

Sir Anthony Holland
Chair

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23 May 2007

To: All Leaders of Councils
c.c. Chief Executives
Monitoring Officers

Dear Leader

My four politically nominated Board members and I are writing to seek your continuing assistance in putting responsibility for upholding high ethical standards firmly where it belongs – at the heart of every local authority's own culture. The recent White Paper stated that the UK has a strong reputation of high standards in public life, and it is important for the future well-being of local government that this is maintained. We firmly believe that the maintenance of high standards is essential to an effective local democracy.

We therefore warmly welcome the recent Parliamentary confirmation of the revised Code of Conduct. As we requested, following our consultation in 2005, this now gives councillors much greater scope to speak up for local residents and local issues. It is clearer, and removes unnecessary restrictions whilst continuing to ensure that there is a firm set of principles underpinning public trust in their local representatives.

Some councils have already adopted the new Code. We urge its early adoption, to achieve the benefits for, and ensure consistent treatment of, councillors nationally.

The new Code is a key step in the switch to a bottom-up approach to the handling of alleged breaches of the Code. Assuming the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill completes its final Parliamentary stages, from April 2008 your own standards committee will receive, filter and, where necessary, investigate most allegations of misconduct. Only where this is not possible, as in the most serious cases, will investigations be referred to the Board. This continues the trend we have already established, with over half of investigated cases being dealt with locally and will allow the Board to increase its efforts in promoting high standards generally supporting those few councils who face difficulties.

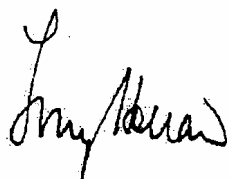
Your standards committee, and its chair, will be the lynch pin to the success of local handling, and to public confidence in it. Our recent research shows that many standards committees have now established mature and constructive relationships in which elected and independent members, of the right calibre and capacity, are genuinely working together to achieve the common goal of achieving a robust local ethical framework. It also shows that the overt support and commitment of Leaders and Elected Mayors is critical to their success. We therefore seek your support in making this the norm in all authorities.

While our research also shows that monitoring officers are generally positive about their changing role, we also ask you to ensure that they are properly supported and resourced in carrying out their new responsibilities. They will need your support in giving the robust and independent advice essential to the confidence of both members and the public in dealing locally with standards issues.

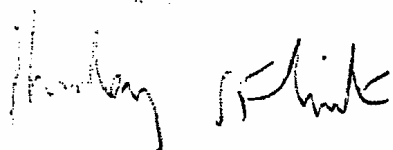
The Board will be working with the Department for Communities and Local Government and all sectors of local government to ensure that the new Code is as clear and workable as possible, and in developing appropriate guidance and training materials to support local authorities in their new responsibilities.

We believe that by making a success of these changing arrangements, councils can reinforce their generally high standing as leaders in standards of conduct, setting an example to the many other bodies with whom they work in partnership. For our part we are more than happy to share our considerable bank of good practice with any council interested in improving its performance in this area. If therefore you want your chief executive or monitoring officer to explore this matter further, we will be happy to respond. Meanwhile, in our own more strategic regulatory role, we will provide, in as light touch a way as possible, the independent monitoring and oversight needed for the public to have confidence that high standards are being maintained nationally.

Yours sincerely



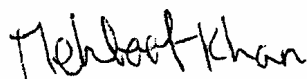
Sir Anthony Holland
Chair




Councillor Mrs Shirley Flint



Councillor Beatrice Fraenkel



Councillor Mehboob Khan



Councillor Sir Ron Watson CBE