



The

Standard

the Standards Board for England

Conference newsletter | Monday 13 October 2008 | Issue one | www.annualassembly.co.uk

Welcome to Delivering the Goods

We would like to welcome you to **Delivering the Goods: Local Standards in Action, the Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees.**

This year's Assembly is the most popular we have ever run. As always, we aim to provide you with as much practical support, guidance and information as possible. This is why a great deal of the conference is focused on helping you and your authority to deliver the local standards framework effectively.

The demand for the Assembly also reflects the increasing



importance of the standards agenda to local government. It is clear that high ethical standards are key to building public confidence in local democracy. Our main plenaries will report on the progress of the new framework in delivering this. They will additionally provide expert advice on best practice for standards committees.

Of course, the conference also provides plenty of opportunities for valuable networking, and sharing of experiences and solutions with other local

practitioners. We hope you'll find these opportunities useful.

As the newly appointed Chair of the Standards Board, this is a timely chance for me to meet with you, and I look forward to talking to you over the course of the next two days.

I wish you a successful and productive conference.

Dr Robert Chilton
Chair
The Standards Board for England

Agenda: Monday

08.30 – 10.00	Registration
09.15 – 10.00	Getting up to speed
10.15 – 11.15	Opening plenary: Hall 1
11.15 – 11.30	Comfort break
11.30 – 13.00	Breakout sessions
13.00 – 14.15	Lunch: Hall 3
14.15 – 15.30	Making an impact?: Hall 1
15.30 – 16.00	Refreshments: Hall 3
16.00 – 17.30	Breakout sessions
17.30	Close of day one
18.00 – 19.00	Fringe events (optional)
19.30 – 20.00	Drinks reception
20.00 – late	Conference dinner



Local standards: Making an impact?

Earlier this year, the new standards arrangements for local government were introduced.

This means local ownership of standards frameworks and greater responsibilities for standards committees, including receiving and assessing complaints about elected and co-opted members.

But what impact does the standards framework really have? Can it make a positive impact on member behaviour? And do high standards contribute to public confidence in local government?

Key opinion formers will address these issues in **Making an impact?** today at 14.15.

Speakers, including Sir Christopher Kelly, Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, will discuss whether the standards framework has made a difference, 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, will draw on the results of research designed to assess the impact of standards arrangements on

local government. He will use this to highlight the impact on members' behaviour and the positive and negative impacts of standards arrangements.

And Ben Page from Ipsos MORI will discuss the main factors impacting on public trust in politicians and confidence in local democracy.

Delegates will be able to participate by sharing their experiences in a Q&A session. Presentation materials from this and other Assembly sessions will shortly be available on our website at www.annualassembly.co.uk

Did you know...?

Research from Ipsos MORI reveals the following about the public's perception of local government:

Nearly half (44%) of adults say they don't know very much about their local council.

About 80% of adults cannot name the elected leader of their local council.

Councils rated excellent by the Audit Commission are generally better at communicating with their residents than other councils.

The number of adults who think councillors generally do a good job (38%) exceeds those who think they are not performing well.

A higher level

What makes a standards committee effective?
Hall 1, Tuesday 14 October, 11.00-12.15.

*Don't forget! Please complete your feedback form and register your email address at the Enquiries Desk to receive the third issue of this newsletter. *

Key to lanyard colours

The colour of delegates' lanyards (neck cords) can be used to identify their position or profession.

Please wear your badge at all times.

WHITE	Monitoring officers
YELLOW	Independent members
DARK GREEN	Standards committee members
ORANGE	Chief executives
BLACK	Council leaders
RED	Speakers
PURPLE	Conference steering committee members
JADE GREEN	The Standards Board for England Board Members
BLUE	Others (delegates who don't fit into any of the categories above)

CPD accreditation

Solicitors attending the Annual Assembly of Standards Committees can earn credit towards their continuing professional development (CPD), as the conference is certified to count towards the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) CPD scheme. This year the amount of credit available at the conference totals 10 hours. Please remember to update your personal training record. Our SRA CPD reference number is: **CYA/SBFE**.

