

**STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND - LATEST ?  
(Report by the Head of Law, Property and Governance  
and Monitoring Officer)**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Members will recall that the Monitoring Officer reported to the last meeting that the Government had announced its intention to "abolish the Standards Board Regime".
- 1.2 Since then, very little further information has emerged but the suggestion now appears to be that the Decentralisation and Localism Bill, due to be published at the end of October, will provide for the abolition of not just Standards for England, but of the Code of Conduct for Members and of Standards Committees. In July the Monitoring Officer reported that Standards for England (SFE) postponed completion of their quarterly monitoring return for the April to June quarter. This was because SFE were reviewing their activities and updating their business plan in light of the Government's announcement.

**2. MINOR DEVELOPMENTS SINCE JULY**

- 2.1 The SFE have now completed their internal review and concluded that monitoring reviews are no longer part of their business plan activities. This means that there will be no further requests for the submission of quarterly or annual returns, nor do they anticipate re-establishing these procedures, unless a specific monitoring need arises in which SFE have to play a part.
- 2.2 The online questionnaires have been removed from their website and are now inaccessible although the information submitted by local authorities is available on request. SFE will be publishing an online report of the annual return information collected for 2009/2010. This would include an introduction to the data, a key figures page, a summary of the findings and a full list of the most common responses to each question.
- 2.3 As SFE have conveyed their thanks to Monitoring Officers for their co-operation with returns since their inception, the inference is that this practice will not be re-instated.

**3. COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE**

- 3.1 For information the Committee might be interested to read an extract from the annual review and report 2009/2010 published by the Committee on Standards in Public Life on the Local Government Standards Framework.

"The Committee last looked in depth at the standards framework for local government five years ago. Significant changes to the standards framework in England have recently been announced by the new Government, including a commitment to abolish Standards for England. We await details of the proposed changes.

A local standards framework is vital to maintaining confidence in the integrity of local politicians. Where it is working well, it ensures that local councillors understand the standards of behaviour which are expected of them and that there are robust mechanisms in place to deter and deal with this misconduct. The evidence from our reviews over the past fifteen years indicates that this is best achieved through local ownership within a framework that ensures consistency of standards and proper enforcement. Whilst the precise shape and structure of the framework may change over time, and could vary in the different parts of the UK, we believe that the necessary components of the framework continue to be:-

- ◆ a clear code of conduct which specifies what behaviour is acceptable and what is not;
- ◆ an independent mechanism for dealing with the most serious breaches under the code;
- ◆ some over-arching mechanism to ensure that the regime is effective and consistent in upholding standards."

#### **4. FURTHER UPDATE FROM MONITORING OFFICER**

- 4.1 Should any further announcements be made subsequent to the publication of the Agenda, the Monitoring Officer will update the Committee.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 The Committee is requested to note the report.

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Letter received from SFE dated 16th August 2010.  
Extract from the annual review and report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life 2009/2010.

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