

AGENDA Monday 5 September 2005


"Welcome to the Fourth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees. With the Code of Conduct and the need for an independent regulator now widely accepted, and the legislative framework all in place, it is time to move forward.

The success of our mission to improve the public's confidence in local government depends on the commitment and expertise of standards committees, monitoring officers and others at a local level. This year, therefore, the conference focuses on investigations, hearings and building the trust of local communities in their authority.

Wherever possible, we provide a platform for local practitioners to describe their experiences and share solutions to difficulties they have encountered. We have also invited our partner organisations to run sessions, to offer their own perspective.

But in many ways, the most important element in the make-up of this event is the people who attend from authorities across the country – who contribute, challenge and debate this important work we are all engaged in.

I hope you enjoy the conference and find it useful. Its success, in many ways, is in your hands."



Sir Anthony Holland Chair
The Standards Board for England

9.00 – 10.30

REGISTRATION

Light breakfast available.



10.30 – 10.40

WELCOME

Sir Anthony Holland, Chair, The Standards Board for England

HALL 1

10.40 – 10.55

A VISION FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Rt Hon Nick Raynsford MP, Minister for Local and Regional Government

The minister opens the conference by setting out his vision for local government.

HALL 1

10.55 – 11.10

MAKING IT HAPPEN

David Prince, Chief Executive, The Standards Board for England

A round up of events over the past year, including an update on the review of the Code of Conduct, and the need to focus on local responsibility for ethical standards.

HALL 1

11.10 – 11.30

TAKING THE LEAD

Sir Alistair Graham, Chair, Committee on Standards in Public Life

Sir Alistair reports back on the Committees' Tenth Inquiry and subsequent developments.

HALL 1

11.30 – 11.45

OVER TO YOU

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

HALL 1

11.45 – 12.00

COMFORT BREAK

12.00 – 13.00

SESSION 1: INVESTIGATIONS IN YOUR HANDS

Since 4 November 2004, the Standards Board for England's ethical standards officers have been able to refer cases back for local investigation. Sessions in this part of the conference programme explore different elements of the process and practice of this topical area. Delegates can choose to attend one of the following sessions.



A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT

An authority shares its experiences of carrying out a local investigation. What worked well? What difficulties did they encounter?



INVESTIGATIONS: THE THEORY

This presentation examines the technical aspects of the investigation process – from the framework that local investigations work within, to establishing the key competencies and components of a good investigation.

Delegates are encouraged to contribute their experiences, both positive and negative, and discuss possible solutions and best practice.



INVESTIGATIONS: THE PRACTICE

Exploration of the technical side of the local level investigative process through practical case studies and role-play. In small groups, delegates work through a series of scenarios, based on several key investigatory competency areas. The session enables delegates to practise and improve upon their skills, receive 360° feedback on their performance and identify best practice.



REACHING THE RIGHT DECISION

Practical case studies are used to explore decision-making as part of the local investigative process and how to draft a fair and proportionate report, before the authority's standards committee considers the case.

Delegates work in groups to consider a series of investigation scenarios, which are based on several problematic/topical areas of the Code of Conduct. Questions posed allow delegates to practise and improve upon their ability to apply the Code of Conduct to factual case studies in order to reach an outcome, debate any issues raised and learn from the experiences of others.



INVESTIGATIONS: OPEN HOUSE Q & A

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



ALTERNATIVE ACTION

What action can be taken to deal with member misconduct, where an investigation is not appropriate? Run by the Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors, this session takes a look at dealing with ethical standards officer directives and explores alternative methods aimed at tackling poor conduct, including mediation.

13.00 – 14.15

LUNCH



HALL 3

14.15 – 15.15

SESSION 2: INVESTIGATIONS IN YOUR HANDS

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15.15 – 15.45

COMFORT BREAK

Refreshments available.



15.45 – 16.45

SESSION 3: HEARINGS IN YOUR HANDS

Standards committees have been holding local hearings, reaching determinations and deciding on sanctions since late 2003. In this part of the programme, sessions tackle a range of issues that are key to this important function. Delegates can choose to attend one of the following sessions.



A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT

An authority gives delegates an inside account of its experiences of carrying out a local hearing. What difficulties did they encounter? What advice would they give others preparing for a hearing?



HEARINGS: THE THEORY

This presentation examines the technical aspects of the hearing process – from the framework that local hearings work within, to establishing the key components of holding a good hearing.

Delegates are encouraged to contribute their experiences, both positive and negative, and discuss possible solutions and best practice.



HOLDING HEARINGS: THE PRACTICE

Exploration of the technical side of holding a hearing at a local level, through practical case studies. In small groups, delegates work through a series of scenarios, based on several technical areas of the hearing process. The session enables delegates to practise and improve upon their ability to make decisions on and carry out their roles in these areas and identify best practice.



MAKING YOUR MIND UP

Practical case studies are used to explore the decision-making side of the hearings process at a local level, including how to reach the right finding and proportionate sanction. Delegates work in groups to consider a series of hearing scenarios, which are based on issues that can affect the fairness and proportionality of a hearing and subsequent sanction. Questions posed allow delegates to practise and improve upon their ability to apply the Code of Conduct to factual hearing scenarios in order to reach an appropriate finding, decide on a proportionate sanction, debate any issues raised and learn from the experiences of others.



