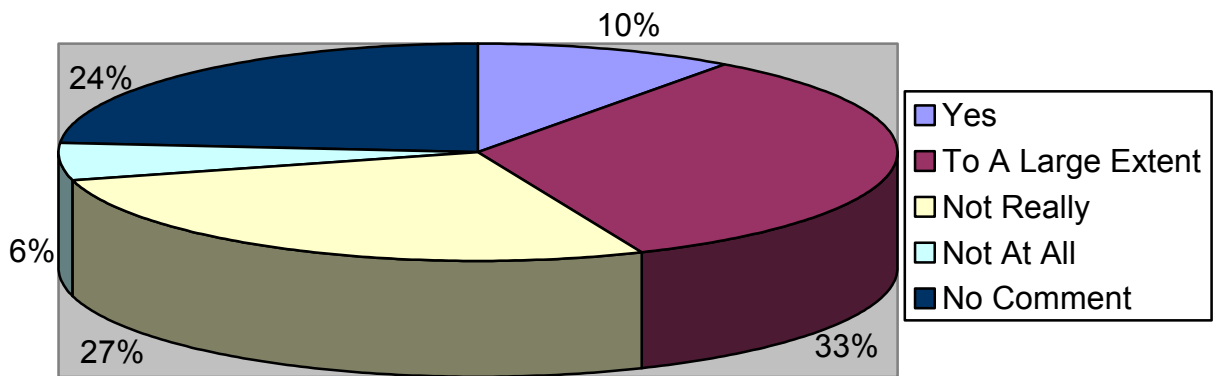


The results to this question are fairly even. The only factor which distinguishes them is the amount of 'No Comments' given, had this number been the same, it may have been that the other categories would be even closer than they are. This 'No Comment' group comes primarily from the Officers responses, for a) only 2 of the 26 'No Comment' responses are from Members. This again reflects in the 'No Comment' category for part b) where there are 3 Member responses out of 15 'No Comments'.

However despite the growing amounts of 'No Comments' that have been registered in the latter half of the Questionnaire, this is another positive response. Only 26% of respondents felt that Members do not have a common knowledge on how to deal with conflict interests, and only 24% felt the same for Officers.

### Question 19

**Are Standards issues perceived as jointly owned by Members and Officers generally?**

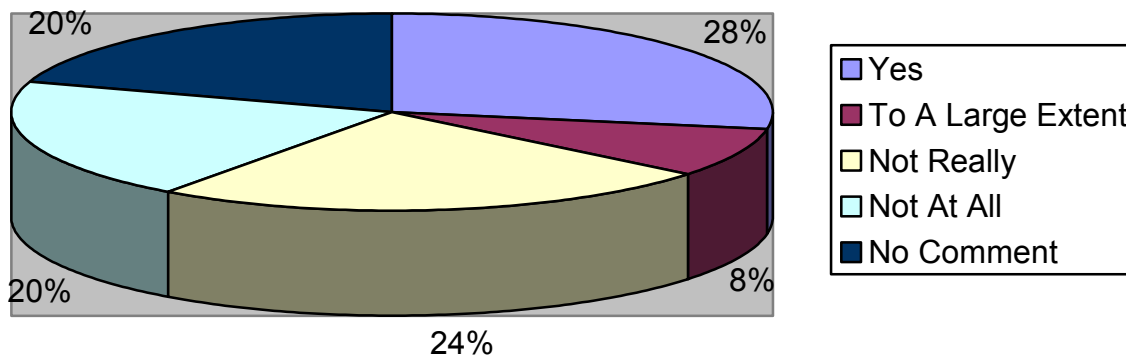


As discussed earlier in Question 6c) and Question 8, because of the broad nature of this question there are very few definite answers (i.e. Yes or Not at All) and many No Comments, this accounts for the high volume of 'Not Really' and 'To A Large Extent'.

