

STANDARDS COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH 3 SEPTEMBER 2008

Members Present:

Mr S Boast (Chair), Ms. B Fearon, Mr O Menendez, Ms. A Smith, Mr D Whiles
Councillors Miners, Todd and Trueman
Parish Councillors Batty and Evans

Officers Present:

Helen Edwards, Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer
Carol Tilley, Senior Cabinet Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Murphy.

2. Declarations of Interest

2.2 Councillor Todd declared an interest in agenda item 4.4 as Chairman of the Council's Planning and Environmental Protection Committee.

3. Minutes of Meeting held 5 June 2008

3.1 The minutes of the meeting held 5 June 2008 were approved as an accurate record, subject to the addition of CRB checks to the Work Programme referred to at paragraph 5.5.

• Additional and urgent item:

At this point in the meeting the Chairman announced that he wished to raise an additional item. He drew Members' attention to an article which currently appeared on the Peterborough Liberal Democrat's website in respect of the Council's approach to Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks for elected Members. The article made the presumption that the Standards Committee would not support the proposal to introduce CRB checks for elected Members and that it was factually inaccurate regarding Councillor Trueman's conduct at the previous meeting when the matter had been debated. It was the Chairman's view that this article had not been helpful and this opinion was supported by the Committee.

Councillor Trueman agreed to pass on the view of the Standards Committee in this regard to Peterborough Liberal Democrats group members.

4. Monitoring Officer's Report

The Committee received a report from the Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer for consideration. Members noted the report and discussion was held as follows:

4.1 Actions since last meeting:

Members were asked to note that a date had been set for the training session which would focus on the process for the local assessment of complaints against elected Members. This event was specifically for Members of the Standards Committee and would be held on Monday 20 October 2008 from 6.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. Further details would be circulated in due course.

The Chairman requested that elected Members of the Standards Committee ensure that their respective substitutes attended this session if possible.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that a separate training session, which would be open to all elected Members, had been scheduled for Tuesday 30 September at 6.00 p.m. This event would focus on the new regime for assessing complaints against elected Members and would include a refresher session on ethics and probity. Invitations would be sent to all Members as soon as possible.

The Committee noted that details of the new regime in respect of complaints against elected Members would be submitted to the Parish Council Liaison Committee at its meeting of 1 October 2008. The presentation would focus particularly on how the new arrangements relate to Parish Councillors.

4.2 Referrals / Complaints

Members were advised that no complaints had been received in respect of the first quarter period up to 30 June. The next quarterly report was due to be submitted early in October and this would record that two complaints had been received. Both complaints had been heard by the Assessment Sub Committee – one had been passed to the Fraud and Investigation Manager for investigation on behalf of the Monitoring Officer and the other complaint would not be pursued.

The Chairman invited feedback from those members of the Committee who had, to date, been involved in the Assessment Sub Committee. It was considered that the process had structure and had worked well, and was felt to have been fair. Members noted the need for confidentiality in all matters related to the complaints and referrals procedure and were mindful that the process was in its infancy and would become clearer with experience.

4.3 Work Programme

CRB Checks for Elected Members -

Members were advised that the policy in respect of CRB checks for officers was currently under review, and that clarification had been received from the HR department advising that the introduction of a 'blanket' policy for checks with regard to elected Members would not be recommended. Instead, a risk assessment should be undertaken to determine whether a check was required and if so, at what level (standard or enhanced).

It was noted that the first draft of the policy in respect of officers was due to be considered by Employment Committee at its meeting of 18 September 2008, prior to seeking final endorsement from Employment Committee at its meeting of 20 November. It was therefore suggested that the final draft version be considered in detail by the Standards Committee at its next meeting on 5 November in order to agree the Committee's formal response on the policy, prior to its submission to Employment Committee.

Members **AGREED** this approach, which would enable the Committee's comments to be incorporated into the policy, prior to its approval by Employment Committee and subsequent adoption at full Council.

The following points were considered:

- The draft policy proposed that officers were subject to CRB re-checks at three yearly intervals. It would be necessary to assess whether this would be a practical approach in respect of elected Members, who were normally elected for a four year term of office;
- The responsibility for verification of documents;
- The responsibility for carrying out risk assessments in order to determine which Members would require a CRB check and responsibility for issuing the results;
- The course of action which would be taken in the case of a positive CRB result and where documents detailing records and results should be held;

Following discussion, it was **RESOLVED**:

- (i) To recommend that the frequency of re-checks should align with Members' appointments to specific Committees/Panels. Membership of such bodies was subject to change each year following Annual Council re-checks and therefore rechecks should be role orientated;
- (ii) To recommend that a member of staff within the Council's Members' Services Unit receive relevant training in order to enable them to formally verify documents;
- (iii) To recommend that the responsibility for undertaking risk assessments to determine which elected Members (by virtue of their position) should be subject to a CRB check lie with the Monitoring Officer and the Principal Democratic Services Officer, in conjunction with a senior professional officer from the relevant service area;
- (iv) That the right of appeal should be built in to the procedure;
- (v) That the Council's Monitoring Officer (or the relevant lead HR officer) should be responsible for issuing the results of the check;
- (vi) That responsibility for advising an elected Member that his/her check had received a positive result rest with the Monitoring Officer and that the relevant Group Leader be advised;
- (vii) Records and results of all CRB checks should be held by the HR department.

4.4. **Planning Committee Voting Analysis**

The Committee noted the Voting Analysis in respect of meetings of the Planning and Environmental Protection Committee held 3 June 2008, 17 June 2008, 16 July 2008 and 29 July 2008 respectively.

