
STANDARDS BOARD FOURTH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report appraises Members of the outcome of the Standards Board Annual Conference.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Fourth Annual Assembly of the Standards Board was held at Birmingham ICC on 5-6 September 2005. The Council's delegates were Independent Members, Mr A C Comber and Mr B M Flynn accompanied by the Head of Legal Services.
- 2.2 The theme of the conference this year was "ethical standards in your hands" and a key message was that local authorities played a crucial role in developing trust and confidence in local democracy and that Standards Committees would need to take greater ownership of the ethical agenda.
- 2.3 The conference included two days of specialised workshops for standards committee members and monitoring officers focusing on the practical application of the Code of Conduct, local investigation and the determination process.

3 DETAILS

- 3.1 Principal speakers at the conference were Phil Woolas MP, Minister for Local Government, Sir Alistair Graham, Chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life and Sir Anthony Holland, chairman of the Standards Board. Other guest speakers at the conference included David Prince, Chief Executive of the Standards Board and Kate Priestly, who chairs the newly-formed Leadership Centre for Local Government.
- 3.2 The Standards Board presented Phil Woolas MP with a series of recommendations for change to the Code of Conduct following its recent review of the Code. The main recommendations were that the Code of Conduct should be simpler, clearer and more positive with the rules governing interests needing revision to recognise the Councillor's role as a community advocate.
- 3.3 The Government has also received recommendations from the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Parliamentary Select Committee of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister which had been scrutinising the performance of the Standards Board. The conclusion of

both these bodies was that the Standards Board should adopt a more strategic role with greater local involvement and local issues being dealt with at a local level. One of the key recommendations was that complaints should be handled and filtered locally by Standards Committees, with the Standards Board handling only the most serious cases.

- 3.4 The Government is still considering its response and a decision on possible revisions to the Code and the changing role of the Standards Board is expected later this year.
- 3.5 During the Conference there was lively discussions about the nature of ethics in local government, information as to the work undertaken by the Board and through a number of workshops more detailed analysis of the provisions of the Code, the regulations relating to local investigations and the adjudication process.
- 3.6 The Standards Board dealt with 3,861 complaints in 2004-05. 24% of these were referred for investigation with 12% dealt with by local determination. It's expected that local referrals will increase as the Standards Board adopt a more strategic role.
- 3.7 The Key Speakers emphasised the Government's committed to maintaining high standards in public life and its belief that a strong ethical framework is essential to ensuring trust and confidence in local democracy.

4 RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES** to note the report and await the Government's response to possible revisions to the Code of Conduct and changes to the ethical framework.

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Background Papers:

None

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