

Building the framework together

At the close of last year's conference, we listed a number of areas that raised concerns among those involved with the local standards framework – issues that we have identified as 'hot topics'.

Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive of Standards for England, talked through these topics in yesterday's opening plenary and discussed the measures we have taken to address your concerns.

Here's a summary of her responses:

Best practice – We have been developing our approach to best practice throughout the year. Our annual returns have helped us identify 'notable practice', which features throughout our current Annual Review and on our new website (see below). We also sponsor the Standards and Ethics category at the Local Government Chronicle Awards, details of which are in the article overleaf.

Communications – Many were keen for ideas on how best to put across the good work of standards committees. We have



Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive Standards for England

been working to identify ways of promoting best practice and attended a local government communications officers' conference in May to spread our views.

Other action – You asked for information on how to get the best out of other action and when you should use it. We have continued to offer advice on this over the past year, and in May we published specific guidance on it, which is available on our website.

Parishes – We have talked to authorities about practical

ways of dealing with difficult parishes, in particular those that are serial complainants and that have a high volume of tit-for-tat complaints. We have worked with representative organisations in the parish sector to improve relations between standards committees and parishes in general. We have also tried a different way of working with parishes – whole parish mentoring – the initial results of which look promising.

Standards in local partnerships – We said that we were going to look at standards in local partnerships and identify any risks across all councils. We believe that there is a role for standards committees in taking a look at partnerships. A typical challenge is good governance arrangements. Advice is available on this and it is a topic of one of the sessions at this year's assembly.

Training – We have produced a new DVD on local assessment, copies of which are currently being distributed (see article overleaf).

AGENDA: Day two

08.00 – 09.00	Registration for 1-day delegates
08.15 – 09.00	Drop in sessions
09.15 – 10.30	Breakout sessions
10.30 – 11.00	Networking and refreshments
11.15 – 12.15	On the brink: Coming back from ethical collapse
12.15 – 13.00	Drop-in sessions
12.15 – 13.15	Lunch
13.30 – 15.00	Breakout sessions
15.00 – 15.15	Comfort break
15.15 – 16.45	Breakout sessions
16.45 – 17.15	Networking and refreshments
17.15	Close of conference

New website features Standards Forum

- Would you like to discuss your experiences of the local standards framework?
- Would you like to network with other monitoring officers and standards committee members?
- Are you looking for a way to help recruit independent members?

Our newly-launched Standards Forum is an online resource that allows those involved with the local standards framework to share experiences and ideas.

We emailed monitoring officers their login details last week and have asked them to send us details of standards committee

members who would like to join. To find out more about joining the forum, please visit the Standards Forum page on our website, or email forum@standardsforengland.gov.uk.

The forum is part of our new website, which has recently been redesigned to better reflect our new role and identity. We hope you find the new menu and design clearer and easier to use. As well as the forum, you can find a useful resource library containing training materials and presentations and speeches from previous Annual Assemblies, and



a Notable Practice section which gives examples of activities undertaken by a variety of standards committees.

We welcome your feedback on our new website – please follow the links on the site or email website-enquiries@standardsforengland.gov.uk to send us your thoughts.

Back from the brink

Ethical collapse can have serious consequences on an authority or organisation no matter what the size. It can affect an organisation's reputation, performance, legitimacy and credibility as well as impact on its recruitment and retention of staff.

This morning's plenary *On the brink: Coming back from ethical collapse* looks at the experiences of authorities who have managed to return from the brink of ethical collapse. We examine the cases of two local authorities, which both managed to reverse their fortunes through testing times.

Professor Alan Lawton of the University of Hull will show how high standards played a role in getting the authorities back on track. He will explore the strategies used and show how they can be applied in future cases.

On the brink: Coming back from ethical collapse is open to all delegates and will be in Hall 1 today at 11am.

