

Bridging the gap

Towards effective local regulation

Advance programme – issue one

Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees
16-17 October 2006, ICC, Birmingham

Key to conference session symbols

Where delegates are given the choice to attend one of a number of conference sessions within the programme, each of these sessions has been given a symbol to indicate the format the session will take and, therefore, what delegates can expect from it. The definitions of the session symbols are as follows.



Plenary sessions take place in Hall 1, with a maximum attendance of 500. They are informative sessions.



Mini plenary sessions are informative sessions taking place in smaller halls, with an attendance of 60-150, but in a more informal setting than the main plenary sessions. These usually incorporate an opportunity for questions and answers.



Facilitated exchange sessions take place in medium-sized halls, with a maximum attendance of 80. Independent facilitators direct these sessions, based on broadly defined topics, but discussion is largely delegate led. The sessions provide a forum for delegates to network and share views and experiences, whilst moving towards formulating best practice.



Presentation and discussion sessions take place in smaller halls, with a maximum attendance of 60. These sessions involve presentations on key topics, followed by facilitated discussion amongst delegates.



Workshops take place in smaller halls, with a maximum attendance of 60. These facilitated sessions take a practical approach to topics, giving delegates the chance to get hands on experience by working through case studies and/or more structured activities, such as role-play.



Q & A sessions take place in smaller halls, with a maximum attendance of 60. They provide an open house for delegates to put questions to the Standards Board for England. Representatives from legal and policy and guidance teams, and an ethical standards officer, are on the panel.



Mini debate sessions take place in medium-sized halls, with a maximum attendance of 150. Facilitated by a chair and panel of speakers, these sessions tackle some of the broader issues relating to ethical conduct.



Fringe events are optional and take place in medium-sized halls. These sessions are organised and run independently of the main conference programme by a range of bodies from the local government family, but cover topics of key interest to delegates.

Welcome to the Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees

This is the largest gathering of members and officers concerned with the local government Code of Conduct and raising ethical standards.

The conference comes at a time of change, with a revised Code and local arrangements for receiving complaints on the horizon. And for many of you, local investigations and hearings are still in the process of being fully embedded within your authority's governance framework.

So as ever, in the current climate, there seem to be more unknowns facing standards committees and monitoring officers than certainties, plenty of challenges and no room for complacency. And that's what this conference is all about: Where do we need to be? Where are we now? And how do we get there?

This year's programme, therefore, is of practical relevance in helping you and your authority to bridge the gap between where you are now – in being able to deliver effectively on the revised standards framework – and where you need to be, whilst still providing plenty of opportunity for some valuable networking and sharing of experiences and solutions with other local practitioners.

I wish you a successful and productive conference. It will provide you with many of the tools you need to carry you forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sir Anthony Holland', with a horizontal line underneath.

Sir Anthony Holland Chair
The Standards Board for England

**If you require this programme in another format,
please contact the Standards Board for England
on 020 7378 5046.**

Monday 16 October 2006

8.30 – 10.15

Registration

Light breakfast available.



9.15 – 10.00



Getting up to speed

David Prince, Chief Executive, The Standards Board for England

An introductory welcome from the chief executive for those new to the Code of Conduct or conference. Attendance optional. All welcome.

An effective ethical environment: where are we going?

10.15 – 10.25

Welcome

Hall 1

Sir Anthony Holland, Chair, The Standards Board for England

10.25 – 10.40

Setting the standard

Hall 1

Phil Woolas MP, Minister for Local Government

The minister opens the conference by setting out his proposals for the future of the ethical framework.

10.40 – 10.55

Bridging the gap: towards strategic regulation

Hall 1

Patricia Hughes, Deputy Chair, The Standards Board for England

An update on the revised Code of Conduct, its implications and the timetable for implementation. And an overview of the Standards Board's plans for transformation into a strategic regulator.

10.55 – 11.25

What will an effective ethical environment look like?

Hall 1

Three key local government figures present their visions of the components of an effective ethical environment: from setting and leading the culture of an authority, to understanding the relationship between ethical standards and the performance of an authority.