Read all about it!

The *Case Review 2007* provided a paragraph-by-paragraph analysis of the revised Code of Conduct. The *Case Review: 2008 Digest*, provides new information and cases and is a useful accompaniment to the *Case Review 2007*. The digest is available from our website, www.standardsboard.gov.uk.

Fringe events

A range of optional fringe events are taking place this evening. These will provide you with a good opportunity to hear about issues currently affecting local government.

All events take place from 18.00 to 19.00.

Hall 8b: Delivering the goods – the leadership and skills of the independent chair

The Association of Independent Members of Standards Committees in England (AIMSce) will hold a Q&A session on the role and attributes of effective independent chairs of standards committees.

Hall 10a: Changes to the Local Government Ombudsman's service: Are you up-to-date?

Tony Redmond will provide an update on significant changes to the Local Government Ombudsman's (LGO) service over the last year.

Hall 10b: Partnership and Governance – the role of local standards committees

An overview of the work the Improvement and Development Agency for local government (IDeA) is undertaking with cross sector partnerships to assess the culture, values, behaviour and relationships that make partnership working more sustainable and effective. There is also an opportunity to discover how robust assessment can contribute to comprehensive area assessments (CAA).

Hall 11b: Question time with a twist

The Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors (ACSeS) will be holding an open forum for participants to talk about their first experiences of local assessment.

Question time

If you have any questions you would like to ask the Standards Board, then please attend one of our Q&A sessions. There are four in total: one for new standards committee members, one for more experienced members, one for monitoring officers, and one session open to all delegates. You can also drop completed question sheets in the conference postboxes.

Steering committee 2008

We would like to thank all the members of the 2008 Annual Assembly's steering committee for the work they have done in helping to stage this event.

If you would like to volunteer to be a committee member for next year's Assembly, please complete the application form enclosed in your delegate pack and submit it at the conference enquiry desk.

Mr Hiralal Banerjee
Independent Chair of Standards Committee
Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames

Cllr Donald Beckett (Lab)
Member of Standards Committee
Vale Royal Borough Council

Mr Steve Boast
Independent Chair of Standards Committee
Peterborough Unitary Authority

Miss Joy Bowes
Head of Legal and Democratic Services
St Edmundsbury Borough Council

Mrs Pam Essler
Independent Chair of Standards Committee
Bradford Metropolitan District Council

Cllr Shirley Flint
Independent Member
North Kesteven District Council

Board Member
Standards Board for England

Mr Anisul Ghanti
Independent Member of Standards Committee
Gloucestershire Police Authority

Mr Atiq Hassan
Independent Member of Standards Committee
Yorkshire Dales National Park

Mrs Maria E Lucas
Head of Legal and Democratic Services
North Tyneside Council

Mrs Anne C Mayes MBE
Independent Chair of Standards Committee
Devon and Cornwall Police Authority

Cllr Liza McKinney
Independent Member
Adur District Council

Cllr Sue Swift
Independent Member and Vice Chair of Standards and Ethics Committee
Kerrier District Council

Mr Mike Wilkinson
Independent Chair of Standards Committee
Leeds City Council

Independent Chair of Standards Committee
West Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Authority

Reduce, reuse, recycle ...



Please put any of your unwanted papers in the recycle bins situated around the conference centre. Thank you.

The Standards Board for England
Fourth Floor, Griffin House
40 Lever Street
Manchester M1 1BB

Enquiries: 0845 078 8181

Minicom: 0161 817 5449 **Fax:** 0161 817 5499

Email: annualassembly2008@standardsboard.gov.uk

Web: www.standardsboard.gov.uk

Conference dinner

Tonight, Hall 3. Drinks reception at 19.30, dinner starts at 20.00.