5. Agenda Planning

- 5.1 Members noted that the next meeting (scheduled for 5 November) would focus on finalising the Committee's response to the draft CRB policy. Committee members were asked to give specific thought to how the Standards Committee might properly support Council in promoting ethical standards and local democracy.
- 5.2 It was **AGREED** to cancel the interim meeting scheduled for 15 October 2008, however Members would retain this date in their diaries – this date could then be utilised to hold a meeting of the Assessment Sub Committee, should the need arise.

Meeting closed at 8.25 p.m.

STANDARDS COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 4
5 November 2008	PUBLIC REPORT

Contact Officer(s):	Helen Edwards, Solicitor to the Council	Tel: 01733 452539
---------------------	---	----------------------

R E C O M M E N D A T I O N S
FROM : SOLICITOR TO THE COUNCIL & MONITORING OFFICER
That the Standards Committee:
1. notes the contents of this report and associated appendices.

REPORT FROM THE MONITORING OFFICER

1. ACTIONS SINCE LAST MEETING

1.1 Training on handling of complaints.

Since the last Standards Committee meeting in September, a further training session has taken place for members of the Standards Committee, in relation to handling complaints, and in particular, dealing with hearings. The training was delivered by Claire Lefort of Weightmans solicitors (formerly of the Standards Board). The event was well attended and well received. Members may wish to consider as part of their work programme any additional training needs.

1.2 Evening seminar on new Standards regime and refresher on ethics and Probity

An e mail was sent to all members on 12 August giving a brief explanation of the new regime. Members were asked to indicate if they would be interested in attending a seminar explaining the new regime, to give an indication of numbers. The original date was postponed, because of a very disappointing response from members of the Council. A new date is being organised, and all members of Standards Committee are asked to support and promote this amongst their colleagues, to ensure maximum attendance.

1.3 Parish Council Liaison Committee

A presentation was given to the Parish Council Liaison Committee at its meeting on 1 October 2008 in respect of the new regime, at the request of the committee.

2. REFERRALS / COMPLAINTS

2.1 Quarterly return

The second quarterly return for the period ending 30 September 2008 was sent to the Standards Committee by the due date, showing that two complaints had been received in the relevant period.

One report was referred for investigation and is awaiting the investigating officer's report by 12 November 2008. In respect of the second complaint the sub-committee's decision was that there was no evidence of a breach of the Code, and no request for a review was received after this was communicated.

One further complaint has been received which, at the time of writing is being referred to an assessment sub-committee. A verbal update will be given at the meeting, with details confirmed in the minutes, and the next quarterly report.

3. WORK PROGRAMME

3.1 CRB Checks for Elected Members.

- 3.1.1 The policy for officers was updated following confirmation by Employment Committee on 18 September.
- 3.1.2 Human Resources are now working on a further amendment as part of their review of all policies, to ensure that policy documents are separated from procedures. It is expected that the second revision of the procedure will be presented to Employment Committee at its meeting on 8 January 2009.
- 3.1.3 In the meantime, the current draft of the new policy is attached at **Appendix 1**, with track changed amendments suggesting how the policy should relate to members. This is for discussion at the Standards Committee meeting on 5 November, following which it will be circulated to members of Scrutiny Committee for comment, before being included in a report to Cabinet for its meeting on 1 December, as a recommendation of the Standards Committee.
- 3.1.4 The attached draft has been prepared in accordance with the views of members as expressed at the previous Standards Committee meeting, and at the Scrutiny Committee on 29 September.

3.2 Consultation on new Code of Conduct

- 3.2.1 The government has issued a consultation paper on which responses are due by Wednesday 24 December 2008. It is the next in a series of Communities in Control consultation documents following the publication of the Local Government Empowerment White Paper, *Communities in Control: Real people, real power*, on 9 July, and building on work still in progress from the 2006 White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*. A copy of the consultation is attached at **Appendix 2**.
- 3.2.2 The paper invites views on proposals for revising the Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2007 and the Relevant Authorities (General Principles) Order 2001. It also seeks views on the proposed introduction of a model code of conduct for local government employees. Particular questions on which we would welcome comments are summarised at **Annex A** to the paper (*shown at p.30 of the consultation document*).
- 3.2.3 It is proposed that the Standards Committee works through the questions in the consultation paper at its meeting on 5 November with a view to sending in its response.

3.3 Consultation on Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

3.3.1 A further consultation paper is expected at the end of October 2008. At the time of producing this report, it has not yet been published.

3.3.2 It is proposed that if this consultation is available for the meeting on 5 November, the Monitoring Officer will report verbally to the Committee in respect of the timescale for a response, and whether this matter can be dealt with at a subsequent meeting.

4. PLANNING COMMITTEE VOTING ANALYSIS

The Planning Committee Voting Analysis is attached at **Appendix 3**.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific financial implications to this report.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

These are dealt with in the body of the report.

7. WARD COUNCILLORS

The contents of this report are not ward specific.

Background Papers

In accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985, background papers used in the preparation of this report were:-

None

Criminal Records & Employment of Ex-Offenders policy

Purpose of the Policy

The purpose of this policy is to facilitate the protection of the public and service users, especially children and vulnerable adults, as well as council property / assets / staff etc. by defining the use of criminal record information in the selection of persons involved in service delivery. The policy also relates to elected members, and their selection to fulfil roles within the Council, such as committee membership.

Deleted: .

Deleted:

All Managers must read, and familiarise themselves with the contents of this document. It is also recommended that all Members familiarise themselves with it.

The council has a statutory duty of care towards vulnerable members of society. The council will carry out this duty of care with due regard to all other relevant legislation.

Scope

This policy includes recruitment and other decisions taken using crime related information in respect of: -

- existing employees who work with children and/or vulnerable adults
- prospective employees who would be employed to work with children and/or vulnerable adults
- the re-checking of previously checked relevant employees
- volunteers working with children and/or vulnerable adults
- licensed taxi-drivers
- foster-carers
- contractors working with children and/or vulnerable adults
- agency workers/interims working with children and/or vulnerable adults
- school transport providers
- elected Members
- others involved in council service provision where children and/or vulnerable adults are involved.

