



Briefing Report No: **121/2009**

Public Agenda Item: **Yes**

Title: **Update on National Developments**

Wards Affected: **All Wards**

To: **Standards Committee**

On: **11 June 2009**

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1. Number of complaints

- 1.1 In the first year of the new local assessment and determination regime, local authorities received approximately 2,800 complaints which is nearly 20 per cent less than received by the Standards Board in the last year of the old regime. The highest percentage of complaints was 42 per cent for alleged failures to declare personal and prejudicial interests.

2. Source of complaints

- 2.1 The source of complaints was:

Members of the public	54%
Members	36%
Officers	4%
Others (primarily parish clerks	
Monitoring officers and MPs	6%

3. Results of initial assessment / referrals subcommittees

- 3.1 The results of initial assessment/referrals subcommittees were:

No further action	53%
Investigation referral	29%
Other action referral	12%
Standards Board referral	6%

4. Results of investigations

- 4.1 Of the complaints referred for investigation, seventy one per cent resulted in a finding by the investigation that the code had been breached and a further four per cent in a finding that the code had been breached but not to such an extent that a hearing could be warranted.

5. Sanctions

- 5.1 An analysis by the Standards Board of the first 86 sanctions imposed by Hearings Subcommittees revealed that 72 included a requirement that the respondent member undertake training, 16 included a requirement that the member issue an apology, 11 members were suspended and a further 18 censured.

6. Emerging issues nationally as highlighted by Standards Board

- (a) Performance of Monitoring Officers – concerns re influence and impact they appear to have in some authorities.
- (b) Dearth of experience of ethical standards matters amongst local authority officers.
- (c) Very high case levels in some authorities, especially those with several parishes.
- (d) Delays in making assessment and review decisions in some authorities.
- (e) Delays in investigation and decision making in some authorities.
- (f) Inappropriate referrals to Standards Board.
- (g) Poor quality of some assessment decisions.
- (h) Poor relations between members, members and the Monitoring Officer, and members and the Standards Committee.
- (i) Composition of Standards Committees.
- (j) Lengthy and high profile investigations.
- (k) Failure of Monitoring Officer to submit complaints to assessment/referral subcommittees.
- (l) A need for Chief Executives and Leaders to profile importance of ethical standards matters.

7. Future development

- (a) The Standards Board intends to issue a short guidance paper on the incorporation of ethical standards by local authorities into their joint working arrangements with other bodies.
- (b) The Standards Board will shortly be issuing a new training DVD on the local assessment process which I will incorporate into our next training meeting.
- (c) The Standards Board intends to develop part of its website as a forum for sharing best practice advice, comments and ideas.
- (d) The Standards Board has identified a need for it to issue training materials on assessments and investigations.

- (e) I have been asked to assist the Standards Board in its Project Excellence Programme and will report on this to our next meeting.

Keith Stevens
Monitoring Officer