



Briefing Report No: **251/2009**

Public Agenda Item: **Yes**

Title: **Public Perception of Ethics**

Wards Affected: **All Wards in Torbay**

To: **Standards Committee**

On: **26 November 2009**

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1. Standards for England has carried out research on “public perceptions of ethics” and produced the attached Report.
  2. Amongst its key findings are:
    - “(a) Those within local Government i.e. officers and members, have, when compared to the general public, a far higher confidence in the ability of Local Government to uncover poor behaviour and deal with it appropriately. (5.5).
    - (b) The Local Standards Framework has had a positive impact on Local Government. Each year, the survey carried out by the Standards Board for England has revealed that Members and Officers consider that Members’ standards of behaviour have improved. (5.6).
    - (c) “Informing the general public about the existence of the Local Standards Framework and the role of Standards Committees may be the key to increased confidence in local authorities’ ability to uncover and deal with breaches in standards. There is much work to be done on increasing the public’s confidence in the accountability mechanisms of local government. (5.9)
    - (d) The proportion of the public believing that local Councillors tell the truth all or most of the time is double (i.e. 28 percent) the proportion believing that to be so for politicians generally and Government Ministers. (6.4)
    - (e) Members and Officers are more than twice as likely, compared to the public, to think that a Councillor would be dealt with appropriately if it was uncovered that their behaviour had fallen short of the expected standard. (6.26)”
  3. The Committee will recall that at the four training sessions run by the Monitoring Officer last year, considerable emphasis was placed on the importance of promoting trust and confidence in local Councillors in order to help increase voter turnout, levels of public participation and engagement in consultation

exercises etc, and create interest in civic matters and democratic systems.

4. At its last meeting the Committee agreed to support initiatives aimed at improving public awareness of the ethical standards framework following consideration of the results of a questionnaire prepared by the Monitoring Officer. Since then, the Chairman and the Monitoring Officer have produced a variety of statements which have been sent (a) to the Council's employees and used for new employee induction sessions, (b) to the media for publication in a way which should increase the public's confidence in the authority, its ethical standards and the processes under which it operates.
5. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to consider the attached and decide on any further measures that should be taken in accordance with next year's work programme which is the subject of another report on this agenda.

**Keith Stevens**  
**Monitoring Officer**

**Appendices**

Appendix 1

Standards Board for England Public Perception of Ethics