

# ***‘Bringing Standards into Focus’***

Standards for England Conference

12-13 October 2009

*(a personal perspective)*

# ‘Focus on the essentials’

(For new members of Standards C'ttees)

- Why have the Code of Conduct?
- Standards Framework
- Role of Standards for England  
(support/providing guidance; and strategic regulator)

# What's new?

- New guidance – quick guides
- New DVD covering local assessment
- Web-based online forum
- Action Plans dealing with LAs, e.g. major issues, 'ethical collapse', etc
- Training exercises
- Changes to Code (covered later)

# New Legislation expected

- Dispensation\*
- Joint committees\*
- Suspension of initial assessment functions  
(power of last resort)

*\*guidance already provided*

# 'State of the Nation'

## ***Rosie Winterton, Minister***

- Conduct and conduct regime continues to be of interest beyond councils
- SCs provide 'ethical well-being'
- More than just ethical police – awareness
- Misconduct damages all, and Standards regime ensures that it does not go unpunished

## ***Bob Chilton, Chair of SfE***

- Standards have become a political issue
- Referred to a Conservative green paper
- Trivial matters – over 50% of allegations dismissed locally
- Over 90% of members support Code
- Most complaints dealt with in 30 days
- Project excellence in SfE resulted in cases cleared in 4 months

## ***Glenys Stacey CE of SfE***

### Statistics:

- 2863 complaints (1:every 25 members)
- $\frac{2}{3}$  of those investigated no breach of code!
- Too high a proportion were no case to answer!
- Proportionality
- This year's hot topics: General election, Revised Code, Risks, Quality, Local costs(?), Vexatious and 'tit for tat'

# Discussion forums/fringe events

- Understanding local assessment/sharing best practice
- Big debate: Local standards framework a force for good or necessary evil?  
(proportionality raised again.....)
- Standards and partnerships
- How can ethical standards improve?
- Sharing good practice of SCs



# Discussion forums, etc (cont'd)

- 'Ethical collapse' – couple of interesting case studies, focused on impact on authority, individuals, reputational damage
- 'Local standards live' – actors performing roles of member/officers, case study
- 'Focus on Code Changes' (next slides)

# ‘Focus on Code changes’

- Draft Code not yet available
- Certain aspects apply to members and their private lives
- One new **General Principle**: ‘You must not bring your office into disrepute by conduct which is a criminal offence’
- ‘Criminal Offence’ – only where a court has **convicted** the member (cautions don’t count for these purposes)

## ‘Focus on Code changes’ (cont’d)

- Fixed penalties, and people going through the court process, even if pleading guilty – don’t count, either
- Some tidying up provisions expected, covering personal/prejudicial interests, gifts and hospitality
- SfE will provide guidance
- Workshop covered three case studies

# Final reflections

- Worthwhile conference
- Interesting, wide range of issues debated
- Proportionality, role of Standards for England, extended role of committees
- Clearly some tensions, and anxieties
- ‘Independence’ of independent members