

REPORT OF THE CHAIR OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

THE LOCALISM ACT 2011 AND THE STANDARDS REGIME

As Members will be aware, the Localism Act will abolish the Standards Regime and pass the responsibility for all Standards matters back to local authorities.

The Government expects the Standards Board for England will cease its regulatory functions on 31 January 2012, and that the Board will be abolished no later than 31 March 2012. Any complaints being dealt with by the Board on that date will be transferred back to the authority that originated the complaint. The local authority in question will then be under an obligation to handle the case using the local elements of the current regime, namely the statutory standards committee.

The Government envisage that the remaining local elements of the current regime, including statutory standards committees with the power to suspend councillors, will be abolished on 1 July 2012.

From 1 July forward, all Standards matters – including consideration and determination of outstanding complaints made during the period the Standards Board regime was operating - will be the responsibility of local authorities, to be handled under the new arrangements. 1 July will also see the new standards arrangements, which include a 'Nolan-based' code, the involvement of an independent person in allegations of misconduct, and a new criminal offence for failing to declare or register interests, coming into force.

The Standards Committee at Blackburn with Darwen will be concentrating on consultation and subsequently producing some recommendations for the Council to consider when deciding its own local arrangements.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE UPDATE

At the most recent meeting of the Standards Committee on 5th December 2011, the Committee considered a report on the Localism Act 2011 and its implications for the Council, and received a presentation from Asad Laher, the Deputy Monitoring Officer. The clear message that came out of the meeting was that when considering future arrangements it was essential that cross party consultation be undertaken ahead of the production of any recommendations.

At the meeting, discussions also focussed on Pre Determination and Predisposition, and the Planning and Highways Committee Member Referral Scheme. Members of the Committee also received an update on complaints since the last meeting.