Formatted: Bullets and Numbering

Where the term employee/applicant/member is used, the principles of this policy may also apply to others engaged in services provided by or for the council.

Deleted:

This policy applies to all Peterborough City Council services as far as possible. However, a different procedure may be necessary for certain areas, e.g. those roles based in schools and who are subject to procedures involving governing bodies. In these circumstances, governing bodies are recommended to adopt the principles of this policy and procedure into their individual school policies.

This policy covers information whether (a) obtained from the Criminal Records Bureau, (b) from other checks, or (c) when disclosed by an Individual.

Peterborough City Council is a registered body for carrying out Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosures and operates some limited services to external bodies. Some checks related to council services are undertaken by other registered bodies, (e.g. 'Educational Personnel Management').

Principles

As a result of Part V of the Police Act 1997, the CRB acts as a central access point not only to criminal records information, but also to the statutory lists which list people considered unsuitable to work with children and vulnerable adults.

The council must be particularly careful to enquire into the character and background of applicants for appointment to posts involving contact with children aged less than 18 years. It is therefore essential that in making an application, applicants disclose whether they have ever been convicted of a criminal offence or cautioned and if so for what offence(s). The manager should make clear via the job description and job pack if the post is exempt from the provisions of section 4(2) of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 by virtue of the Rehabilitation of Offenders (1074) (exceptions) order 1975 and the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (exceptions) (Amendment) Order 1986 the Police Act 1997 as amended by part V of the Protection of Children Act 1999.

Posts working with Children or Vulnerable Adults or meeting other exemptions are defined within the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, and are described as 'exempted', which means disclosure applications can be made.

When seeking to recruit people for posts that are **exempted** under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act, the advertisement and / or job information available for all candidates must make it clear that the post requires the disclosure of all criminal record information, including details and dates of 'spent' convictions, cautions, reprimands and final warnings. Where the post is subject to Enhanced Disclosure, other relevant non-conviction information such as police enquiries and pending prosecutions should also be asked for.

When seeking to recruit people for posts that are **not exempted** under the Rehabilitation of Offenders act the advertisement and / or job information must make it clear that criminal convictions will be taken into account only when they are relevant to the post. It should be explained that applicants are not required to disclose convictions that are 'spent' under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. Cautions, reprimands and final warnings are considered 'spent' immediately they are given.

Failure to disclose convictions on an application form may be considered a disciplinary offence and action taken against the employee.

[In respect of elected members, the Monitoring Officer will arrange for a risk assessment to be carried out as to which roles within the Council require the Member nominated to that position to have a CRB check.](#)

Types of disclosures

There are three types of disclosures. Only line managers will have sufficient in-depth knowledge of their own posts to allow them to decide which the appropriate level of check to apply is. [For elected members, the Monitoring Officer will determine the appropriate level of check to be carried out.](#) HR are able to provide advice on the criteria and will proactively advise managers if they are checking posts that do not appear to meet the criteria, and/or are being checked at the wrong level. Some roles may also be ruled inadmissible by the CRB or there may be a suggested level, which will generally need to be followed.

This must be carefully managed. If an inappropriately high level of check for the role is requested, there could be a breach of the Data Protection Act and the terms of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. However if an inappropriately low level of check is requested the council could be failing in its duty of care for the protection of children and/or vulnerable adults. If a manager is unsure of which check to request they should always consult HR for further advice.

CRB policy: Approved: XXXX
Effective: XXXX
Published: XXXX

Draft 1 - Human Resources
Peterborough City Council
Page 2 of 11

Applications for Standard and/or Enhanced Disclosures can only be made by the employer (PCC). Applications to the CRB must be made with the express agreement of the individual concerned, and signed by both the applicant and the registered body. Applicants receive their own copy of the disclosure, though this does not include any additional police information.

In general, the assessment of which type of disclosure is relevant should have regard to:

- job descriptions and person specifications
- the level of supervision the post receives
- [for elected Members, the terms of reference of the committee in question](#)
- the degree of contact with children and/or vulnerable adults.

Formatted: Bullets and Numbering

Completion & Checking of Disclosure requests

The disclosure applicant will be required to submit the completed CRB Disclosure Application Form and relevant original documentation in person to the verifier. The verifier will check the CRB Disclosure Application Form and check the original documentation and then forward the CRB Disclosure Application Form to a currently approved Peterborough City Council CRB signatory for counter signing before submission to the CRB.

It is the responsibility of the appointing manager / [Monitoring Officer](#) to:

- ensure that the appropriate level of check is obtained and
- that the disclosure application form is completed correctly
- ensure that there has been no oversight in the completion of the form or in verification of the form

The government lists will be checked as part of a standard or enhanced disclosure check provided the correct options have been ticked on the form.

Commencement of duties

Applicants should not commence work or service provision for any role in the council until all the relevant checks have been undertaken, assessed and signed off as acceptable by the responsible manager.

[Ordinarily, elected members appointed to committees will have CRB checks in place before taking up that appointment, although this will not prevent appointments being made, and appropriate systems will be put in place to protect the safety of service users in the meantime.](#)

However, it is recognised that where delays occur in the processing of CRB checks, this may place additional pressures on services in terms of meeting client needs and overall service objectives. **The paramount consideration must always be the safety of the service users.** No person who requires a CRB check should be allowed to commence work until the risk assessment has been undertaken using the standard council template and signed off by a Director/Head of HR/Lead CRB Counter signatory as detailed.

If a new employee commences work, subject to checks, they must be allocated other work-related duties, which do not involve close or sole contact with children and/or vulnerable adults until the results of the disclosure and/or other checks have been received.