The nature of the response to this question leaves it open to interpretation as to whether any weight can be placed on the above results. The question is phrased as a very general one and therefore suggests a more general reply, this means it becomes more difficult for respondents to confidently say 'Yes' or 'Not At All' and are left with the alternative of picking a answer out of two options, 'Not Really' and 'To a Large Extent', those who are not in the habit of missing questions or leaving them blank would have ticked one of these two boxes, the others would have made 'No Comment'.

## Question 20

**Do you know where (or from whom) you can obtain advice and support to help you on Standards issues? (Please specify who in the comments box)**



Question 20 received a very even response as illustrated above; overall however it was a fairly negative response that again drew a large portion of 'No Comment' responses.

However, this may be misleading, despite the fact that 28 respondents made 'No Comment', 15 then proceeded to correctly name a source where assistance with Standards is available.

The chart on the following page shows the answers given and which response accompanied it.

The Term 'Valid Answer' is not necessarily a correct one, there are certain 'right' answers for this question, and there are a few 'wrong' ones, but there are many answers given whom would be able to help to a certain extent. This explains why, in the chart on the following page, that suggestions are validated with 'Yes', 'No' or 'To An Extent'. So as such, there is only 1 'wrong' answer, and this respondent offered three answers, the others being John Lawson and Chris Mathews, correct answers.

Where more than one answer is given, both answers have been marked, so this chart should not be used in comparison to the above pie chart which illustrates the percentage division between responses.

	Yes	To A Large Extent	Not Really	Not At All	No Comment	Valid Answer?
John Lawson	8	3	1		4	Yes

Chris Mathews	9	1		1	3	Yes
The Monitoring Officer	9				2	Yes
Bruce Claxton	1				1	Yes
Mike Fisher	2				2	Yes
Line Manager	2		2	1	4	Yes
Bob Streets					1	To An Extent
Internal Audit Section		1	1			To An Extent
Ged Richardson	1					To An Extent
Parish Priest	1					No
Union	1					To An Extent
Corporate Policy Team	1					To An Extent
Paul Wilkinson	1					To An Extent
Glen Garrod	1					To An Extent

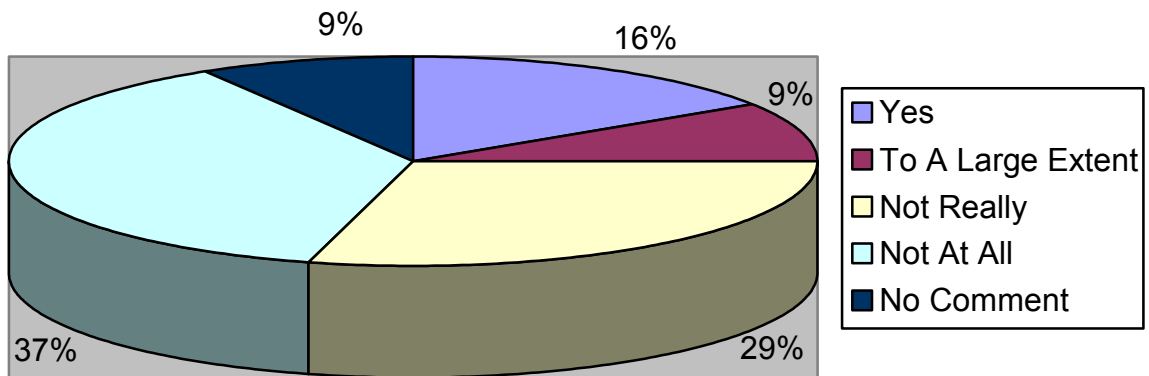
So we can see that the general impression of whom to contact is a correct one, even if those persons can only help to a certain extent, they are in the position to point in the right direction.

The majority of respondents as we can see believed that John Lawson and Chris Mathews are the correct people to contact, along with the Monitoring Officer (a position held by John Lawson, and Chris Mathews (Deputy)).

It appears clear that the majority of Members and Officers are satisfied that assumption can find somebody who can help or at least point them in the right direction.

