

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

7 JULY 2010

LATEST NEWS FROM STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND

Report from: Deborah Upton, Monitoring Officer

Author: Peter Holland, Committee Co-ordinator

Summary

This report advises the Committee of the latest information in relation to Standards for England (SfE) and the implications of the proposed Decentralisation and Localism Bill as announced in the Queen's speech on 25 May 2010.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 This Committee has responsibility to promote and maintain high standards of conduct by all Councillors and co-opted members including the church and parent governor representatives who serve on the Children and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.2 In order to fulfil this role effectively the Committee needs to be up to date with latest SfE guidance and associated issues.

2. Background

- 2.1 Standards for England's main task is to ensure that standards of ethical conduct are maintained across authorities in England. One of Standards for England's key functions is to provide guidance for authorities when implementing the Code of Conduct with the aim of helping members, monitoring officers and Standards Committees to successfully interpret the Code of Conduct.
- 2.2 A range of guidance and toolkits can be found on the Standards for England website (www.standardsforengland.gov.uk). Regular information bulletins are also published on the website.

3. Latest SfE news

- 3.1 The Government announced in the recent Queen's Speech that the proposed Decentralisation and Localism bill will include proposals to "abolish the Standards Board regime". At Appendix 1 is a letter from Dr Robert Chilton Chair of Standards for England that he asked to be circulated to all Standards Committee Chairmen.

3.2 The Monitoring Officer will keep Members informed of developments when clear details of the scope and implications of the proposals are made available. In the meantime the committee is required to continue with its statutory duties including the assessment of complaints.

3.3 Postponement of quarterly monitoring return

Each authority has to complete a quarterly monitoring return to support Standards for England's role in ensuring the effectiveness of local standards arrangements. The next return would have been due in early July.

As the Government has recently announced that it intends to bring forward legislation to abolish the Standards Board regime, Standards for England are beginning a process to review their activities and to update their Business Plan.

During this review, Standards for England have decided to postpone the quarterly monitoring and the next return that authorities would have submitted during July is no longer required.

3.4 The Standards for England 2010 Annual Assembly

The Standards for England 2010 Annual Assembly, 'A place for Standards' due to take place on 18 October 2010, has been cancelled. Standards for England has given assurances that a full refund policy is in place for those who have booked places.

4. Risk management

4.1 Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community. This report aims to ensure that the Standards Committee is kept apprised of current legislation, guidance and best practice and to minimise the risk of Medway's procedures and practice relating to the Member Code of Conduct becoming out of date.

5. Financial and legal implications

5.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

5.2 The Standards Committee and standards system and procedures are requirements of the Local Government Act 2000, as amended by subsequent legislation, most recently by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The Committee is recommended to note the contents of the report.

Lead officer contact

Peter Holland, Committee Co-ordinator,
Telephone 01634 332011 Email: peter.holland@medway.gov.uk

Background papers

Statement from Bob Chilton, Chair and Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive of Standards for England – 28 May 2010