

## **2009 Annual Assembly of Standards Committees 12-13 October 2009**

### **Introduction**

There were a record number of attendances to the Annual Assembly this year and this brief review is prepared to provide an overview of the key messages that came through many of the sessions. I was invited to present with two other speakers at one of the mini plenary sessions at the Assembly and enclose feedback from the session.

### **Assembly – Leading Themes**

The main event opened with a video of an interview with Rosie Winterton MP Minister of State for Local Government. Chair of Standards for England (SfE) followed this, and then the Chief Executive SfE, the speakers were all stimulating in different ways, and the key themes mentioned are as follows:

- Independent Members of Standards Committees are essential to the process
- A vital link is with the Monitoring Officers
- The Conduct regime is paying off
- The value of a National Independent organisation SfE is of major importance

### **Bob Chilton Chair SfE**

- My role by statute is that I am directly responsible to Ministers and there may well be a shift of emphasis after the next general election
- Good efforts to weed out trivial and vexatious complaints
- We do experience 'bullying' in many ways in Local Government
- Pre-determination dates back to 1841
- Concern over long periods of uncertainty for accused Councillors
- We need to focus on how we create excellence in our work
- Higher quality for less money – promote who we are, what we do, and can we do it cheaper
- Good progress on improving investigations
- Excellence in Standards Committees – compliance, quality, innovation, influence and communications

### **Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive SfE**

- Introduced annual statistics (on SfE web site)
- Standards for local partnerships will be developing and they will offer advice on the progress
- The tasks facing the organisation: General Election, Revised Code 2010, Risk, Quality, Cost of the service, Timeliness of complaints, SfE - fit for purpose

The following sessions revolved around debating many of the aspects that SCDC face with the Standards Committee remit. There was a very open style adopted for the breakout sessions involving Standards Committee members and encouraging them to comment on their experiences.

### **Engaging Leaders and Embedding Standards**

This session was delivered by a highly experienced Chairman of some nine years Mark Scrimshaw the Independent Chair of Newcastle City and Georgina J Butcher with one year's experience of Chairing the Standards Committee at SCDC. Dr Michael Macaulay who has an enviable record undertaking research in this sector particularly for the SfE organisation devised the idea for this session. Michael chaired the session and both speakers were encouraged to compare and contrast their experiences.

The audience were provided with six questions and asked to rank them by voting on, which ones they would like the speakers to comment on. Then Michael (Chair) asked both speakers to comment and then managed questions from the audience.

The response from the audience was very encouraging and highlighted a very wide range of practices. There was a great interest in the work undertaken by the SCDC Standards Committee and many of the audience contacted me to provide a copy of the notes from our presentation. The work by our Standards Committee was praised by the audience and both Mark and I highlighted that it is a Committee working together to improve the reputation of the most deserving of Parish, County and District Councillors that is the real reward.