## Question 21

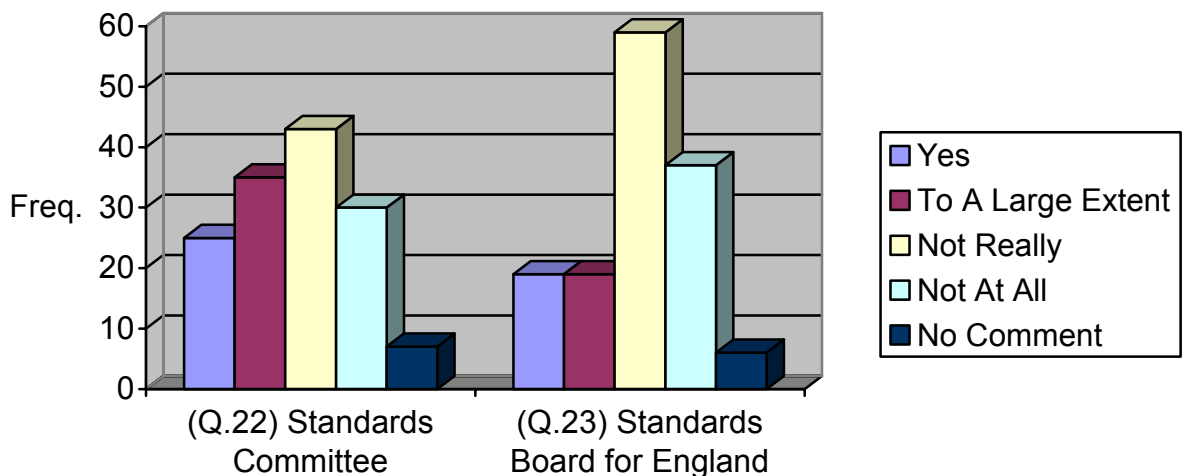
**Have you had relevant training on issues relating to standards of conduct?**



This question supplies the questionnaire with one of its biggest negative responses. A massive 66% do not feel that they have received relevant training on issues relating to standards of conduct.

### Question 22/23

**Do you understand the role of the Standards Committee/the Standards Board for England?**



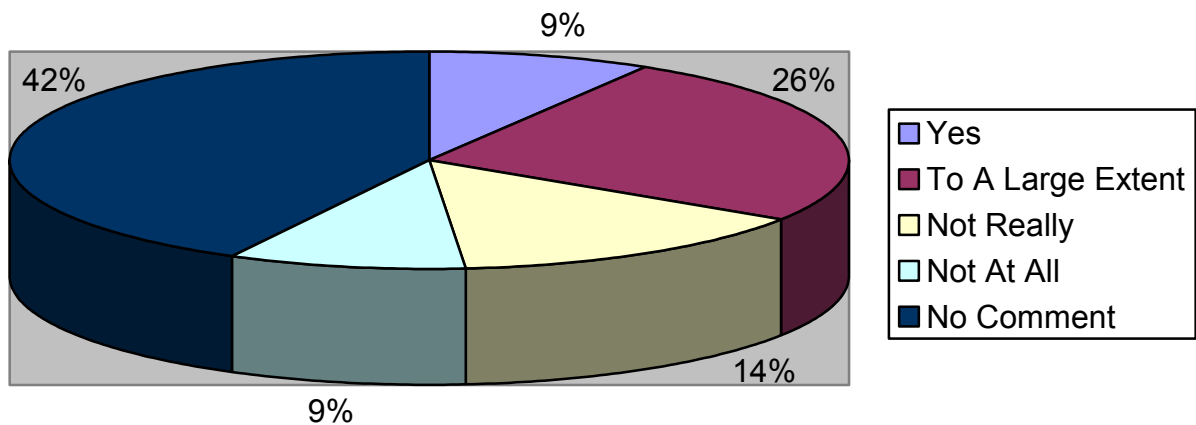
Neither organisation is truly appreciated for its full role and how it relates to the Council, but the Standards Committee does have a 29% more positive response, however the Standards Committee is an internal organisation and therefore it is expected that Members and Officers will have a better knowledge of its role.

