



Report to Standards Committee

Date: 30 November 2007

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**Subject: Sixth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees
- 15/15 October 2007 - ICC Birmingham**

The Sixth Annual Assembly was attended by Ms Helen Barrington, 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 “Down to detail: Making local regulation work” and was designed to help public authorities tackle the key issues raised by the revised Code of Conduct and the impending introduction of the local filter.

The programme was designed to be of practical relevance to the delegates in mapping out the steps to be taken to put the local filter and the revised code into action.

Parmjit Dhanda, MP, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department of Communities and Local Government addressed the Conference and described how responsibilities across local government are moving back to where they belonged – at a Local level. The minister said that following the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act [which received Royal Assent on 30 October 2007], there will be consultation on the regulations operation of the new system. The minister recognised that there are concerns about resources and that the system will bring new challenges. Although he did not address the issue of additional resources, he did point out that standards committees and monitoring officers will be aided by the support and guidance of the Standards Board, and the revised Code of Conduct, will be looked at again early next year to make sure it is absolutely fit for purpose.

Following on from the Fifth Annual Assembly last year, this conference explored the Local Filter in more detail. The Local Filter aims to promote local ownership of the conduct regime by enabling local standards committees' to make initial assessments of all misconduct allegations, and to investigate and determine all but the most serious cases of misconduct. The Standards Board will have a strong strategic, advisory and monitoring role, and will retain responsibility for investigating the most serious misconduct allegations.

The results of the Local Filter Pilot Scheme were reported. The first pilot aimed to measure how authorities carried out their decision making. The results indicated that Standards Committees may adopt a lower threshold than the Standards Board and

might recommend alternative measures to investigation, for example member training.

The second pilot investigated joint arrangement, examining the scope for Standards Committees working together and the impact this would have on resources. The pilot offered 4 different types of joint working structures with most participants preferring a joint structure handling the local filter function. Feedback from delegates attending the conference supports the use of joint arrangements.

A third pilot is planned which will develop the Standards Board's future monitoring and auditing arrangements. The aim is to create an online information return system for monitoring officers and provide local authorities with their own complaint tracking system.

The breakout sessions covered a wide variety of topics in order to seek to prepare delegates for the changes expected in April 2008. Areas dealt with included: Investigations; Managing the Filter; Cracking the Revised code; Mediation; Hearings; Sanctions; Managing Communications and Engaging Leaders.

More detailed information about the conference is available at www.standardsboard.gov.uk

Recommendation

Members are requested to note the report.