Any applicant who completes the application form or CRB form and declares that they **do have unspent criminal convictions must not commence employment under any circumstances.**

Persons who have worked or lived overseas during the previous five years

Managers should be cautious about relying on checks on those with little if any residence in the UK and should also exercise caution in respect of those with any gaps in their career record. The CRB

may be able to offer advice about criminal record checking systems based outside the United Kingdom if required.

The CRB can only access criminal records held on the Police National Computer. The Police National Computer does not hold details of convictions, cautions, reprimands or warnings made outside of the United Kingdom. A CRB check will not provide details of an overseas criminal record that may or may not exist.

All persons who are appointed to a post requiring a CRB check must still undergo a CRB check regardless of their length of stay in the UK.

However, for those new arrivals to the UK they must provide in addition to all documentation in relation to the Immigration requirements, and the CRB requirements, a STATEMENT OF GOOD CONDUCT to cover the time period in their own country.

Re-Checks

Existing employees [and members](#) who have been checked and who continue in a role where checks are required will generally have a full CRB disclosure check every three years. However, this will vary according to circumstances and re-checks will be carried out more frequently than three years in some service areas.

Whilst there are no published timescales within which CRB disclosures should be renewed best practice suggests that renewal should take place at least every three years to strike a balance between the appropriate level of safeguarding and the efficient management of risk.

Re-checks may also be carried out if there are concerns about a person's suitability to work with children, or if a person's work changes to involve greater contact with children. Re-checks will also be carried out if a person moves to a different post within the council which requires a check.

Employees will have no right to refuse to comply with this request, as Peterborough City Council is under a duty to adhere to the statutory requirements of e.g. the CSCI.

Any existing employee refusing to comply with the request for a full CRB disclosure check will be advised that their deliberate and/or unreasonable refusal to carry out lawful and safe instructions issued by an appropriate manager/supervisor, and/or to comply with a contractual agreement will lead to the employee being instructed to attend a disciplinary hearing.

[An elected Member who refuses to comply with the request for a full CRB disclosure check will be given the opportunity of not taking up the committee or other role in respect of which the check is sought. If the Member insists on taking up the position without a CRB check, the matter may be referred to the Standards Committee for consideration of whether, in the circumstances of the case, this may represent a potential breach of the Code of Conduct.](#)

Disclosure results

A process to follow to ensure that every positive trace is dealt with in a consistent manner has been devised and must be followed to ensure key decisions are taken correctly and in accordance with the council policy and the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act. A record needs to be kept of the decision relating to all applicants for whom a disclosure application is made and not just those where any conviction information is disclosed.

Formatted: Bullets and Numbering

Counter signatories and Verifiers

Before any verification of documents or CRB disclosures is undertaken, verification of document training must be carried out. This training is mandatory. A central record of trained employees is held in the HR Support team. All counter signatories will also receive verification training.

CRB policy: Approved: XXXX
Effective: XXXX
Published: XXXX

Draft 1 - Human Resources
Peterborough City Council
Page 4 of 11

Volunteers

Applicants for voluntary posts that involve contact with children and/or vulnerable adults will need to have a CRB Disclosure check at the appropriate level. The definition of volunteer taken from the 1997 Police Act (Criminal Records) Regulations 2002 is 'a person who performs any activity which involves spending time, unpaid (except for travelling and other out-of-pocket expenses), doing something which aims to benefit someone (individuals or groups) other than or in addition to close relatives.

Acting as an umbrella body

An umbrella body is one, which countersigns applications and receives disclosure information on behalf of other employers or recruiting organisations.

The Council is registered with the CRB as a 'limited umbrella body.' The Council does not openly provide a commercial service to external bodies but can conduct checks on behalf of other organisations to whom the council provides HR and/or Payroll services, or other partner organisations it may from time to time chose to support (e.g. sports clubs, children's services provided by voluntary organisations etc).

Before acting as an Umbrella Body the council will take all reasonable steps to ensure that the client organisation can comply fully with the CRB Code of Practice and has adopted appropriate policies and procedures. The council will enter into a written agreement with the organisation outlining its duties and responsibilities.

Portability

Portability refers to the re-use of a CRB Disclosure, obtained for a position in one organisation and later used for another position in another organisation. The council policy is that CRB checks are non transferable in any circumstances.

Statutory framework Including Standard Government Checks

The council has a statutory duty of care towards vulnerable members of society. However, this duty must be carried out with due regard to all other relevant legislation including the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (1974), the Data Protection Act (1998) and the Human Rights Act (1998). Anyone who believes their rights have been violated by a public authority is able to raise their complaint before a UK court. Managers must be aware of the possibility of legal challenge from ex offenders who believe their rights have been violated under article 14 of the act which guarantees freedom from discrimination. Equally they must be aware that victims of physical/sexual/verbal abuse caused by employees known to have a criminal record might also seek legal challenge on the grounds that the organisation failed to protect them sufficiently. In order to avoid prosecution by the courts the council needs to apply policies that ensure vulnerable people are protected but at the same time treat ex-offenders fairly.

Protection of Vulnerable Adults

The Care Standards Act sets out obligations in relation to individuals in care positions involving regular contact with vulnerable adults. There is a statutory requirement on providers of care to check if an individual is included on the POVA list prior to appointment to a care position.

Protection of Children

The Protection of Children Act sets out obligations of "child care organisations." There is a statutory requirement to check if an individual is included on the POCA list or the list known as List 99 prior to appointment. It is a criminal offence to employ a person in a child care position if that person is included on the POCA List or List 99.

Agency workers, Contractors, Interims

CRB policy: Approved: XXXX
Effective: XXXX
Published: XXXX

Draft 1 - Human Resources
Peterborough City Council
Page 5 of 11

Heads of Service must ensure that where agency, interims or contractor workers are supplied to carry out duties within the council the manager obtains written confirmation from the agency/employment business that the relevant CRB disclosure check has been carried out and is satisfactory before the individual commences work with the council.