With only 14% of respondents understanding the role of the Standards Board for England, Question 23 has a very negative response.

### Question 24.

**Do you think that the Standards Committee and/or Standards Board work effectively in dealing with misconduct by members?**

With hindsight, this question is also too broad, and should maybe have been split into two questions. That is whatever response is received we do not know whether the respondent is referring to the Standards Committee, the Standards Board, or both.



A massive 42% of respondents chose to make 'No Comment' for this question, which suggests that they were unable to answer the question due to a lack of knowledge and experience in the matter. This is understandable, as those whom are not in direct contact with Members or the Standards Committee/Standards Board will have limited dealings with these matters. Although having said this, there were still 6 Members who chose not to make any comments for this question, suggesting other reasons for doing so, such as not understanding the question, or maybe by accident missing the last page of the questionnaire, these are simply guesses however and there is no evidence to suggest why this question was ignored by so many, other than those reasons suggested.

**Part 3.**

This part of the evaluation deals with responses from the Public only.

As I addressed in Part 1 of this evaluation, only 5 external Questionnaires were returned and hence little weight can be placed on the evidence that these responses produce. This amount of respondents becomes even harder to take any real results from as the

Questionnaire progress, once we reach Question 13, the remaining 23 questions have only one or two persons responding, the remainder opting to make 'No Comment' (with the exception of Question 14d where only two respondents opt for 'No Comment'. None the less, following is presented the information extracted from these 5 respondents:

	Yes	To A Large Extent	Not Really	Not At All	No Comment
5) Do you receive Clear information about the work of the council which is relevant to you?		1	4		
6) Do you think there is any complacency about standards of conduct? a) Within Members?	3	2			
b) Within Officers?	1	4			
7) Do you think Members see themselves as having a role in ensuring good conduct and high standards on the part of others?		2	3		
8) Do you think Officers see themselves as having a role in ensuring good conduct and high standards on the part of others?		2	3		
9) Does the Council consistently follow such proper procedures?			5		
10) Do you think Members have a common understanding on how to deal with conflict of interests?			4	1	
11) Do you think Officers have a common understanding on how to deal with conflict of interests?		2	3		
12) Do you know where (or from whom) you can obtain advice and support to help you on Standards issues? (please specify who in the comments box)			3	2	
	Yes	To A Large Extent	Not Really	Not At All	No Comment
13) Are you aware of and have a broad understanding of the following documents? a) Standing Orders		1		1	3
b) Scheme of Delegation		1		1	3



c) National Code of Local Government Conduct for Members		1		1	3
d) Officer/Member Protocol		1		1	3
e) Financial Regulations		1		1	3
f) Contract Standing Orders		1		1	3
g) Special Procedures and Protocols		1		1	3
14a) Do you know where you can put your hands on the above documents?		1		1	3
14b) Are you aware of any significant ambiguities or omissions in these documents?				1	4
14c) Do any of these documents provide you with a mechanism for improving the documents?		1			4
14d) Are you satisfied with the present procedures leading to the selection and appointment of Officers?			2	1	2
15) Do you have a reasonable understanding of the role of the following statutory officers?		1	1		3
a) Head of Paid Service					
15b) Monitoring Officer		1	1		3
15c) Chief Finance Officer		2			3
16) Do you have a good understanding of the processes for the conduct of local authority business?			2		3
17) Are Members clear as to their own role and accountabilities?			2		3
18) Are Officers clear as to their own role and accountabilities?		1	1		3
19) In respect of ethical governance are the Council's practices and procedures, relevant, up to date and clear?			2		3
20) Are Standards issues perceived as jointly owned by Members and Officers generally?			1		4
21) Have you had relevant training on issues relating to standards of conduct?	1			1	3
22) Do you understand the					

