

08 May 2009

Standards one year on

Today (8 May 2009) marks the first anniversary of the local standards framework, and the Standards Board for England have released the latest information on complaints made under the councillors' Code of Conduct.

Dr Robert Chilton, who chairs the Standards Board, said: "Overall, we're pleased with the way that authorities have taken ownership of local standards. The latest information from authorities shows that local experience of dealing with cases is growing, and that, on the whole, the system is working well".

There were 2,863 complaints received locally from 8 May 2008 to 31 March 2009. So far, just over half of all allegations received by local authorities have not been referred for investigation, with 29% being investigated locally and 12% being referred to monitoring officers for alternative measures, such as training or mediation. In comparison, between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008, the Standards Board for England received 3,547 complaints and referred just 14% for investigation.

54% of the complaints made since May 2008 were from members of the public. Just 4% were made by council officers and 36% were from elected members. The latest data received shows that there were far fewer complaints than might be expected about town and parish councillors. Despite making up around 80% of all elected members, only 51% of complaints are about their conduct.

The most frequent potential breaches of the Code of Conduct being investigated are failure to declare personal interests, failure to treat others with respect and bringing the authority into disrepute.

Dr Chilton adds: "Over the past year, we have been working with authorities to ensure they handle complaints fairly and proportionately. In the minority of councils where teething problems have occurred, we're exercising our responsibility to step in to protect and restore standards. We will support authorities by investigating those complaints that would be inappropriate for them to handle, providing a vital impartial resource for difficult or high-profile cases, or those where local conflicts of interests could undermine confidence in the system.

"As a national regulator, we will continue to advise government on how to develop and improve the local standards framework, drive high standards of behaviour and increase trust in local democracy."

Ends.