



## **Report to Standards Committee**

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**Subject: Fifth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees  
- 16/17 October 2006 - ICC Birmingham**

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The Fifth Annual Assembly was attended by the Monitoring Officer, the Deputy Monitoring Officer and Mr John Baggaley, Independent Member of the Standards Committee over the course of the two-day event.

The title for the Assembly was “Bridging the Gap towards Effective Local Regulation” as the Conference recognised that it was being held at a time of change with a revised Code of Conduct and local arrangements for receiving filtering and investigating complaints on the horizon.

The programme was designed to be of practical relevance to the delegates in helping each authority to “bridge the gap” between where they were at that point in time and where they needed to be in the future to deliver effectively on the revised standards framework.

Phil Woolas, MP, the Minister of Local Government and Community Cohesion opened the Conference by setting out his proposals for the future of the ethical framework. The thrust of the proposals was that the standards regime would be more locally based to ensure that responsibility was taken at the right level and that the Standards Board for England would move to a more strategic role.

A revised draft Code of Conduct would be issued in the near future to enable the new Code of Conduct to be in place for the local elections due to take place on 3 May 2007.

The revised Code of Conduct would be designed to be more user friendly and would incorporate the recommendations of the Standards Board for England’s consultation on the review of the Code of Conduct as analysed by researchers from the University of Teeside. Those recommendations were reported to this Committee on 7 October 2005.

The more strategic role for Standards Board for England would involve the Board in providing training and guidance and only undertaking investigations on a more limited basis. The Standards Board for England would continue to increase the number of cases delegated for local investigation and hearing.

Standards Committees should have a strong independent chair with a balance of members from the political parties and further independent members to ensure democratic ownership of the process.

It was recognised that there would be resource implications for the Monitoring Officer. The resources available to the Monitoring Officer would become increasingly stretched as more complaints were to be filtered and investigated at a local level. There needed to be robustness and consistency in investigations with the possibility of co-operation and joint working between local authorities identified as a method of dealing with investigations and hearings in smaller authorities.

The workshops concentrated on holding effective investigations and hearings and the revised Code with particular reference to declaration of interests. Representatives from authorities across the Country spoke of their personal experiences, some more positive than others, in dealing with hearings and investigations. A common theme was the impact such work had had upon the members of the Standards Committees and officers involved.

### **Recommendation**

Members are requested to note the report.