Where there is disclosed information on the CRB check then the manager must obtain a copy of the CRB disclosure from the agency/employment business before the individual commences work with the council to allow a proper assessment to be undertaken.

Where there is 'soft information' provided by the Chief Police Officer then the agency/employment business cannot provide the council with a copy of that information. The Head of Service would need to carry out a repeat disclosure if they still wanted to use that person.

Heads of Service must ensure that the contract with the agency/employment business imposes an obligation on them to carry out the same checks as the council would for its own staff in advance of the work starting. **It is essential that these checks are up to date and renewed in accordance with this policy.**

DRAFT

Statement of main terms and conditions of employment

There will be a clause placed in the statement of main terms and conditions of employment for all employees outlining the position on checks through the CRB or other official agencies.

DRAFT

Policy Statement on the Secure Storage, Handling, Use, Retention and Disposal of Disclosures & Disclosure information

1. General principles

As an organisation using the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Disclosure service to help assess the suitability of applicants for positions of trust, Peterborough City Council complies fully with the CRB Code of Practice regarding the correct handling, use, storage, retention and disposal of Disclosures and Disclosure information. It also complies fully with its obligations under the Data Protection Act (1998) and other relevant legislation pertaining to the safe handling, use, storage, retention and disposal of Disclosure information and has a written policy on these matters, which is available to those who wish to see it on request.

2. Storage & Access

Disclosure information is never kept on an applicant's personal file and is always kept separately and securely, in lockable, non-portable, storage containers with access strictly controlled and limited to those who are entitled to see it as part of their duties.

3. Handling

In accordance with section 124 of the Police Act 1997, Disclosure information is only passed to those who are authorised to receive it in the course of their duties. We maintain a record of all those to whom Disclosures or Disclosure Information has been revealed and we recognise that it is a **criminal offence** to pass this information to anyone who is not entitled to receive it.

4. Usage

Disclosure information is only used for the specific purpose for which it has been requested and for which the applicant's full consent has been given.

5. Retention

Once a recruitment (or other relevant) decision has been made, the council does not keep Disclosure information for any longer than is absolutely necessary. This is generally for a period of up to six months, to allow for the consideration and resolution of any disputes or complaints. If, in exceptional circumstances, it is considered necessary to keep Disclosure information for longer than six-months, we will consult the CRB about this and will give full consideration to the Data Protection and Human Rights of the individual subject before doing so. Throughout this time, the usual conditions regarding safe storage and strictly controlled access will prevail.

Where a unit is subject to an inspection by the Care Standards Inspectorate disclosures will be retained until the next annual inspection, and no longer.

6. Disposal

Once the retention period has elapsed, the council will ensure that any Disclosure information is immediately suitably destroyed by secure means, i.e. by shredding, pulping or burning. While awaiting destruction, Disclosure information will not be kept in any insecure receptacle (e.g. waste bin or confidential waste sack). The council will not keep any photocopy or other image of the Disclosure or any copy or representation of the contents of a Disclosure. However, notwithstanding the above, the council may keep a record of the date of the issue of the Disclosure, the name of the subject, the type of Disclosure requested, the position for which the Disclosure was requested, the unique reference of the Disclosure and the details of the recruitment decision taken.

Policy statement on the recruitment of ex-offenders

1. As an organisation using the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) Disclosure service to assess applicants' suitability for positions of trust, Peterborough City Council complies fully with the CRB Code of Practice and undertakes to treat all applicants for positions fairly. It undertakes not to discriminate unfairly against any subject of a Disclosure on the basis of conviction or other information revealed.
2. Peterborough City Council is committed to the fair treatment of its staff, potential staff or users of its services, regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, responsibilities for dependants, age, physical/mental disability or offending background.
3. We have a written policy on the recruitment of ex-offenders, which is made available to all Disclosure applicants at the outset of the recruitment process.
4. We actively promote equality of opportunity for all with the right mix of talent, skills and potential and welcome applications from a wide range of candidates, (which may include those with criminal records). We select all candidates for interview and appointment based on their skills, qualifications and experience and their ability to meet the requirements listed in the person specification attached to the job description.
5. A Disclosure is only requested after a thorough risk assessment has indicated that one is both proportionate and relevant to the position concerned. For those positions where a Disclosure is required, all job adverts and person specifications will contain a statement that a Disclosure will be requested in the event of the individual being offered the position.
6. Where a Disclosure is to form part of the recruitment process, we encourage all applicants called for interview to provide details of their criminal record at an early stage in the application process. We request that this information is sent under separate, confidential cover, to a designated person within Peterborough City Council and we guarantee that this information is only seen by those who need to see it as part of the recruitment process.
7. Unless the nature of the position allows Peterborough City Council to ask questions about the entire criminal record we only ask about "unspent" convictions as defined in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA) 1974. All posts where work is with children or vulnerable adults is classed as an exemption and therefore the applicant for the check must declare any reprimands, cautions, warnings, bind-over's, or convictions on the application (including those regarded as 'spent') if they are applying for a post working with children or vulnerable adults.
8. We ensure that all those in Peterborough City Council who are involved in the recruitment process have been suitably trained to identify and assess the relevance and circumstances of offences. We also ensure that they have received appropriate guidance and training in the relevant legislation relating to the employment of ex-offenders, e.g. the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA) 1974.
9. At interview, or in a separate discussion, we ensure that an open and measured discussion takes place on the subject of any offences or other matter that might be relevant to the position. Failure to reveal information that is directly relevant to the position sought could lead to withdrawal of an offer of employment.
10. We make every subject of a CRB Disclosure aware of the existence of the CRB Code of Practice and make a copy available on request.
11. We undertake to discuss any matter revealed in a Disclosure with the person seeking the position before withdrawing a conditional offer of employment.

