

Standards Committee

14 August 2007

Standards Board For England Annual Review 2006-07



Report of Lesley Davies, Acting Director (Corporate Services) and Monitoring Officer

Purpose of the Report

1. To advise Members about the publication of the Annual Review of the Standards Board for England 2006 – 07 entitled 'To Higher Standards'.

Overview

2. The Review outlines the progress that has been made during 2006-07 in developing a locally based ethical system, and explains the part the Standards Board has played in moving this process forward.

3. During 2006-07 the review of the Code of Conduct was completed. The majority of the Standards Board's recommendations were implemented leading, in their view, to the introduction of an improved, less restrictive Code of Conduct in May 2007. The Board has hosted a series of Roadshows and produced guidance on the new Code for members.

4. The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill is also on course to become law by Autumn 2007. The Bill will reverse the centralism of the original Local Government Act 2000 and make standards a truly local issue. The key provision from the Standards Board viewpoint is that local standards committees will be handed the responsibility for receiving complaints and deciding whether they should be investigated.

5. This in turn will clarify the Standards Board's new role as a strategic regulator, with the responsibility to monitor and promote standards and to support and oversee local authorities in the application of the Code. The Board will only deal with those cases that can't be handled locally because of conflicts of interest or because they raise issues of particular importance. This will build on the trend which in 2006-07, saw over half of all cases investigated locally.

6. The Board reported that in 2006-07, despite a challenging and eventful year they met their most important targets, including:

- 100% of telephone enquiries received a substantive response within 2 working days (excluding case related issues).
- 91% of correspondence received a substantive response within 5 working days of receipt (excluding case related issues).
- An average of nine days from receipt of allegation to notification.
- 90% of cases referred for investigation completed within 6 months.

7. The review also supplies details of the key findings of four major research projects, commissioned by the Board and completed during 2006-07. The first project looked at components of an ethical environment; that is to say the conditions that need to be created locally in order for high ethical standards to be maintained. The second focused on the role of the Standards Board; how it is perceived by members and what members want from the Board.

8. The third project provided a snapshot of how local standards committees and monitoring officers are performing and how they are adapting to their changing roles. The fourth was an investigation of stakeholders' perceptions of the culture and values of the Standards Board. (Further details are available on the Board's website www.standardsboard.gov.uk).

9. In conclusion the Board hopes its review strikes the right balance between welcoming the positive changes that have continued to take place over the last twelve months and recognising the scale of the challenge that local authorities still face. The Board recognises that rigorously upholding high standards is not a task for the faint-hearted and emphasises its commitment to providing members with all the support and guidance they need as they adapt to their new role as local champions of ethical standards in 2007-08 and beyond.

10. A copy of the document has been placed in the Members Resource Centre for information.

Conclusion

11. Members are asked to note the report.