

Local government standards

16. The Localism Act received Royal Assent in January 2012. The legislation abolished Standards for England, the body charged with the oversight of the local authority standards regime, with effect from 31 March 2012.
17. The Committee welcomed the Act's objectives of returning to a standards regime operated at a local level and recognised the importance of limiting vexatious complaints. But we were concerned that the original bill went too far in dismantling some of the other elements in the previous regime. We were pleased therefore that amendments were made in the House of Lords to maintain a mandatory requirement for each Local Authority to have a code of conduct based on the Nolan Principles and to retain some provision to investigate non-adherence to the code.
18. We remain concerned, however, about what we regard as inadequate sanctions in the new arrangements for non-adherence to local authorities' new codes. We believe that it is insufficient to leave any instances of poor conduct to be dealt with only through the criminal law or through the discipline of the ballot box. In our view there have been numerous examples of types of behaviour for which a criminal prosecution would not be appropriate, or easy to undertake, but which most people would think fall short of the standards expected of public office holders and deserving of some sort of sanction.
19. We believe that there is a significant risk under the new arrangements that inappropriate conduct by local authority members will not be dealt with effectively, eroding public confidence in local government at a time when the scope of local decision-making in planning and other matters is being increased. We will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Civil service and public appointments

20. The Commissioner for Public Appointments, Sir David Normington, issued a consultation paper on proposals for amending the public appointments system with a view to making it more proportionate, principled and risk-based in June 2011. The existing regulatory system dated back to 1995 when it was established as a response to recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in our first report.
21. The consultation paper suggested that good progress had been made over 15 years in establishing that ministerial appointments to public office should be on merit after a fair and open process and that clear processes were in place to guard against cronyism and political patronage. But it also