Having a criminal record will not necessarily bar you from working with us. This will depend on the nature of the position and the circumstances and background of your offences.

1. Further Advice

Further details are provided in the CRB Managers Guidance document. Advice and support is available from your line manager, HR Business Partner, HR support, or trade union representative. Any employee with concerns about the application/breach of this policy should discuss this in the first instance with their line manager.

[Any elected member with concerns about the application / breach of this policy should discuss this in the first instance with the monitoring officer, or their group leader.](#)

2. Implementation procedures

To implement the principles in this policy please use:
CRB Manager's Guidance
Recruitment & Selection policy

3. Authorisation and review

This policy has been authorised by: Jacquie McGeachie, Head of Human Resources

Glossary of terms

Full description	Any abbreviation commonly used	Meaning
Criminal Records Bureau	CRB	An executive agency of the Home Office which vets applications for people who want to work with children and vulnerable people.
Education Personnel Management	EPM	A personnel and payroll service provider used by many Peterborough schools
Commission for social care inspection	CSCI	Set up by the government to independently inspect and report on care services and councils
Department of Health 'Protection of Vulnerable Adults' list	POVA list	A list detailing care workers who have harmed vulnerable adults in their care. There is a statutory requirement on registered care providers to check if a care worker is included on the POVA list.
Information held under Section 142 of the Education Act 2002	Previously called List 99	This list is maintained by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and contains the details of teachers who are considered unsuitable or banned from working with children in education.
Protection of Children Act List.	POCA list	This is a list, managed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) on behalf of the Department of Health (DH), of people banned from working with children.
Exempted Question		This is a valid request for a person to reveal their full criminal history (including spent convictions) and is made possible by virtue of the Exceptions Order to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA) 1974.
Exceptions Order		The Exceptions Order to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act (ROA) 1974 sets out those occupations and positions exempt from the provisions of the ROA. These are generally positions of trust, where there is a valid need to see a person's full criminal history in order to assess their suitability for a position. The information is intended as general guidance only and is not a definitive interpretation of the ROA.
Caution		A formal warning about future conduct given by a senior police officer, usually in a police station, after a person has committed an offence. It is used as an alternative to a charge and possible prosecution.
Conviction		Guilty of the crime as charged
Fixed Penalty Notices	FPN	These are designed to reduce paperwork on police and council officers by allowing low-level anti-social behaviour to be dealt with on the spot. Receiving a notice is not a criminal conviction.
CRB disclosure results		A CRB check can provide access to a range of different types of information, such as: (a) held on the Police National Computer (PNC), including Convictions, Cautions, Reprimands and Warnings in England and Wales, and most of the relevant convictions in Scotland and Northern Ireland may also be included. (b) held by local police forces and other agencies, relating to relevant non-conviction information; (c) from the Government's Protection of Children Act List (PoCA), where applicable; (d) from the Government's Protection of Vulnerable Adults List (PoVA), where applicable; and (e) held by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) under Section 142 of the Education Act 2002 (formerly known as List 99), where applicable.
Independent Safeguarding Authority Vetting & Barring Scheme	ISA VBS	From October 2009, the new Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS) will replace current schemes: List 99, PoCA, PoVA and Disqualification Orders. Under the VBS, the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) will take the decisions on barring unsuitable people from working or volunteering with vulnerable groups.

CRB policy: Approved: XXXX
Effective: XXXX
Published: XXXX

Draft 1 - Human Resources
Peterborough City Council
Page 11 of 11

APPENDIX 2

1 October 2008

To Chief Executives of:
County Councils and District Councils in England
London Borough Councils
The Greater London Authority
National Park Authorities
The Broads Authority

The Clerk of:
City of London
Council of the Isle of Scilly
Combined Fire and Rescue Authorities
Fire and Civil Defence Authorities
Police Authorities in England and Wales

The Clerk of:
Parish and Town Councils in England

Dear Colleague,

Communities in control: Real people, real power: Codes of conduct for local authority members and employees – A consultation

I am writing to draw your attention to the above consultation paper which was published on the Communities and Local Government website on 1 October. I also enclose a paper copy of the consultation for your consideration.

You will see that this is the next in a series of Communities in Control consultation documents following the publication of the Local Government Empowerment White Paper, *Communities in Control: Real people, real power*, on 9 July, and building on work still in progress from the 2006 White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*.

This paper invites views on proposals for revising the Local Authorities (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2007 and the Relevant Authorities (General Principles) Order 2001. It also seeks views on the proposed introduction of a model code of conduct for local government employees. Particular questions on which we would welcome comments are summarised at Annex A to the paper.

Copies of the consultation paper are being sent to all principal local authorities, parish councils and other organisations and individuals who have a particular interest in these issues. If you wish to comment, please send responses either by post to:

Karl Holden
Conduct and Council Constitutions Team
Communities and Local Government
Zone 5/B2, Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU

Or by e-mail to: conductcode@communities.gsi.gov.uk

By **Wednesday 24 December 2008**.

Any queries you may have about this letter or the enclosed paper should be directed to Karl Holden (tel: 0207 944 5962; conductcode@communities.gsi.gov.uk).

You will also be interested to know that, as announced in the *Communities in control: Real people, real power: Improving local accountability* consultation paper, we will be consulting at the end of October on proposals to revise the code of recommended practice on local authority publicity. A paper copy of the consultation paper will be sent to you on publication.

Yours sincerely

Paul Rowsell

Orders and Regulations Relating to the Conduct of
Local Authority Members in England
Consultation



Orders and Regulations Relating to the Conduct of
Local Authority Members in England
Consultation

Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London
SW1E 5DU
Telephone: 020 7944 4400
Website: www.communities.gov.uk

© Crown Copyright, 2008

Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown.

