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## Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance)

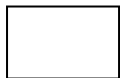
### Standards Committee

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> December 2008

Subject: Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees: 'Delivering the Goods: Local Standards in Action'

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#### Electoral Wards Affected:



Ward Members consulted  
(referred to in report)

#### Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

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### Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the Committee of the Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees which took place on 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> October 2008 at the International Convention Centre (ICC) in Birmingham.
2. The main points of interest at the Annual Assembly were the standards framework (including the new local assessment arrangements), and improving the effectiveness of standards committees.
3. Members of the Committee are asked to note the contents of this report and the attached newsletters.

## **1.0 Purpose Of This Report**

- 1.1 To advise Members of the Committee of the Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees which took place on 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> October 2008 at the International Convention Centre (ICC) in Birmingham.

## **2.0 Background Information**

- 2.1 The theme of this year's conference was 'Delivering the Goods: Local Standards in Action'. The Chair of the Standards Board for England (SBE), Dr Robert Chilton said that he believes that local authorities have made good progress in adopting the new local framework.
- 2.2 Three editions of 'The Standard' newsletter have been published since the conference took place, and are attached at Appendix A for information. Members will note the range of speakers included the Chair and Chief Executive of SBE; Sadiq Khan MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government; Sir Christopher Kelly, Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life; Dr Michael Macaulay, Reader in Governance and Public Ethics at the University of Teesside; and Alison Kelly, Strategy Advisor, Governance and Accountability at the Audit Commission.
- 2.3 The Assembly was attended by Mike Wilkinson on behalf of the Committee and by Nicolé Jackson, Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance) and Monitoring Officer.

## **3.0 Main Issues**

- 3.1 The main points of interest at the Annual Assembly were the standards framework (including the new local assessment arrangements), and improving the effectiveness of standards committees.

### The standards framework

- 3.2 At the opening plenary, the Standards Board reported on what local delivery has meant in practice, and provided delegates with the latest information and feedback on the standards framework. Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive, SBE spoke about alternative action to investigation (such as mentoring, mediation and guidance), describing it as an important tool, but one which needs to be used wisely. She also revealed that more than 1,000 cases had been reported since May 2008, with 54% of complaints being made by members of the public, 36% by Members, and 10% by other sources, for example council officers or parish/town clerks.
- 3.3 Glenys Stacey chaired a session entitled 'Making an Impact?' which considered the impact of the standards framework, whether it has a positive impact on member behaviour, and whether high standards contribute to public confidence in local government. Sir Christopher Kelly discussed the difference the standards framework has made, the importance of high standards in public life and the challenge of influencing the public's perception of Members. Dr Richard Cowell, from the University of Cardiff, used the results of research undertaken to assess the impact of standards arrangements on local government (in which Leeds City Council is participating), and highlighted the impact on Members' behaviour and the positive and negative impacts of standards arrangements. Finally, Ben Page of Ipsos MORI

discussed the main factors impacting on public trust in politicians and confidence in local democracy.

- 3.4 Several workshops were also held regarding the local assessment process, informing delegates of the key steps involved, as well as how to deliver and manage local investigations. Delegates were also shown a DVD regarding the local assessment process, which is available for Committee members to view (please contact the Committee clerk for further details).

#### Improving the effectiveness of standards committees

- 3.5 Dr Robert Chilton chaired a session looking at what makes a standards committee effective, what knowledge and resources are available to help local authorities improve the performance of their committee, and whether effective standards committees can contribute to the good governance of local authorities. Dr Michael Macaulay reported that an effective standards committee should have sustainable leadership, a broad remit and acceptance within the authority. Alison Kelly discussed the results of the Audit Commission Self Assessment Ethical Governance Survey, and suggested some 'next steps' for Councils, including ensuring that the work of the Standards Committee is included in the Council's Annual Governance Statement.

#### Closing session

- 3.6 In the closing session, Glenys Stacey spoke of the need to collate examples of best practice and publicise them, and for more information on alternative action, including looking at the guidance that the Standards Board provides. The need for delegates to communicate their work and anxiety around the issue of confidentiality were two themes which ran through the conference, and which the Standards Board would be considering further as part of its work programme.

### **4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance**

- 4.1 The Annual Assembly provides an opportunity for Members of standards committees to discuss their experiences and exchange examples of good practice. The Assembly also provides training on a range of standards issues.
- 4.2 The theme of this year's conference also summarised that standards and ethics, and the system that gives those ideals substance and structure, are vitally important to the future of our local democracy.

### **5.0 Legal And Resource Implications**

- 5.1 There are no legal or resource implications.

### **6.0 Conclusions**

- 6.1 The main points of interest at the Annual Assembly were the standards framework (including the new local assessment arrangements), and improving the effectiveness of standards committees.
- 6.2 The Chair of the Committee is invited to feedback to the Committee on the Annual Assembly.

## **7.0 Recommendations**

7.1 Members of the Committee are asked to note the contents of this report and the attached newsletters.

## **8.0 Background Documents**

8.1 All background documents used are available from the Annual Assembly website (<http://www.annualassembly.co.uk>).