Role of the Standards Committee?	1	1			3
23) Do you understand the role of the Standards Board for England?	1	1			3
24) Do you think that the Standards Committee and/or Standards Board work effectively in dealing with misconduct by Members?			1	1	3

Despite the large amount of 'No Comment' responses, the respondents did wish to make some other comments:

- How can they be when the Independent Councillors joined the Lib Dems after the election! (Response to Question 3, Do you believe standards of ethical conduct in this authority are high?)
- I'm concerned that the Council carries out surveys of public opinion, only to ignore them. The most recent example is the £40,000 cut in Countryside section, which was at the top of the agenda in the Island Voices consultation. (General Comments Section)
- I totally lost faith in the Council after the way Independent and Lib Dem Councillors deceived us during the elections, they effectively lied! What ethics? What standards? (General Comments Section)
- Too many people come from within the local government "industry". Why not recruit from industry and the private sector? (Response to Question 14d) Are you satisfied with the present procedures leading to the selection and appointment of Officers?)
- Too many cronies! (Response to Question 14d) Are you satisfied with the present procedures leading to the selection and appointment of Officers?)

Unfortunately with the limited response received it would be inefficient to take the public results as public opinion. Although from these five responses we do seem to have received a negative response, suggesting that Council standards are not viewed in the most positive of ways. However, as discussed earlier, these 5 respondents may be regarded as 'fluke' responses, as they are too minimal to portray a definite public opinion.

We must also consider what initially inspired these 5 respondents to answer the Questionnaire. It is quite possible that these 5 respondents saw the opportunity when 'browsing' the Isle of Wight Council Website to give the Council some feedback and decided to do so out of good will. It is also possible that these persons were looking for a means of contact on the website and decided that the Questionnaire would be an effective method of conveying their opinions about the way in which the council is run. That is not to say that this is the wrong reason to fill in a Questionnaire, one person's opinion holds as much credit as the next.

It remains though that with out offering some incentive, i.e.: prize draw etc. (which was not offered in this case) it will always be difficult to get a large amount of responses. Generally speaking, only persons who feel that they have something to gain will take the time to fill in the form. For example, if Person A is made aware of the questionnaire on the website, he may not decide to fill it in, it would cost time and effort, and they have nothing to gain. Person B however has had recent affairs with the Council, with which the result was a negative one, once this person has been made aware of the Questionnaire they are more likely to respond to it, as an opportunity to express their distress at the outcome of their recent affair. There is no evidence to support this, as is the nature of the public questionnaire that unfortunately there is little evidence to support anything, but especially with the high volume of 'No Comment' responses it suggests that the respondents logged on to the Questionnaire to make the comments that are listed on the previous page and then filled in the rest of the Questionnaire though they had already made their point.

### **Possible Improvements.**

There are improvements to be made within the Questionnaire itself, firstly, the glaringly obvious one that if a survey of the public is going to be taken, then a large cross section of the population must be used. Whether this is done by offering an incentive (as mentioned earlier on Page 25) or by sending the Questionnaires out with correspondence that the Council would normally send out, or by random address on the Electoral roll remains a separate matter to be decided by convenience, neutrality and legitimacy. The immediate problem with this improvement is of course cost; there is the obvious cost of offering a prize to respondents, and a possibly even greater cost with

sending out the Questionnaires. To receive a decent feedback it would be essential to include pre-paid return envelopes, otherwise, the return could be just as disastrous as this year's effort.

Another improvement that can be made to the Questionnaire is the matter of possible responses, throughout we have seen an often increasing percentage of 'No Comments' that have been made, and leads us to ask why? Firstly, is this due to the fact that the Respondent is unsure how to respond and does not wish to mark a leading response? Secondly, has the Respondent become weary with reading the Questionnaire and simply chosen to ignore a question or two? In response to the first part, the solution to this is that we request the Respondent to tick a box marked 'Don't Know' and ask them to explain why they are unable to answer the question. Secondly the addition of the 'Don't Know' responses benefits the reviewer with the information that the Respondent has read the question.