The

Standard



the
Standards Board
for England

Conference newsletter | Tuesday 14 October 2008 | Issue two | www.annualassembly.co.uk

Devolved framework a success, says MP

Sadiq Khan MP spoke yesterday of the importance of the conduct regime to local democracy.

Speaking on his eighth day as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at Communities and Local Government, Mr Khan said the devolution of the conduct regime has been a success.

He added that those involved have delivered the goods so far and

thanked delegates for their hard work.

The minister said that the public should have trust in their elected representatives and talked of the probity, accountability and objectivity expected of members.

He continued that the last 12 months have been among the most important since the conduct regime was established in 2001.

Mr Khan commented on the success of the revised Code of Conduct, which is clearer, simpler and more proportionate. He said it has bedded in well, but that it is now time to make revisions. Consultation on proposed amendments has now begun and comments are being invited before the closing date of 24 December.

The minister concluded by emphasising that the Standards Board is there to support local authorities

and that they should make the most of the organisation as a resource.



Sadiq Khan MP

Good progress under new framework

Dr Robert Chilton, recently appointed Chair of the Standards Board, believes that local authorities have made good progress in adopting the new local framework.



Dr Robert Chilton

Addressing delegates in yesterday's opening session, Dr Chilton said he is keen to hear from authorities themselves about their experience.

He spoke of a number of important issues that have already been competing for his attention. These include the relationship between local government and national politics. He also shared the Standards Board's experience of this year's party conferences.

In addition, the attention demanded by individual cases was discussed,

and he mentioned the issue of alternative action.

Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive of the Standards Board, also talked about alternative action in her opening speech, as one of a number of hot topics. She described it as an important tool, but one that needs to be used wisely.

Glenys revealed some of the latest figures for the second quarter of monitoring returns. These included more than 1,000 cases being reported so far. About half (54%) of complaints have been

made by members of the public. The final statistics will be on the Standards Board's website in November.

She referred to the Standards Board's corporate plan for 2009-11, which will reflect the organisation becoming an established strategic regulator. This will mean a continuing emphasis on guidance and support, and also developing proportionate ways of working with the authorities that are finding it difficult to maintain standards.

Closing governance gaps

The importance of ensuring local authorities employ good corporate governance arrangements within their committee structures will be discussed in a mini plenary this morning.

Joining the dots at 09.30 will allow delegates to examine case studies highlighting the

challenges faced by local authority standards, audit and overview and scrutiny committees.

The session will show how standards, audit, and overview and scrutiny committees together form an important part of governance arrangements within local authorities. It will explore their roles and responsibilities and will

outline common features and differences between the committees. The session will also show how the committees can work together to ensure that good governance is achieved.

Case studies will highlight the innovative ways that committees can work with

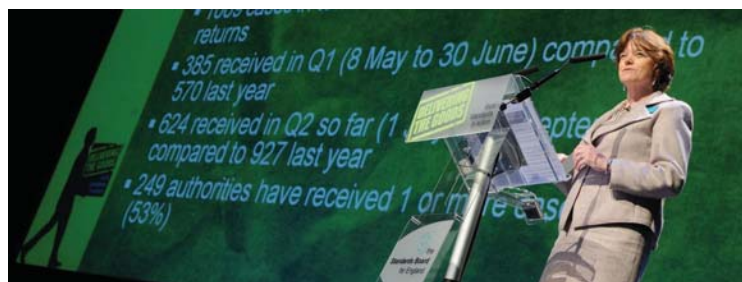
each other to ensure they close potential 'governance gaps'.

These include the example of Newport, where a review of its scrutiny arrangements led to them being relocated to a "Law & Standards" division.

Session information such as handouts and presentation slides will be available at www.annualassembly.co.uk.

Standards and Ethics

The Standards Board is supporting the 'Standards and Ethics' award at this year's Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards. Please visit www.lgcawards.co.uk for more details.