Annual Review 2008-09 now published

Our *Annual Review 2008-09* is now published. Copies were sent out to authorities at the end of last week and an electronic version is available on our website. The main conclusions drawn in the review were mentioned by Glenys Stacey in yesterday's opening plenary. Here's an additional glance at some figures revealed in the document:

Key figures from the Annual Review

- 2,863 complaints were received by local authorities
- standards committees took an average of 20 working days to make initial assessment decisions about complaints
- from 8 May 2007 to 31 March 2009, Standards for England received 177 referrals from standards committees. We accepted 123 of these for investigation
- 74% of our stakeholders agree that the local standards framework is now successfully bedded in¹
- 94% of our stakeholders support the need for members to sign up to the Code of Conduct¹

This year's annual review differs to previous editions as it is split into two sections. The first is our view of what is happening among our regulated community, which has been guided by information from our monitoring and research. It includes figures from local investigations, information on standards committees and how local authorities have been promoting the new complaints system. Examples of notable practice gathered from our annual survey appear throughout this first section. These take the form of interesting examples collected



from our annual survey and of longer case studies of particular authorities, whose overall approach highlighted a number of areas of notable practice.

The second section deals with what we have done at Standards for England to position ourselves in our new role as a strategic regulator. We discuss the wider standards environment, including any particular challenges and concerns associated with running the local standards framework. We look over how we have been supporting and guiding authorities throughout the last year, our approach to risk, and we review our investigations role which includes summaries of notable cases we have investigated.

We have sent copies by post to monitoring officers, for them and their standards committee chairs. Further copies are available from our conference information stand or you can visit www.standardsforengland.gov.uk to download the pdf.

¹BMG Research: Stakeholder Tracker 2009 (Satisfaction with the Standards Board for England and attitudes to the ethical environment).

Lights, camera, local assessment!

Standards for England's latest training DVD is being sent out to monitoring officers and county association secretaries today.

The DVD is aimed at standards committee members and local authority officers involved in the assessment of complaints. It features dramatised case studies that will guide you through the four main stages of the local assessment process – pre-assessment, assessment, decision and review.

Dramatised case studies will demonstrate the criteria used

to guide each decision – such as if an investigation should be conducted locally or referred to Standards for England. You can pause the DVD after each case to discuss it or to think about what you would do if you were the standards committee assessing the case.

If you are a standards committee member that would like to use the DVD, then please contact your monitoring officer. Additional copies cost £12.50 and are available by contacting us on 0161 817 5000 or by emailing publications@standardsforengland.gov.uk.

Spreading the word

A new award recognises authorities that are best demonstrating how their work in ethical standards is contributing to public trust in local democracy.

The Standards and Ethics Award category was newly introduced at the Local Government Chronicle Awards last year. Sponsored by Standards for England, the award is given to the authority judged to be among the most ethical in the country. To win, authorities must demonstrate how work on ethical standards has made a difference to the perception of local democracy and public trust in their areas.

Rossendale Borough Council was the first recipient of the award – and we were impressed by how the council's standards agenda made a real difference. Rossendale had a strong, visible standards campaign, headed

by the strapline 'Serious About Standards'. This campaign helped Rossendale substantially improve its corporate assessment rating, saw resident satisfaction rise by 8% and led to an increased turnout at local elections.

Yesterday, communications professionals including Nick Molyneux, Communications Manager at Rossendale Borough Council, discussed ways of promoting standards in a workshop session. Best practice ideas, and ways of working with your authority's communications team to promote standards were among the topics discussed.

Your authority still has time to enter for the award as the deadline is 13 November 2009, with the award ceremony taking place on 24 March 2010. Please visit www.lgcawards.co.uk for more information and to enter.



Reduce, reuse, recycle ...

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

CPD accreditation

Solicitors attending the Assembly can earn bonus credits towards their continuing professional development, as the event is certified to count towards SRA's CPD scheme.

This year the amount of credit available is 10.25 hours. To claim credits, please register

your attendance at the enquiries desk, quoting CYA/SBFE.

The Assembly is also accredited by the Bar Standards Board and barristers can earn 10 CPD hours. If you would like to register your attendance, please obtain a form from the enquiries desk.

2010 Annual Assembly dates:

Monday 18 and Tuesday 19 October, ICC, Birmingham

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