11.25 – 11.45

Question time

Hall 1

An opportunity to pose questions to the morning's speakers.

11.45 – 12.00
Comfort break



12.00 – 13.00
SESSION 1 Implications of the revised Code and the future ethical environment

Delegates debate the implications of the revised Code of Conduct, the local filter for complaints and the future ethical environment. Independent facilitators direct the sessions.

Up to ten workshops, each with a maximum of 80 delegates.

Delegates will choose between:

- > A monitoring officer focused session
- > A standards committee focused session
- > A mixed attendance session

Delegates should refer to the reverse of their conference name badge to find out which session they are pre-allocated to attend and its location. All delegates attend.

13.00 – 14.15
Lunch



Hall 3

Where are you now? Locating the gap

14.15 – 15.15

Standards committees: a national snapshot

Hall 1

BMG Research present findings from research carried out earlier this year into the make-up, capacity and experience of standards committees. The research, commissioned by the Standards Board for England, provides the first national snapshot of standards committees and their work. Two local authorities give delegates a practical insight into how they fit into this national profile.

15.15 – 15.45

Comfort break

Refreshments available.



15.45 – 16.45

SESSION 2 How do you measure up?

Delegates discuss how their authority compares to the national picture of standards committees presented in the plenary at 14.15. The main focus of this workshop is then for individuals to carry out a practical analysis, identifying the strengths and weaknesses within their authorities, and establish key milestones for improving and moving forward. Independent facilitators direct the sessions.

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All delegates attend.

16.45 – 17.00

Comfort break



Tools to make the transition

17.00 – 18.15

SESSION 3 Bridging the gap: knowledge, techniques and skills

Authorities have been able to carry out investigations, hold local hearings, reach determinations and decide on sanctions since the ethical framework was fully implemented in late 2004. And with the challenges of a revised Code of Conduct and a more locally focused system ahead, delegates need to be confident that they have the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to deliver on the ethical agenda to the standard required. In this part of the programme, sessions tackle a range of issues that are key to bridging these gaps. Delegates can choose to attend one of the following sessions.



Case review – lessons learnt so far

Drawing on four years' experience, this session considers the learning from significant cases, tribunals, local hearings and circumstances where an ethical standards officer has made the decision not to refer a matter for determination. [Useful for all delegates.](#)



A robust filter

From 2008, standards committees will be receiving complaints and deciding if they should be investigated and, if so, whether that investigation should either be carried out locally, or nationally by the Standards Board for England. Delegates consider the practicalities of a local filter: Could joint arrangements work? How? What types of cases should be investigated at a national level? [This session is primarily aimed at standards committee members.](#)



Conducting an effective investigation

Examination of the essential components of an effective investigation – from understanding the technical elements of the investigative process, to exploring key competencies, including timeliness and proportionality. Following the presentation, delegates are encouraged to share their experiences, with the aim of moving towards best practice. [Particularly useful for monitoring officers new to the investigative process and for those wanting a refresher.](#)



Holding an effective hearing

This presentation explores the essential components of holding a fair and effective hearing – from understanding the framework that local hearings operate within, to exploring key principles of implementation, such as best practice for pre-hearing preparation, and identifying common pitfalls to avoid. Delegates have the opportunity to contribute their experiences. [Particularly useful for standards committee members new to the hearing process and for those wanting a refresher.](#)



Investigations – work through

Delegates work through a case study, based on several problematic/topical areas of the Code of Conduct, applying the Code to reach a decision on a matter under investigation. This session also touches on key competencies of the investigative process and enables delegates to consider best practice approaches to some of the most frequently encountered difficulties in areas such as decision-making and report drafting. [Particularly useful for monitoring officers who want to develop their skills in this area.](#)



Hearings – work through

Delegates work through a case study, based on issues that can affect the fairness and proportionality of a hearing and subsequent sanction, applying the Code to reach a decision on a matter under consideration at a fictional tribunal. This session also touches on some technical areas of the hearing process and encourages delegates to consider what constitutes a proportionate sanction. [Particularly useful for all those involved in the hearings process and who want to develop their skills in this area.](#)



The revised Code – declaring interests

The definition of interests that must be declared is one of the most fundamental revisions proposed to the Code of Conduct. Using worked examples, this session considers the anticipated requirements, particularly in relation to planning and licensing. [A useful session for new monitoring officers and those wanting an in-depth refresher.](#)



Investigations – in-house or out-house?

