

Ministers axe Standards Board

The Government is axing the Standards Board and has indicated corrupt councillors will now find themselves in court.

Communities minister [Andrew Stunell](#) made the announcement at an NLGN event ahead of the Lib Dem annual party conference, saying the regime had 'become a vehicle for malicious and frivolous complaints'.

Councillors will now have to register personal interests in a public register and further powers will be bestowed upon the Local Government Ombudsman, which will ensure local authorities are legally bound to implement its findings.

Mr Stunell said: 'We will legislate to ensure that if a councillor is corrupt and abuses their office for personal gain they will be dealt with in the criminal courts. If a councillor behaves ineffectively or irresponsibly then it's a matter for the electorate not an unelected quango.'

'This Government is freeing councillors from central prescription and top down bureaucracy so they can get on with their job. In the future councillors must expect to be judged at the ballot box by an electorate with real access to their accounts and personal interests in a new transparent era.'

He added the Government would allow councils to decide whether they wish to have a mayor or leader, and cabinet or committee systems.

'For the last decade councils have been forced to implement a one-size fits all model of government. This government will let councils and communities decide how to organise themselves. We don't presume to know more than local people about how their area should be run,' he said.

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Communities minister
Andrew Stunell

Councillor misconduct to be a criminal offence

By Jaimie Kaffash

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Serious misconduct by councillors will become a criminal offence, communities minister Andrew Stunell announced today.

Stunell said that [Standards for England](#), the councillor watchdog, had 'become a vehicle for malicious and frivolous complaints'. The government announced in May that the quango would be axed. It dealt with 6,000 complaints since its May 2008 relaunch, but half of these were judged not worthy of further action.

The government will legislate to make serious misconduct by councillors an offence that will be tried in court. It has also promised to give the Local Government Ombudsman 'real teeth'. Local authorities will be legally obliged to implement the findings of the ombudsman, which investigates public complaints over the way they have been treated by their council.

Stunell said: 'The Standards Board regime ended up fuelling petty complaints and malicious vendettas. Nearly every council had investigations hanging over them – most of which would be dismissed but not before reputations were damaged and taxpayer money was wasted.

'Frivolous allegations undermined local democracy and discouraged people from running for public office.'

Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles added: 'Failure to register or declare an interest, or deliberately seeking to mislead the public about an interest, will become a criminal offence while a newly empowered Local Government Ombudsman will investigate incompetence on behalf local people.'

Public Finance recently revealed that [thecost of abolishing Standards for England will be more than it saves](#) because of the pensions liabilities it holds.