

## Summary of the Standards Board annual review

Full text can be found at:

<http://www.standardsboard.co.uk/Publications/AnnualReviewandReport/filedownload,4670,en.pdf>

### Overview

The devolution of the responsibility for the ethical agenda, increased local ownership and the changing role of the Standards Board for England are the key themes addressed in the Standards Board's Annual Review 2005-06, available this week. The review focuses on the shift in ownership of the conduct regime to a local level.

### Changes:

- A new Code of Conduct will be introduced
- Local authorities will conduct the vast majority of investigations
- Legislation will be introduced to require standards committees to assess complaints and for standards committee chairs to be independent
- The Standards Board for England will continue to develop its strategic role at the heart of the conduct regime, overseeing a national framework and local ownership

### Framework

Local authorities:

- Support, training and guidance for officers.
- The revised conduct regime encourages local authorities to conduct the majority of investigations.
- A recommendation has been made for standards committees to be given powers to impose higher penalties in order to be able to investigate a wider variety of cases.
- Increasing local capacity to deal with a higher caseload.

Standards committees to assess complaints:

- This allows local knowledge to be applied in individual cases
- This change is anticipated to be part of the future local government bill.

Working with standards committees:

- **Independent:** Standards committees to be independent so they are seen as being politically neutral. It is proposed that all chairs are to be independent.
- **Locally owned:** A balance of elected and independent members should ensure public confidence in its independence.
- **Accountable:** The Standards Board will oversee the framework to ensure high standards in decision-making. The Standards Board will have the power to remove responsibilities from standards committees in extreme cases.
- **Supported:** More guidance for standards committees on their growing responsibilities. This may include a new training DVD.

### Code of conduct

Changes:

- Clarifying the rules around personal and prejudicial interests to encourage greater participation, while ensuring that decisions are made in the public interest.
- Making the Code clearer on what information should, and should not, be confidential
- Regulating conduct in private life only when it concerns unlawful activities

- Addressing bullying more explicitly, but acknowledging that members have the right to call officers to account
- Removing the current duty for members to report breaches.

#### **Research**

- Creation of the “Ethical governance toolkit” which offers a range of ways to assess their ethical ‘temperature’.
- A training DVD was released in 2006 along with guidance for local authorities on how to conduct an investigation.
- The Standards Board is looking for new ways to work with county associations to promote high standards at parish level and provide local training.