



## **STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

### **ANNUAL REPORT 2010/11**

#### **Changes to the Standards Committee**

The government set out its intention to abolish the 'Standards Board Regime' in the coalition agreement published in May 2010.

The changes will be brought into effect through the Localism Bill which was introduced to Parliament on December 13, 2010.

The House of Commons debated its main principles on 17 January 2011 and the Bill is now undergoing revisions at the Committee stage.

It is anticipated that Standards for England will cease to investigate complaints in late 2011 and will be formally abolished in early 2012.

In summary the government's proposals are:

- to abolish Standards for England
- to remove the First-tier Tribunal's (Local Government Standards in England) jurisdiction over member conduct
- to remove the national Code of Conduct for councillors and the requirement to have a standards committee
- to allow councils to choose whether or not they wish to have a local code or a standards committee
- to create a criminal offence relating to failure to register or declare interests

Councils will be required to consult their electorate as to whether they intend to abolish the code of conduct or revise it for their Members.

#### **Registration and Declaration of Interests**

Regulations will require an authority's monitoring officer to establish and maintain a register of members' interests. Failure to register or disclose an interest or to take part in business of the authority to which an interest applies, without reasonable excuse, will be a criminal offence.

The penalty that the magistrates' court may impose upon conviction is a fine of up to £5,000 and an order disqualifying the person from being a member of a relevant authority for up to five years.

**Council, 20 July 2011**

The conduct of politicians - whether national or local - is coming under ever closer scrutiny. Members will be aware that the former Leader of Essex County Council, for example, was recently sentenced to a term of imprisonment for falsely claiming expenses, albeit as member of the House of Lords. Although the over-prescriptive standards regime is being abolished, the need for Members to maintain the highest level of personal conduct and integrity will remain, reinforced by the risk of imprisonment if interests are not declared. Maintaining high standards of conduct will remain a priority."