



Mrs Kathleen English
Chairman and independent Member
South Cambridgeshire District Council Standards
Committee
South Cambridgeshire Hall
Cambourne Business Park
Cambourne
Cambridge
CB23 6EA

8th March 2011

Dear Mrs. English,

Andrew Stunell MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Department for Communities and Local
Government

Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Tel: 0303 444 3440

Fax: 0303 444 3287

E-Mail: andrew.stunell@communities.gsi.gov.uk

www.communities.gov.uk

Our Ref: ER/ST/008460/11

Your Ref: SC101143

LOCALISM BILL: THE FUTURE OF STANDARDS

Thank you for your letter of 24 January to the Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP expressing the views on your Standards Committee on our proposals in the Localism Bill for abolishing the Standards Board regime. I am replying because my Ministerial responsibilities include local government.

The Government believes that the existing conduct regime has encouraged vexatious, politically motivated and malicious complaints that waste council resources and council taxpayers' money. Although the Localism Bill currently includes a provision to abolish the requirement on authorities to adopt a code of conduct for their members, it will not prevent them from doing so if they wish.

The Government expects that councils will decide to adopt a code of conduct in the absence of a legal requirement to do so, and such a code could cover bullying and failure to treat others, including council employees, with respect, or any other types of behaviour that it considers inappropriate or improper. Councils will need to consider the sanctions that they will have the power to impose given that these will no longer include suspension or disqualification of members. It should be noted that under the Localism Bill, district councils will no longer be responsible for dealing with complaints about the conduct of parish council members in their area.

The Government is committed to high standards of conduct and that is why we have introduced a new criminal offence, for members who deliberately fail to register or declare their personal interests. A member who simply forgets to register an interest will not be guilty of committing the new offence. The definition of the interests that members will be required to register and disclose will be set out in secondary legislation.

Finally, I am not aware of misreporting in the national press of advice from your Council's legal team. I can assure you that our press releases were based on our internal advice.

Yours sincerely
Andrew Stunell

ANDREW STUNELL MP