

## White paper weeks away says Woolas

The Local Government White Paper is now a matter of weeks away, according to local government minister Phil Woolas MP in his plenary session yesterday. He says the paper will be devolutionary and look to empower local government, councillors and local people — and that the standards regime must follow.

The Code of Conduct is a vital element of the more locally-based framework, and the minister says that the consultation on a revised draft Code will be issued very shortly. The new Code, which resulted from a review by the Standards Board, will be in place for the local elections on 3 May 2007.

For the new system to work effectively, the capacity and capability of monitoring officers and standards committees to carry out their new roles must develop.

**“The [new] Code will be user-friendly, fair and proportionate — in fact, a reflection of the conduct regime itself as it should be.”**

This means having the right training, development and guidance in place for both officers and members, and this important role will continue to be delivered by the Standards Board.

To help retain public confidence, the minister says standards committees

should have an independent chair, but should not be required to have a majority of independent members. Maintaining a balance of members, including those with a representative role, helps to ensure local democratic ownership.

The minister recognises concerns about resource implications of the new regime and the need for monitoring officers to be robust and consistent, resisting political pressure. He added that he wants to see authorities cooperate and work together. His speech ended by asking delegates to step up and meet the challenges facing them in the months ahead.



Phil Woolas MP (top) and Patricia Hughes, Deputy Chair of the Standards Board for England, during their plenary sessions yesterday.

### The new strategic outlook

Patricia Hughes, the deputy chair of the Standards Board for England, yesterday gave an overview of the future of the Board and the revised Code of Conduct.

Patricia pointed out the consistency of the volume of complaints and the high threshold for referring cases. Experience of locally handled cases so far showed smooth handling of the majority of cases, though there were a few teething problems to watch out for. The focus of the Standards Board is already adjusting in anticipation of the new framework: away from the volume of cases investigated and towards the provision of a stronger framework of support and guidance.

**“The proposed changes are far-reaching, they are radical; they give us an opportunity to get the Code we want and to get it right.” Patricia Hughes**

The Standards Board is working closely with the Department for Communities and Local Government to make sure the new system is designed to be as effective and flexible as possible.

This raises a number of issues, for example ensuring equal treatment of members from one authority to another, and resource implications for some district councils.

Patricia urged delegates carefully to consider the proposed revisions to the Code of Conduct, and stressed the need for authorities to adopt the revised Code as early as possible. She finished by summarising how the Standards Board sees its future role — increasingly strategic in outlook, making sure the system is running well, issuing formal and informal guidance, and giving individual advice and support.

### Up to speed

Yesterday's *Getting up to speed* session provided an introductory welcome for delegates new to the Code of Conduct or conference from David Prince, the chief executive of the Standards Board for England.

David helped delegates understand more about the intentions behind the Code, and get to grips with some of the jargon and common misunderstandings associated with the ethical framework. He then looked at the future of the Code and at topics that would be covered in the rest of the conference.

There was a high turnout for this optional event, which included the opportunity to meet Standards Board representatives and other delegates in a similar position. If you would like to find out more about the work of the Standards Board, come to our information desk in the registration area today.

### Help us to recycle

Please hand back your badge and lanyard for recycling when you leave the conference today and place any unwanted papers in the recycling bins. If you no longer require your delegate bag, please hand it in at the registration area. Thank you.

### Agenda

08.00 – 09.00	Refreshments
09.00 – 10.15	SESSION 4 Bridging the gap: knowledge, techniques and skills
10.15 – 10.45	Comfort break
10.45 – 11.45	When politics becomes personal: is local level governance the panacea?
11.45 – 12.00	Comfort break
12.00 – 13.15	SESSION 5 Bridging the gap: awareness, development, wider debate
13.15 – 14.30	Lunch
14.30 – 15.45	SESSION 6 Bridging the gap: awareness, development, wider debate
15.45 – 16.00	Comfort break
16.00 – 16.20	Time to reflect
16.20 – 16.30	Moving forward
16.30	Close



## Win a £20 book token

Fill in and return your delegate feedback form before you leave the venue this afternoon and you could be the lucky winner of a £20 book token. Five delegates will be picked at random to receive the tokens and notified in the next few weeks.

Your feedback on the conference is vital to ensure that future events continue to improve and meet your requirements, and the Standards Board encourages all delegates to share their thoughts and ideas. This year we would particularly like to hear your views about our dedicated conference website.

You will find a feedback form in your delegate pack. Please complete it and hand it in to a representative of the Standards Board as you leave the conference today

## A new home for the Standards Board

The Standards Board for England is moving to Manchester. From next April, the organisation will be based in its new headquarters in Lever Street, Manchester.

The move is in response to the government's desire to relocate both civil servants and agencies outside of London. As well as having financial benefits, it is believed that moving organisations such as ours out of London will have a real benefit in terms of regeneration and development of the regions. We have always been committed to getting out and about to be close to local authorities we work with and this commitment will remain the same. Our regular roadshows will continue to feature destinations across the country.

### Moving cities

The Standards Board has chosen Manchester as our new home for a number of reasons. As well as being a city with a proud history of robust local government, it has excellent transport links and a good labour market from which we have already been able to recruit new colleagues with valuable local government experience.

We will publicise our new contact details towards the beginning of next year. The Standards Board is looking forward to the move as one more change on our way to becoming a strategic regulator with a focus on guidance, support and an overview of an effective locally based system.

## Keep in touch

Please register your email address at the enquiries desk to receive an electronic copy of the third conference newsletter later this month. It will provide an overview of the conference's main themes and of the key concerns put forward by delegates during the sessions, as well as articles and further photos of delegates and speakers.

To remind yourself of the detail of this year's sessions, visit [www.annualassembly.co.uk](http://www.annualassembly.co.uk) where all of the session handouts and many

other items of conference literature will be available to download in the next few days.

### Already looking forward to next year?

All of the delegates attending this year's conference will automatically receive booking information for next year's conference as soon as it becomes available. The Sixth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees will be back at the ICC in Birmingham from 15–16 October 2007. We look forward to seeing you again.

## 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

### DARK GREEN

Standards committee members

### YELLOW

Independent members

### ORANGE

Chief executives

### BLACK

Council leaders

### RED

Speakers

### PURPLE

Conference steering committee members

### JADE GREEN

The Standards Board for England members

### BLUE

Others (delegates who don't fit in to any of the categories above)

## Any questions?

Please come along to the Standards Board information desk to pose any questions you may have. Alternatively, use the question sheet in your conference delegate pack and drop it into one of the many question postboxes situated around the conference centre.

## CONFERENCE PICTURES

*Bridging the gap:* these pictures capture some moments from the first day of the conference. There will be plenty more shots of both speakers and delegates in the third issue — see *Keep in Touch* above for more details.



## Contacts



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ANNUAL ASSEMBLY 2007

15–16 OCTOBER 2007  
 ICC, BIRMINGHAM