HEARINGS: OPEN HOUSE Q & A

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



A HEAD START

What can standards committees learn from the Adjudication Panel for England's hearing process? In this session, delegates can take the opportunity to understand and learn more about the national hearing process and pick up some useful tips on best practice that can be implemented at a local level.

16.45

CLOSE OF DAY ONE

17.00 – 19.30

FRINGE EVENTS (OPTIONAL)

Various fringe events include:



TAKING COMMUNITIES FORWARD

Overcoming hurdles – a look at solutions for parish and town councils.
Hosted by the National Association of Local Councils.



INDEPENDENT MEMBERS' FORUM

An informal event for independent members to network and share experiences, concerns and solutions.



WORKING IN A STATUTORY ENVIRONMENT

The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE) invite delegates to join them for this event, which considers the role of, and relationship between, the three statutory officers within every authority: the chief executive, the head of finance and the monitoring officer.

19.30 – 20.00

DRINKS RECEPTION

20.00 – LATE

CONFERENCE DINNER

A guest speaker will address delegates after dinner.
Free seating. Dress code is smart or smart-casual. Cash bar available.



AGENDA Tuesday 6 September 2005

8.00 – 9.00

REFRESHMENTS

Tea and coffee available.

Delegates attending for today only need to register at the Enquiries desk.



8.00 – 8.45

EARLY MORNING BRIEFING

Delegates are welcome to attend a live interview with David Prince, chief executive of the Standards Board for England, reflecting on the conference so far and other key issues of the day.

9.00 – 10.00

SESSION 4: HEARINGS IN YOUR HANDS

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10.00 – 10.30

COMFORT BREAK

Refreshments available.



10.30 – 11.30

PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN YOUR HANDS: MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

HALL 1

This year's big debate asks, 'Will the public ever trust local government?' Opinion-formers speaking on this topic include Tim Minogue, Editor, *Private Eye's* Rotten Boroughs column.

11.30 – 11.45

COMFORT BREAK

11.45 – 12.45

SESSION 5: PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN YOUR HANDS

How can authorities build the public's confidence and trust in both themselves and local democracy as a whole? Sessions in this part of the programme focus on a number of approaches authorities can employ to contribute to improving and strengthening their relationship with their communities. Delegates can choose to attend one of the following sessions.



ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

MORI present some of the key findings of their recent research into public perceptions of ethical standards in local government. And the Local Government Association shares its views on how authorities can go about building public confidence.

This session encourages delegates to consider their expectations of public perception in comparison to the reality and identify methods for initiating change within their authority in order to better engage their public.



BEYOND THE CODE

Brief presentations from two authorities highlight how some standards committees are working well beyond what is required for compliance with the Code of Conduct and explain how their extended remit works towards building public confidence in their authorities.

Delegates work together to explore how appropriate the actions described would be for their authorities and how they can make a difference to their local community's confidence in local democracy.



COMMUNICATING GOOD NEWS

How do the public know when things are going well in an authority? Newspapers? Word of mouth? Or not at all? This session takes a practical look at how open and transparent authorities communicate with their communities. It also considers, the role of standards committees in improving the relationship between members and the communities they serve.

Delegates are encouraged to share their experiences, both positive and negative, and develop a list of best practice strategies they could employ in their authority to improve public perception.



EARLY WARNING SIGNS

Through case studies, this presentation examines some of the factors, including troubled member relations, which can indicate an authority may be heading for a slip in the behavioural standards of its members and a loss of public confidence. What can be done to prevent this developing further?

Delegates contribute to developing a guide to some of the early warning signs and steps that can be taken to head off further difficulties.



HOW DO YOU MEASURE UP?

This session takes a closer look at the ethical toolkit – an ethical standards 'health-check' that assesses an authority's current ethical position by combining audit, self-audit, questionnaire and tailored workshop elements – developed between the Audit Commission, Improvement and Development Agency and the Standards Board for England.

Delegates are invited to consider how fit for purpose their standards committees are and share ways of developing current practices and identify their own opportunities for improvement.



CPA: INSPECTING AND AUDITING THE ETHICAL DIMENSION

The Audit Commission presents this session, examining how ethical standards and the work of standards committees are assessed to inform inspection judgements, based on comprehensive performance assessments and corporate governance inspections.

Delegates will take the opportunity to gain a better understanding of their role in relation to this topical issue, and take away tips on improvement for their authorities.

12.45 – 14.00

LUNCH



HALL 3

14.00 – 15.00

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15.00 – 15.15

COMFORT BREAK

15.15 – 15.45

THE WAY FORWARD

HALL 1

Patricia Hughes, Deputy Chair, The Standards Board for England

A reflection on the highlights of the past two days and taking the ethical agenda forward.

15.45 – 16.10

OPEN FLOOR TO Q & A

HALL 1

Opportunity for questions and answers. Delegates are able to post questions throughout the event. These will be considered along with contributions from the floor.

16.10 – 16.15

FINAL THOUGHTS

HALL 1

Sir Anthony Holland, Chair, The Standards Board for England

16.15

CLOSE

Refreshments available.