Please put any of your unwanted papers in the recycle bins situated around the conference centre. Thank you.

Agenda: Tuesday

08.00 – 09.00 Refreshments

09.00 – 10.30 Breakout sessions

10.30 – 11.00 Refreshments

11.00 – 12.15 A higher level

12.15 – 13.30 Lunch

13.30 – 15.00 Breakout sessions

15.00 – 15.15 Comfort break

15.15 – 15.30 Delivering the goods

15.30 – 15.45 Local standards in action

15.45 – 16.15 Networking

16.15 Close of conference

Eighth Annual Assembly

We will send all booking information to delegates attending this year's conference for next year's Annual Assembly as soon as it becomes available.

The Eighth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees will be again held at the ICC in Birmingham from 12-13 October 2009. We hope to see you again.

The Standards Board for England
Fourth Floor, Griffin House
40 Lever Street
Manchester M1 1BB

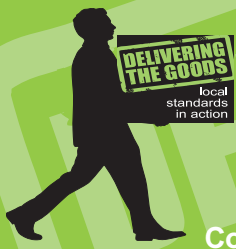
Enquiries: 0845 078 8181

Minicom: 0161 817 5449 **Fax:** 0161 817 5499

Email: annualassembly2008@standardsboard.gov.uk

Web: www.standardsboard.gov.uk

See you again We hope you enjoyed the conference and look forward to seeing you at the 2009 Annual Assembly.



The

Standard



Conference newsletter | Friday 24 October 2008 | Issue three | www.annualassembly.co.uk

Road ahead for standards framework



This year's closing plenary looked back at the key issues that had been discussed over the conference and outlined the next steps for those involved with the strategic framework.

Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive of the Standards Board, returned to the list of hot topics that she had discussed in her opening session and what should now be done with each. She spoke of the need to gather together examples of best practice and publicise them. She also responded to calls for

more information on alternative action and its pitfalls, and to look at the guidance that the Standards Board provides.

Glenys observed that the need for delegates to communicate their work was a theme that ran through the conference. She also mentioned anxiety around the issue of confidentiality. She said the Standards Board would be looking at its work programme in the light of these views.

At the same time, however, she would be aware of the line to be drawn between the role

of the Standards Board and delegates' own responsibilities and discretion, which lie at the heart of the locally based system.

She also reminded delegates to consider the consultation on revisions to the Code of Conduct and the officers' code.

Dr Robert Chilton, Chair of the Standards Board, said the Assembly had confirmed to him that those involved in the standards framework are doing an outstanding job. Dr Chilton said he felt the challenges facing standards committees fell into two categories –

some were problems requiring a fix, for example like further guidance. Others were dilemmas, like how to change ingrained attitudes, which required a longer term strategy. In both cases, the Standards Board would be doing its best to help.

Dr Chilton concluded by outlining his personal commitment, and those of his colleagues, to the job ahead. He said standards and ethics, and the system that gives those ideals substance and structure, are vitally important to the future of our local democracy.



Fringe sessions

Several optional fringe events were held at this year's Annual Assembly.

The Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors (ACSeS) presented **Question Time with a Twist**. This was an informal forum that allowed delegates to discuss all they had learnt over the past few months. A mixed panel consisting of those involved with the

standards framework considered the progress made since local assessment.

The panel said that the new framework allows the Standards Board to focus on significant cases, that local decision-making represents local involvement, and that some monitoring officers have received fewer complaints.

Areas to consider included a perceived lack of consistency, a demand for more flexibility in the regulations and a potential lack of resources among those responsible for parish councils.

The Association of Independent Members of Standards Committees in England (AIMSce) led a session entitled **Delivering the goods: the leadership and skills of the independent chair**. The session covered the skills necessary to lead an effective standards committee.

These included being able to set priorities within the wider plans of the council and how to achieve your goals. There was also a section on recruitment and the need to replace the skills of a departing chair. A general Q&A session followed the presentation with many

independent members sharing good practice examples from their own standards committee.

