

**STANDARDS WATCHDOG TO REVIEW
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REGIME IN 2014/15
(Extract from Local Government Lawyer-19 April 2013)**

The Committee for Standards in Public Life has said it expects – barring any unforeseen developments – to undertake an assessment of the state of local government standards in 2014/15.

In its *Annual Plan for 2013/14*, the Committee said that in the meantime it would continue to monitor the implementation of the new local government standards regime.

This will be through analysis both of media reporting and issues of principle brought directly to the Committee's attention by members of local councils and the public.

The Watchdog revealed that in the course of 2013/14 it would also be monitoring to see if there was any evidence of the impact of austerity on support for maintaining high ethical standards.

In its *Standards Matter* report, *published in January this year*, the Committee said it had placed the post-Localism Act local government standards regime on a 'watching brief', saying that the lack of available sanctions and independent scrutiny risked damaging public confidence in the probity of local government.

The *Annual Plan for 2013/14* reveals that the Committee meanwhile plans a series of seminars "which may or may not lead to full scale inquiries".

These include events on new methods of delivering public services. The first seminar – organised in collaboration with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners – is expected to provide an opportunity for the Committee to work with recently elected PCCs to discuss ways of managing, in a proportionate way, the common ethical risks and issues which they may face in fulfilling their new roles.

Further seminars in the series will address the ethical issues affecting new forms of educational provision (including academies and free schools) and clinical commissioning groups, potentially in collaboration with regulators and others in the education and health sectors.

"We envisage that the outputs of these seminars may feed into a broader inquiry into new methods of public service delivery and intend to also carry out some in-depth fact-finding research which would support such an inquiry," the Committee said.

Another seminar will review the progress to date with Government proposals to improve the transparency of the lobbying process and the ethical standards of lobbyists. This will focus on lobbying from the point of view of the lobbied rather than lobbyists, the Committee said.

In addition to monitoring the impact of austerity, the Committee said it would continue to look at the following issues in 2013/14:

- ◆ progress towards resolution of the issues surrounding political party funding addressed in its 13th report;
- ◆ interchange between the public and private sectors;
- ◆ the behaviour and conduct of the police;
- ◆ electoral arrangements, including the conclusions of the Electoral Commission's review of vulnerabilities to electoral fraud, expected in autumn 2013;
- ◆ the role of the media in the public sector's promotion and maintenance of standards, including the aftermath of the Leveson Inquiry; and
- ◆ whistleblowing, in light of the findings of the Francis report into Mid Staffs and subsequent developments.

The Annual Plan revealed that the Committee's budget – which is provided by the Cabinet Office – had fallen from £504k in 2012-13 to £400k in 2013-14.

The size of its secretariat has also reduced from six in 2007 to three in 2013.

"Our reduced resources will necessarily affect the ways in which we are able to fulfil our terms of reference," the Committee said.

"We will need to prioritise the ethical risks we identify carefully and focus our work accordingly. At the same time we believe that the current economic circumstances may be creating additional and enhanced ethical risks which fall within our remit to monitor and address."