Authorities can conduct an investigation in one of three ways: by carrying it out themselves, by outsourcing the function, or by developing reciprocal arrangements with other authorities in their area. Several authorities share their experiences. What difficulties did they encounter? What advice would they give others? During this session, delegates consider the benefits and risks of each approach and discuss the circumstances within which each option may be most appropriate. [This session is primarily aimed at monitoring officers.](#)



General open house Q & A

Open house for delegates to put questions relating to any topic to representatives from the Standards Board for England.

18.15

Close of day one

18.30 – 19.30

Fringe events (optional)

Various fringe events include:



Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors (ACSeS)



Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)



Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE)

19.30 – 20.00

Drinks reception



20.00 – late

Conference dinner

Free seating. Dress code is smart or smart-casual.

Cash bar available.

Live music from the Al Gurr Quartet, featuring Sarah Coleman on vocals.



Tuesday 17 October 2006

8.00 – 9.00

Refreshments

Tea and coffee available. Delegates attending for today only need to register at the Enquiries desk.



9.00 – 10.15

SESSION 4 Bridging the gap: knowledge, techniques and skills

Authorities have been able to carry out investigations, hold local hearings, reach determinations and decide on sanctions since the ethical framework was fully implemented in late 2004. And with the challenges of a revised Code of Conduct and a more locally focused system ahead, delegates need to be confident that they have the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to deliver on the ethical agenda to the standard required. In this part of the programme, sessions tackle a range of issues that are key to bridging these gaps. Delegates can choose to attend one of the following sessions.



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Particularly useful for monitoring officers new to the investigative process and for those wanting a refresher.



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General open house Q & A

Open house for delegates to put questions relating to any topic to representatives from the Standards Board for England.

10.15 – 10.45

Comfort break

Refreshments available.



10.45 – 11.45

When politics becomes personal:

is local level governance the panacea?

Hall 1

Three opinion-formers contribute their differing views on this topical issue. Delegates are invited to pose questions to the panel.

11.45 – 12.00

Comfort break

12.00 – 13.15

SESSION 5 Bridging the gap: awareness, development, wider debate

Authorities need to be confident that good conduct is both engrained within the culture of their authority from the top down and exists as a foundation, underpinning the partnerships that they build with other authorities in the area and with the local community. Sessions in this part of the programme, therefore, focus on bridging the gap between simply fulfilling the statutory obligations of carrying out investigations and hearings and moving towards taking a more holistic approach to integrating ethical standards into the corporate governance framework. Delegates can choose to attend one of the following sessions.



Corporate governance – integrating the ethical agenda

This presentation explores the role of the ethical agenda as a crucial part of the wider governance framework of an authority. The joint Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)/Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) working group shares its understanding of effective corporate governance.

Useful for all delegates.



Freedom of expression – drawing the line

Where is the line to be drawn between freedom of expression and causing offence to others? This session invites delegates to consider the views presented by a panel of key local government figures and then debate this fundamental issue and its implications for the Code of Conduct.

Useful for all delegates.



An inclusive approach to towns and parishes

Brief presentations highlight a range of strategies that can be implemented to better engage with town and parish councils and raise the profile of these councils within a local community. Amongst the issues explored will be: providing proactive training and support arrangements, mentoring schemes, and model agreements between standards committees and county associations. Delegates are encouraged to develop a list of best practice approaches they can employ within their local area.

Particularly useful for anyone who works with town and parish councils.