The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) held **Partnership and Governance – the role of local standards committees**. This session gave an overview of the work the IDeA is undertaking with cross-sector partnerships to assess the culture, values, behaviour and relationships that make partnership working more sustainable and effective.

And the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) presented the session **'Changes to the Local Government Ombudsman's service: Are you up to date?'**. This allowed delegates to discuss changes to the new framework and to put questions to the ombudsman.



Download our conference material

Material from this year's conference is now on our dedicated Annual Assembly website. You can find handouts and presentations under 'Session materials' in the Programme section of:

www.annualassembly.co.uk

'Start spreading the news ...'

Many local authorities show a strong commitment to ethical standards and raising confidence in local democracy. However, fewer actually promote this commitment and show the good work they are doing.

The **Communicating with communities** session encouraged delegates to think of ways to promote their commitment to ethical standards and to engage with officers,

members, the public and the media.

Ben Dudley from the Local Government Association (LGA) spoke of the difficulties in achieving positive media coverage and in communicating quickly and proactively with the public directly and through the press. He cited research suggesting that authorities with more effective and well-developed communications departments

consistently get higher satisfaction rates.

Delegates suggested several methods of communicating the work of standards committees. These included using authorities' websites, producing newsletters, using local newspapers and publishing case studies.

Richard Scott, Head of Communications at the

Standards Board discussed the various methods proposed and highlighted that the media poses the biggest reputational risk to a local authority.

He urged authorities to develop media policies and pointed delegates to a toolkit the Standards Board has produced, which is aimed at local authority press officers.

The press toolkit is available by emailing publications@standardsboard.gov.uk.

Online monitoring system reviewed

In August we conducted a review of the Standards Board's online monitoring system.

We carried out telephone interviews with a sample of monitoring officers and those nominated by monitoring officers to make online returns.

The majority of comments received were positive and the simplicity of the form was valued, with the majority experiencing minimal or no difficulty in making their submission. This was confirmed by 98% of

authorities submitting their return on time.

A large majority (83%) of monitoring officers/nominated staff interviewed said that the system is working effectively. We asked interviewees if they had contacted the Standards Board for assistance with the completion of the online form.

A small number of those interviewed (25%) had contacted the Standards Board for help. We invited those that had made contact to rate the response received in terms of speed, politeness and

helpfulness. All respondents rated the response for all categories as very good.

Respondents were also asked how the Standards Board can improve the support we provide. We received some useful suggestions. These included having a confirmation receipt upon completion of the submission and receiving a reminder when the submission is due.

We were also interested in finding out about any technical issues that you may have experienced and were glad to hear that there were only minor technical problems, such as forgetting passwords.

Improvements have already been made to the system and we will continue to review it. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all who participated in the review.

If you have any questions about this review or future reviews of the system please contact: Cara Afzal, Deputy Research and Monitoring Manager
email: cara.afzal@standardsboard.gov.uk

Your thoughts

Thank you for your feedback about this year's conference. We'll be analysing all your feedback comments in detail to help us plan future work, including next year's assembly.

“ Overall a most enjoyable assembly. My thanks to all involved in delivering the programme... I particularly enjoyed the sessions when we were encouraged to get involved eg Mediation in Action. ”

“ I think some specific examples of good practice would help. ”

“ The increased time of breakout sessions is much better. ”

“ Learnt a great deal - know what I want to go forward. ”

“ More specific guidance would be better, how legal arguments are formulated and how conclusions are reached. ”



Conference in pictures



Contact

The Standards Board for England
Fourth Floor, Griffin House
40 Lever Street
Manchester M1 1BB

Enquiries: 0845 078 8181

Minicom: 0161 817 5449

Fax: 0161 817 5499

Email: annualassembly2008@standardsboard.gov.uk

Web: www.standardsboard.gov.uk