This publication, excluding logos, may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium for research, private study or for internal circulation within an organisation. This is subject to it being reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the publication specified.

Any other use of the contents of this publication would require a copyright licence. Please apply for a Click-Use Licence for core material at www.opsi.gov.uk/click-use/system/online/pLogin.asp, or by writing to the Office of Public Sector Information, Information Policy Team, St Clements House, 2-16 Colegate, Norwich, NR3 1BQ. Fax: 01603 723000 or email: HMSOLicensing@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk

If you require this publication in an alternative format please email: alternativeformats@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Communities and Local Government Publications
PO Box 236
Wetherby
West Yorkshire
LS23 7NB
Tel: 08701 226 236
Fax: 08701 226 237
Textphone: 08701 207 405
Email: communities@twoten.com
or online via the Communities and Local Government website:
www.communities.gov.uk

January 2008

Product Code: 07 LGSR 05005

Contents

Chapter 1	
Introduction	1
Chapter 2	
New standards committee powers to make initial assessments of misconduct allegations, composition of committees and access to information	4
Chapter 3	
The Standards Board’s new monitoring function and the circumstances where it may suspend a standards committee’s function of undertaking the initial assessment of misconduct allegations and for other committees or the Standards Board or joint committees to undertake this role	14
Chapter 4	
Adjudications by case tribunals of the Adjudication Panel	21
Chapter 5	
Issuing dispensations to allow councillors to participate in meetings so as to preserve political balance	25
Chapter 6	
The granting and supervision of exemptions of certain local authority posts from political restrictions	27
Chapter 7	
Other issues	29
Annex A	
Summary of questions	30
Annex B	
The Consultation Criteria	33

Chapter 1

Introduction

1. We are consulting on the detailed arrangements for putting into effect orders and regulations to provide a revised ethical regime for the conduct of local councillors in England.
2. Part 10 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 (the 2007 Act) provides for a revised ethical conduct regime for local government based on the principle of proportionate decision-making on conduct issues by local authorities. We wish to make arrangements for these provisions to come into effect in Spring 2008, and to seek views on how the detailed rules should work in practice.
3. The paper also consults on other undertakings relating to the operation of the regime in respect of the political restrictions imposed on certain local government posts and the maximum pay of political assistants. We are also taking the opportunity to consult on proposals to amend the Relevant Authorities (Standards Committees) (Dispensations) Regulations 2002, with a view to resolving concerns which have been raised by some local authorities on the operation of some aspects of the current provisions.
4. This consultation follows extensive earlier consultation on the basic principles on which the revised conduct regime for local government should be based. The Discussion Paper *'Standards of Conduct in English Local Government: The Future'*, of December 2005, set out the Government's responses, regarding the reform of the regime relating to standards of conduct of local government, to the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the report of the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Select Committee and the Standards Board. The Local Government White Paper, *'Strong and Prosperous Communities'*, issued in October 2006, outlined the Government's proposals to introduce a more proportionate and locally based decision-making regime for the investigation and determination of all but the most serious of misconduct allegations against members of local authorities.
5. Our most recent consultation with regard to the conduct regime was a six week consultation between January and March this year on amendments to the model code of conduct for local authority members, which resulted in a revised model code being introduced with effect from 3 May 2007.

6. For the new, reformed ethical regime based on a devolutionary approach to become operational, we need to make regulations and orders under the Local Government Act 2000 (the 2000 Act) as amended by Part 10 of the 2007 Act to implement the proposals set out in the Local Government White Paper to deliver a more locally based conduct regime for local government members, with local standards committees making initial assessments of misconduct allegations and most investigations and determinations of cases taking place at local level.
7. We now need to put in place detailed arrangements to allow standards committees and the Standards Board to undertake their new roles under the new regime. These arrangements need to cover:
 - The operation of standards committees' powers to make initial assessments of misconduct allegations.
 - The operation of other functions by standards committees and the Adjudication Panel in issuing penalties and sanctions.
 - The operation of the Standards Board's revised strategic role to provide supervision, support and guidance for the regime.
 - Other matters, ie the rules on the issue of dispensations, the issue of exemptions of posts from political restrictions and the pay of local authority political assistants.
8. The paper sets out for each of these issues in turn the specific purpose of the provisions, the proposals for how the rules should operate via appropriate regulations and orders under the 2000 Act, and seeks views on the proposals, including highlighting particular questions on which consultees' comments would be welcome (summarised at Annex A).
9. We aim to undertake a separate consultation shortly on amendments to the instruments setting out the general principles which govern the conduct of local councillors and the model code of conduct, which members are required to follow.

Position of Welsh police authorities

10. The new ethical conduct regime providing for the initial assessment of misconduct allegations by standards committees will not apply to Welsh police authorities. The initial assessment of allegations in respect of members of Welsh police authorities will therefore continue to be a matter for the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and not local standards committees. The proposals referred to in this paper in respect of joint standards committees will also not apply to Welsh police authorities. However, the rules on the size, composition and procedures of standards committees and the proposed amendment to the dispensation regulations will apply to these authorities.

11. We are asking for comments on this paper by 15 February 2008. This effectively gives consultees six weeks to respond. This reflects the period normally allowed for consultation with local government in the Framework for Partnership between the Government and the Local Government Association. As mentioned above, significant consultation has already been undertaken about the principles underpinning the new reformed regime and the approach to be adopted in the regulations and orders under the new regime.
12. Comments should be sent to:
William Tandoh
Address: Department for Communities and Local Government
Local Democracy and Empowerment Directorate
5/G10 Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU
e-mail: william.tandoh@communities.gsi.gov.uk

by **15 February 2008.**

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004).

