STANDARDS COMMITTEE   **1ST JULY 2004**

STANDARDS – CURRENT ISSUES
(Report by the Democratic Services Manager)

1.   INTRODUCTION

1.1   This report is intended to

- ♦   update the Committee on the current position with regard to the Local Authorities (Code of Conduct) (Local Determinations) (Amendments) Regulations 2003; and
- ♦   confirm attendance at the Third Annual Assembly of Standards Committees.

2.   LOCAL AUTHORITY (CODE OF CONDUCT) (LOCAL DETERMINATIONS) (AMENDMENTS) REGULATIONS 2003

2.1   The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) intends to publish Regulations to enable Monitoring Officers to undertake investigations into allegations of misconduct locally referred to them by Ethical Standards Officers from the Standards Board for England.   When introduced, the arrangements will mean that investigations can be carried out at the level most appropriate to the alleged misconduct and speed up the investigative process overall.

2.2   At their last meeting, the Committee approved responses to specific questions raised by the ODPM and Standards Board in consultation papers on a proposed framework for the local investigation and determination of complaints.   Consultation on both papers ended in May.   Responses received to the guidance and Regulations are currently being assessed and discussions taking place between the ODPM and the Standards Board.   It is the intention that the guidance will be made available once the final Regulations are in place.   There is no indication as yet when the Regulations themselves will be published although the Standards Board have indicated that they will continue to pursue the ODPM to introduce the Regulations as soon as possible.

2.3   The Board consider the introduction of the Regulations to be crucial in their attempt to focus attention on the most serious allegations concerning behaviour that has the potential to damage the reputation of local government.

3.   THIRD ANNUAL ASSEMBLY OF STANDARDS COMMITTEES

3.1   The third Annual Assembly of Standards Committee Conferences is to take place at the International Conference Centre (ICC), Birmingham between 13th and 14th September 2004.   The conference provides an opportunity for Monitoring Officers, Members of Standards Committees and other local government professionals to discuss key issues and on this occasion the conference will address the practical application of the Code of Conduct, its areas of difficulty and how it can be improved and will debate the role of the Code in the wider ethical framework.

3.2   Sir Alistair Graham, newly appointed Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, is to speak at the Conference. His keynote address will be one of his first public commitments since his appointment in May 2004 and will reflect on evidence given to the Committee as part of its current inquiry concerning the operation of the ethical framework and the Committee's role in ensuring high standards of conduct in the public sector.

3.3   Other key speakers confirmed so far include the Rt. Hon. Nick Raynesford MP, Minister for Local Government and the Regions and Sir Brian Briscow Chief Executive for the Local Government Association.

3.4   At their last meeting, the Committee requested that places at the conference be reserved for the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Committee, a representative of the Opposition Group, an Independent Member and a Town and Parish Council representative with a view to confirming attendance following the meeting of the Committee on 1st July 2004.

4.   CONCLUSION

4.1   The Committee is requested to note

- ♦ the current position with regard to the Local Authorities (Code of Conduct) (Local Determinations) (Amendments) Regulations 2003; and
- ♦ confirm the attendance of Members of the Committee at the Third Annual Assembly of Standards Committees Conferences 2004.

Background Papers
Bulletin Number 19 – Standards Board for England
Crack the Code – Flyer detailing the content of the Third Annual Assembly of Standards Committees.

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