Towns and parishes – when things go wrong

Town and parish councils are increasingly important as the first tier of local government, but they can be vulnerable to infighting and conflict. Presentations from authorities, who have dealt with town or parish councils that have experienced problems, provide an insight into the difficulties that can occur and methods of tackling these issues effectively. What are the appropriate roles for standards committees, monitoring officers and the Standards Board for England in these situations? This session encourages delegates to explore the alternatives for handling circumstances where town or parish council relations have broken down. [Particularly useful for anyone who may work with town and parish councils that are experiencing problems and require support.](#)



Training the trainer

Everyone agrees that good training is vital, but how best to provide it? This session, run by an independent trainer, offers practical advice on planning and running training sessions for members. [Particularly useful for anyone who is responsible for training others.](#)



Working proactively – the role of standards committees

Standards committees have a far wider role than simply dealing with casework. In this session, two standards committees share their extended work programmes and explain what kinds of additional responsibilities they have taken on and how these work in practice. Delegates work together to explore some of the more proactive roles they play, including sharing good practice examples of how they promote and support high standards of conduct within their authorities. [A useful session for new standards committee members and those wanting a refresher.](#)



Standards committees – raising your profile

In order to operate effectively, standards committees need to promote their role both within their authorities and to their local communities – but how? In this session, delegates are encouraged to identify and evaluate strategies for raising their profile. And, in light of the proposed local filter for allegations from 2008, delegates can take this opportunity to consider how they may publicise the new process to the public. [A useful session for all standards committee members.](#)



Issues of independence

The role of the independent member is, undoubtedly, crucial to the effective operation of the ethical agenda. This session considers that role, the skills and competencies independent members need, how they can best be recruited, the support and training they require and their relationship with the authority and its elected members. Delegates are invited to contribute any key issues of concern with regard to these topics and share possible solutions and best practice. *This session is primarily aimed at independent members, and those involved in their recruitment and selection.*



Monitoring officer open house Q & A

Open house for delegates to put questions relating to any topic to representatives from the Standards Board for England. *This session is primarily aimed at monitoring officers.*

13.15 – 14.30

Lunch



Hall 3

14.30 – 15.45

SESSION 6 Bridging the gap: awareness, development, wider debate

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Standards committee open house Q & A

Open house for delegates to put questions relating to any topic to representatives from the Standards Board for England. [This session is primarily aimed at standards committee members.](#)

15.45 – 16.00
Comfort break

16.00 – 16.20
Time to reflect

Hall 1

Sir Anthony Holland, Chair, The Standards Board for England

16.20 – 16.30
Moving forward

Hall 1

David Prince, Chief Executive, The Standards Board for England

A reflection on the highlights of the past two days and a look ahead to taking the ethical agenda forward.

16.30
Close
Refreshments available.



All information contained within this programme was correct at the time of publication, but may be subject to change.

The mill responsible for producing this paper has a certified environmental management system. It is accredited with ISO14001 and EMAS. The pulp used in the production of this paper is Elemental Chlorine Free.

How to get there

The ICC is located in the centre of Birmingham. You can travel there in a number of ways.

By train

Services to Birmingham New Street Station travel from locations all over the country. Services to Birmingham Snow Hill Station run in the local area. Please telephone National Rail Enquiries on 08457 48 49 50 for further information.

By car

Birmingham is easily accessible via a network of motorways.

By taxi

The venue is a short taxi ride from Birmingham New Street and Birmingham Snow Hill stations.

On foot

The venue is approximately 10 minutes walk from Birmingham New Street Station.

Car parking

There are five public multi-storey car parks close to the ICC.

A location map will be sent to delegates in a final mailing, shortly before the conference. The map will indicate the motorways, train stations and car parks.

Further information

If you have any enquiries regarding the conference, please contact:

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PO Box 617
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Surrey, GU5 9XU

Telephone: 01483 205 432

Fax: 01483 202 335

E-mail: annualassembly2006@standardsboard.co.uk

Alternatively, visit our conference website at

www.annualassembly.co.uk