

11 August 2011

Mrs Holly Adams
South Cambridgeshire District Council
South Cambridgeshire Hall
Cambourne
Cambridge
CB23 6EA

Our Ref: ER/16/004328/11
Your Ref: SC101143

Dear Mrs Adams,

ABOLITION OF THE STANDARDS BOARD REGIME

Thank you for your E-mail of 26th January, enclosing a letter with the views of South Cambridgeshire District Council's Standards Committee about the Government's plans for the abolition of the Standards Board regime. Your enquiry has been passed to me for reply because I work in the team responsible for policy on the regime. The Department has been receiving very high volumes of correspondence this year, and I am very sorry for the delay in replying that this has caused.

We note the views of the Standards Committee about the abolition of a national code of conduct. The Government believes that the current regime has encouraged vexatious and politically motivated complaints, and that it is wrong for the electorate to be deprived of their elected representative by a committee or unelected tribunal. As you may know, after the Localism Bill is enacted, councils will be able to adopt a code of conduct for their members if they wish and to keep standards committees for investigating complaints about councillors' conduct if they wish. A code of conduct could include provisions about bullying if a council wishes. It is likely that monitoring officers of district councils will be responsible for establishing and maintaining registers of interests for parishes in their areas, but not for dealing with complaints about the conduct of the members of these councils.

It is not intended that councillors who inadvertently fail to register or declare an interest will be guilty of the new criminal offence, and the definition of the interests that must be registered will be provided in secondary legislation. The offence is for those whose failure is deliberate or without good reason.

Finally, I have looked at the press release issued on 14th November last about freedom of councillors to campaign, and I cannot see any references to the Council or advice from its legal team. If the Committee is referring to a different press release, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

Rosalind Kendler