

TOWN AND PARISH STANDARD



Welcome

This will be the last time I write to you as Chief Executive, as I will be retiring in June this year. My successor is Glenys Stacey and she takes up her post in April, allowing for a substantial and detailed handover.

Glenys is experienced in the public sector. She is a solicitor and former Chief Executive of the Criminal Cases Review Commission. She will come to the Standards Board for England from her latest role as Chief Executive of Animal Health. Her various duties have included heading the country-wide field response to animal disease outbreaks.

I am sure Glenys shares my commitment to the work of parishes and will continue to champion this area of work. I wish her every success.

I have taken great pleasure in working with colleagues in town and parish councils over the years, and have spoken with many of you at various conferences. There was some concern when parish and town councils were included in the Code of Conduct back in 2002. However, recent research has shown that most of you feel you should be covered by the Code, and that by and large it has been positive.

There has rightly been a growing emphasis on the role of parishes with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, devolving even more powers to parishes and town councils. Our lead article discusses the changes to the standards framework. These firmly place responsibility for standards where they belong – at the heart of local government.



David Prince
Chief Executive

Changes to the standards framework

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 means local standards committees will make initial assessments of misconduct allegations, and that most cases will be handled locally. We will supervise, support and guide local authorities and take on a new regulatory role.

We believe that the local system will improve public confidence by demonstrating transparency and accountability in decision-making, and allowing local ownership of standards.

Key features of the new system are:

- Standards committees, chaired by an independent member, will be responsible for receiving allegations in relation to the Code of Conduct. They will also decide whether any action needs to be taken. This is referred to as 'local assessment'.
- Where the standards committee decides action is needed, the cases will be passed to the local monitoring officer for investigation, or for any other action the committee feels appropriate.
- Standards committees will be responsible for reviewing any request from a complainant, either

to review a decision or to take no action in relation to a complaint.

- The Standards Board will be responsible for supporting and monitoring local arrangements, and will continue to be responsible for carrying out those investigations which cannot be carried out locally.
- Each standards committee will need an independent chair. We advise each committee to have at least three independent members and, if the authority is responsible for parish councils, at least three parish or town council representatives. This is so that the standards committee has a different independent member, and parish representative if applicable, available to assess and review complaints. It also ensures the standards committee still has flexibility if an independent member or parish representative is unavailable.

For more information please see the local assessment section of our website:
www.standardsboard.gov.uk

LATEST NEWS

- We have published a training exercise for standards committees, which aims to prepare them for the forthcoming changes to the standards framework. It consists of anonymised complaints that will give standards committees practice at operating the appeal mechanism. You can find the exercise in the local assessment section on our website.

Standards Board guidance

We are producing a range of guidance on the new framework in preparation for local assessment.

The guidance is subject to regulations supporting changes to the framework. We are working to publish each part of the guidance as soon as possible after the regulations are confirmed. We will also produce a binder of all the guidance in a loose-leaf format, which will let us make amendments over time if necessary.

The guidance will focus on:

- the role and make-up of standards committees
- local assessment and how it will operate
- local investigations
- local determinations
- monitoring and audit arrangements

Capacity-building bid

The Standards Board has been working with some of its partners in planning for the implementation of a capacity building bid.

The bid has two strands. The first is a compact, which will see county associations working with standards committees and monitoring officers. The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) will lead this programme and has already contacted some of you directly to get involved. We expect this programme will run from June to December 2008.

The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) will lead the second strand – a peer mentoring programme. Here, mentors in principal authorities, and towns and parishes, will work with parish and town councillors in supporting and strengthening leadership. This will run from September to November 2008.

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