

Annual Review by the Standards Board for England

Report of the Clerk

For further information about this report please contact Sue Kembrey, Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Fire Authority, on 01952 383200.

1 Purpose of Report

This report briefly outlines the contents of the Annual Review.

2 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report.

3 Background

The Report concentrates on the gradual transfer of the processing of complaints from the Board to local authorities and the Board taking on the role of strategic regulator.

4 Information

In 2006/07 over 55% of complaints were investigated by monitoring officers.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill will pass the responsibility for handling complaints to local standards committees. The Bill is likely to be enacted in the autumn.

The Bill will also clarify the Board's role as a strategic regulator with the responsibility for promoting standards and supporting local authorities.

The Bill will contain a requirement for local standards committees to report periodically to the Board.



The Board has initiated a number of research projects on standards committees, monitoring officers, and the requirements of members. The research reveals

- an acceptance of the importance of high standards,
- support for the Code,
- a belief that standards of ethical behaviour have improved,
- the positive impact of carrying out local investigations and local hearings,
- good relationships and support between standards committees and their monitoring officers.

The Board have worked with the Audit Commission and the Improvement and Development Agency on an 'ethical governance toolkit' which enables local authorities to identify where improvements to the way they are operating need to be made.

They have also worked with the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) on ensuring that the guidance that PAS provides on probity and planning is consistent with the revised Code of Conduct.

5 Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

6 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

7 Equality Impact Assessment

Officers have considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have decided that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising from this report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

8 Appendix

Summary of the Annual Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life

9 Background Papers

The Annual Review 2006-07 produced by the Standards Board for England



Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial		Staff	
Fire Control/Fire Link		Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*



Summary of the Annual Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life 2006

The main activities during the year are set out in the Report:

- A review of Electoral Commission's current mandate. The Committee made numerous recommendations to focus the work of the Commission on regulating political party funding and electoral administration.
- Following up from their previous report on the Ethical Standards Framework for Local Government, the Committee noted the progress made in implementing their recommendations on complaints of breach of the Code of the Conduct being handled locally, the strengthening of the independent composition of Standards Committees, and revisions to the Code of Conduct itself.
- The Committee commissioned a national survey of public attitudes towards conduct in public life which revealed that levels of trust in national politicians remain low.
- It also carried out a review of the seven principles of public life, and will be making recommendations on these, following research carried out on their behalf.
- An examination of the operation of the Code of Ethics and Procedural Guidance for Ministers has been undertaken. Arising from this it was noted that there was still no effective system for the independent investigation of alleged breaches of that Code.
- The Committee had made a number of recommendations on a new Civil Service Code which had largely been accepted, but they still had concerns that the Code had not been placed on a statutory basis.
- It was noted that a review was taking place of the system of allowances and expenses for MPs which it was hoped would help to build public confidence.
- The Committee considered an issue regarding lobbying and All Party Parliamentary Groups, recommending that a register of these Groups be set up to include details and sources of any financial support, and easy public access to information about them be made available. It has been accepted that all publications produced by the Groups should carry details of relevant clients and sponsors.

- Following a number of allegations regarding 'cash for honours', a police investigation is ongoing and the Committee has not expressed a view regarding this, except to comment that an effective and transparent regulatory framework needs to be established to allay public fears and criticism.
- There was considerable concern by the Committee that since the introduction of postal voting on demand there is a growing public perception and evidence that the electoral system is more susceptible to organised electoral fraud. They welcome the changes introduced by the government to deal with this problem but have recommended that other measures be put in place, similar to those in Northern Ireland to combat the issue.
- They have repeated their call for the government to introduce a system of individual registration following the next general election or by 2010 at the latest.
- Concern was expressed by the Committee over the decision of the Serious Fraud Office to discontinue the investigation into the affairs of BAe Systems plc relating to a defence contract. The UK has an international reputation for upholding the highest standards of conduct in public life, and this decision will have a negative impact on this.