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To: Standards Committee Chairs

30 November 2010

Dear colleagues

I would like to draw your attention to a letter sent to me from the Local Government Minister, Bob Neill MP about the Government proposals for the future of standards in local government. This letter has now been published on both our and CLG's website.

As you will know, since the Coalition Government announced its intention 'to abolish the Standards Board regime', there has been little detail available about what this would mean in practice. The letter from the Minister now sets out the proposition in greater detail.

In brief, you will see that the proposal is that, alongside the abolition of Standards for England, the First Tier Tribunal (Local Government Standards in England) would lose jurisdiction over member conduct. The Government also intends to remove the national Code of Conduct for councillors and the requirement to have a standards committee. Instead it would be for councils themselves to choose whether or not they wish to have a local code or a standards committee (which would be an 'ordinary committee' of the authority and therefore not need to have independent representation). Any standards committee would no longer have the power to suspend a member. There would also be a new criminal offence created relating to failure to register or declare interests.

In the meantime, you will see that these proposals will need primary legislation. Our understanding is that the Decentralisation and Localism Bill, which would contain such provisions, will be introduced to Parliament by the end of the year. The current framework will continue in place until such time as the bill receives Royal Assent and the relevant provisions are enacted. Our understanding is that

this is likely to be some time in the summer or autumn next year, although exact timing will obviously depend upon Parliamentary progress of the bill as a whole. Consequently, in the meantime, as the Minister recognises, standards committees will continue to have a legal requirement to operate as now and, in particular, to continue to consider any allegations.

You will see that the Minister's letter sets out, in some detail, the transition arrangements that they intend to apply to any cases which will be in the pipeline at the end of the framework. While these proposals obviously depend on Parliamentary approval, in brief, Standards for England would cease to handle cases from an Appointed Day (likely to be two months after the coming into force of the provisions). At that stage, all cases still open would be passed back to the relevant local authority to complete. Any cases with the Tribunal at that stage would be completed but no further references could be made to it. Any cases being handled locally would need to be completed locally after that date by the standards committee, with no power to pass them to Standards for England or the Tribunal, but no new allegations could be made after the Appointed Day.

I hope that you find this helpful.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Chilton', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert Chilton  
Chair