

Putting the public in the picture

What does your authority's website say about standards?

Take this short quiz and see how your authority scores.

1. How easy is it to find anything to do with the standards committee on your website?

Score 15 for a mention of the standards committee or standards and ethics on your home page.

Score 10 for a link to a page dealing with the standards committee or standards and ethics on a page you reach by following a link from the home page.

Score 5 if, when you search for 'standards' or 'ethics', the top result takes you to a page about the standards committee. (Note: standards committee papers which are published online without any additional information don't count.)

2. Does the standards committee have its own page or section on the website?

Score 10 for yes.

3. Is there a clear explanation of what the standards committee does on the website? Is it up to date?

Score 15 for a good explanation (between 50 and 150 words) of the role of the committee.

Score 10 if the explanation is longer or shorter than that.

But **subtract 5** from that score if it's out of date – for example, if it has the wrong person named as chair, or hasn't been updated to reflect the work the committee has been doing since May 2008.

Score 2 bonus points for including frequently asked questions or something similar.

4. Can you find the names of standards committee members?

Score 15 for all members' names

Score 10 for the chair only

Score 5 for local authority committee members only

5. Does the website feature information about any proactive work the committee has done to raise the profile of standards, or any information about the standards committee's work programme?

Score 15 for articles and online access to committee papers

Score 10 for an annual report

Score 5 for online access to committee papers only

6. Does the website include decision notices and other information to publicise how your authority has handled complaints?

Score 15 for stories and/or press releases about serious cases, published decision notices, and information about the assessment process and decisions.

Score 10 for decision notices and information about assessment decisions only.

Score 5 for decision notices only.

Subtract 10 from your score if your authority has heard cases, but no information is available.

7. Is the Code of Conduct for your authority published on the website?

Score 15 for a page devoted to the Code of Conduct, including an explanation about what it is and how it works.

Score 10 if the Code is published online, but without further information.

8. Is it possible to find out how to complain about an elected member on your website?

Score 15 for a specific reference to how to complain about a member, and the ability to submit complaints online.

Score 10 for a specific reference to how to complain about a member, giving full details of how to phone or write in with a complaint.

Subtract 15 from your score if your website still gives Standards for England as the first port of call for complaints.

Subtract 5 if a web user cannot find information on how to complain by typing 'complaints' into the site's search function.

9. Is there a link to the Standards for England website?

Score 15 for yes, providing it works.

Score 10 for an explanation of Standards for England's role, but no link.

Score 1 for a link that doesn't work.

10. Does your website promote the value of high standards in public behaviour?

Score 15 for articles, statements from the leader or chief executive, or other materials linking the authority to a culture of high ethical and behavioural standards.

Score an additional 10 points for publishing other ethical governance policies or protocols online.

How did you score?

- 0 – 25** Online information about your authority's standards is probably minimal or non-existent – but there are plenty of ways to improve. Speak to your authority's communications team and ask them how the authority's website can be used to get the standards message across. At the very least, start with the bare essentials: make sure that the site includes clear and easily searchable information about how to make a complaint and a clear explanation of what the standards committee does.
- 26 – 90** It sounds like your authority is starting to get the standards message across online, providing basic information. You might, however, be missing opportunities to provide more user-friendly content, such as an online complaints form or easily downloadable materials, so talk to your authority's web team to find out how the site can be used more creatively. Remember also that a website is a promotional tool as well as an information source. There are lots of opportunities for proactive online PR, such as links to press release, articles and comment and regular updates on the standards committee's work. And check that your web content scores on quality as well as quantity. Is the material fully up to date? Is the information easy for someone with no prior knowledge to find and understand?
- 91 – 165** Your standards committee is probably well-represented on your authority's website and, if your score is at the higher end of this category, the information available is of a high quality and includes proactive promotion of standards issues. There's always room for improvement, however! Make sure that you're making use of every opportunity to promote the work of the standards committee, and make it clear that standards are key to your authority's governance. Use your website to showcase your authority's commitment to high ethical standards as a whole, and include positive, proactive material as well as case outcomes and committee papers. Make content interactive and engaging as possible – include links to other useful pages and offer web users a chance to give feedback.