Some of the non-responses may have been received due to the openness of the question, for example, Question 19; Are Standards issues perceived as jointly owned by Members and Officers generally? Would have been clearer if written like this: Do you perceive standards issues as jointly owned by Members and Officers? Or: Which group of people hold more responsibility over standards issue? Followed by a sliding scale of responses between Members and Officers, with a 'Jointly Owned' option in the middle. Another example of this is Question 24, which as I discussed on Page 21, is also too broad. Question 8, Do you have a good understanding of the processes for the conduct of local authority business? Has also been discussed as not specific enough, the term Local Authority Business contains such a vast variety of activities it may intimidate respondents into making 'No Comment' or choosing the less leading available response, which in the case of this Questionnaire, is 'Not Really'.

## **Conclusion.**

Unfortunately due to the sheer lack of responses from members of the public, little conclusion can be gained from that part of the Questionnaire, so in this conclusion I will mostly be focusing on the results of the internal respondents.

Overall there was a fairly positive response to the Questionnaire from Members and Officers.

Strongly positive responses throughout the Questionnaire and in particular in Questions 9, and 4(a&b) illustrate a successful response to this Questionnaire, not only are the majority of respondents satisfied with the information provided but they are satisfied that they receive all the information that they need relative to their jobs. In opposition to this it is clear from Question 5 that Members and Officers do not have complete knowledge of all documents, however, these documents are not necessarily relevant to the respondents position within the Council, (and not to forget that several of these respondents may have only been employed for a week prior to the Questionnaire being sent out, but due to the anonymous nature of the Questionnaire this is unknown - but possible). As illustrated in the results for Question 9 (Do you receive clear information about the work of the Council which is relevant to you?) where there is a much more positive response and 79% of actual responses were positive ones. Question 4a&b) questions the access to information, and the majority of respondents are happy that the degree of accessibility is satisfactory. So from the results of Questions regarding access to information, it appears that the Council has done/is doing a satisfactory job.

Is the job done to a good ethical standard though? Well, questions 15 and 16 illustrate that Members and Officers agree that the Council's ethical procedures and practices are up-to-date and consistently followed, in Question 15, excluding the non-responses, or 'No Comments' 70% of respondents replied positively that the Council's procedures and practices are up-to-date and clear, this was followed by Question 16 which resulted with the fact that (again excluding non-responses) 76% of respondents are satisfied that the Council consistently follows these procedures. This can also be interpreted as a negative response, that is, if 76% of respondents are satisfied with ethical standards, this tells us that 24%, are not, and positive response or not this certainly leaves plenty of room for improvement.

However, negative responses in Questions 21, 24 suggest not only that there is room for improvement, but also that it is necessary. In Question 21, 66% of respondents suggest that they have not received relevant training as far as ethical conduct is perceived. This is further enforced by Question 24, in which 23% do not feel that the Standards Committee or the Standards Board for England work effectively in dealing with misconduct by members. Though due to extreme numbers of 'No Comments' this actually works out at 41% of responses.

Overall this Questionnaire has given the Council a generally positive response and a strong base to work from. We have seen that the respondents are satisfied with access to information and that they are satisfied they can find help if they need it, but we have also seen that more training needs to be enforced on the subject of standards. Once a degree of training and awareness has been achieved among Officers and Members the measurement of further matters, procedures regarding standards etc, will increase, as more respondents are able to confidently answer the questions. If a person is not fully

informed on a subject then the chances are that the results of the individuals questionnaire are going to appear negative.

This audit has given the Council the opportunity to find out how to best improve itself internally, not just how to make the public perception of the Council better by manner of public relations exercise. It has also given the Council better ability to build on the format of its correspondence with the public, and as a result of which to regulate how Standards within the Council are improving or not in a monitored fashion.