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department will process your personal data in accordance with the DPA and in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Chapter 2

New standards committee powers to make initial assessments of misconduct allegations, composition of committees and access to information

Purpose

1. Regulations will need to be made to amend and re-enact existing provisions in the Local Authorities (Code of Conduct) (Local Determination) Regulations 2003 and to amend and re-enact the provisions of the Relevant Authorities (Standards Committee) Regulations 2001, to make provision:
 - with respect to the exercise of the new initial assessment functions by standards committees of relevant authorities in England;
 - as to the powers and validity of proceedings of standards committees, including notification requirements;
 - with regards to the publicity to be given to matters referred to monitoring officers of local authorities;
 - in relation to the way in which any matters referred to the monitoring officer of a local authority by a standards committee should be dealt with;
 - to enable a standards committee to refer a case to the Adjudication Panel (ie the independent body which decides whether in the more serious cases the code of conduct has been breached and what sanction, if any, should be applied to the member) where the standards committee considers that the sanctions available to it would be insufficient;
 - with respect to the size and composition of standards committees and access to meetings and information.

Proposals

a) Standards committee members and initial assessment

2. In order to undertake their new functions for making initial assessments of misconduct allegations and considering requests to review decisions to take no action, under powers conferred by Part 10 of the 2007 Act, as well as existing powers for standards committees to make determinations of allegations, each standards committee will need to have a clear operational structure. It is likely that there will be a need for sub-committees of standards committees to be created, so that the separate functions involved in the ethical regime for local authority members can be appropriately discharged, namely:

- The initial assessment of a misconduct allegation received by a standards committee under section 57A of the 2000 Act.
 - Any request a standards committee receives from a complainant to review its decision to take no action in relation to the misconduct allegation under section 57B of the 2000 Act.
 - Any subsequent hearing of a standards committee to determine whether a member has breached the code, and where appropriate impose a sanction on a member.
3. Standards committees will need to minimise the potential risk of failing to conduct the above processes appropriately. In order to do this and ensure fairness for all parties in the operation of the ethical regime, we propose that the regulations should prohibit a member of a standards committee who has taken part in decision-making on the initial assessment of an allegation under section 57A of the 2000 Act, or considered an allegation which has been referred back to the standards committee by a monitoring officer or ethical standards officer, from being involved in the review of any subsequent request from the complainant under section 57B of the 2000 Act for a review of the committee's decision to take no action. The most obvious way of achieving this would be to require sub-committees of the standards committee to exercise the different functions.
4. However, we are aware of the resource implications of prohibiting members of standards committees from undertaking certain functions of the ethical regime and the problems this may cause for local authorities. Accordingly, we propose that members of a standards committee who have been involved in the initial assessment of a misconduct allegation, or a review of a standards committee's previous decision to take no action, should not be prohibited from taking part in any subsequent hearing by the standards committee to determine whether that matter constituted a breach of the code of conduct and, if so, whether any sanction is appropriate.

Question

Q1. Does our proposal to prohibit a member who has been involved in a decision on the initial assessment of an allegation from reviewing any subsequent request to review that decision to take no action (but for such a member not to be prohibited necessarily from taking part in any subsequent determination hearing), provide an appropriate balance between the need to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure a proportionate approach? Would a requirement to perform the functions of initial assessment, review of a decision to take no action, and subsequent hearing, by sub-committees be workable?

b) Members of more than one authority - parallel complaint procedures

5. We are aware that the introduction of the regime for the initial assessment of misconduct allegations may raise an issue with regard to what should happen if a misconduct allegation is made against an individual who is a member of more than one authority (known as a dual-hatted member) and, as such, may have failed to comply with more than one relevant authority's code. For example, an individual who is a member of a district council and a police authority, may be the subject of allegations that he or she has breached the code of both authorities. As such, it would be possible for both the standards committee of the district council and the police authority to receive allegations against the member.
6. Such a situation could lead to inconsistencies in how allegations are dealt with, as one standards committee could decide that no action should be taken with regard to an allegation, whilst another standards committee could refer the allegation for investigation. In addition, to the inconsistencies that this situation may create, there is the issue of a member being subject to an investigation in relation to the same allegation more than once. One potential option for avoiding such a situation would be for the regulations to require that where an allegation of misconduct is made to two separate standards committees, for those committees to decide which one of them should consider the matter, and in default of agreement for the allegation to be referred to the Standards Board who could then decide how it should be dealt with.
7. However, in the spirit of the new devolved conduct regime, we consider that decisions on whether to deal with a particular allegation should be taken by standards committees themselves, following discussion with each other and taking advice as necessary from the Standards Board. This would enable a cooperative approach to be adopted, including the sharing of knowledge and information about the local circumstances and cooperation in the carrying out of investigations to ensure effective use of resources.
8. Two standards committees might, for example, consider it would be appropriate for both of them to consider similar allegations or the same allegation against the same individual, and even to reach a different decision on the matter. Under the new locally based regime standards committees will be encouraged to take into account local factors which affect their authorities and communities. Allegations of misconduct constituting a particular criminal offence might, for example, be taken more seriously by a standards committee of a police authority, than of another type of authority. And this could lead to the two standards committees reaching a different decision on the matter.

Question

Q2. Where an allegation is made to more than one standards committee, is it appropriate for decisions on which standards committee should deal with it to be a matter for agreement between standards committees? Do you agree that it is neither necessary nor desirable to provide for any adjudication role for the Standards Board?

c) Publicising the new initial assessment procedure

9. In order to ensure that people are aware of the existence of the new ethical regime and the local arrangements for how to make a misconduct allegation, we propose to include in the regulations a requirement that each standards committee should publish a notice detailing where misconduct allegations should be sent after the new regime has commenced. We also propose that the regulations should require a standards committee to use its best endeavours to continue to bring to the public's attention the address to which misconduct allegations should be sent, as well as any changes in those arrangements.
10. We propose that the Standards Board for England will then issue guidance on the content of the notice, and on how the requirement for the standards committee to provide appropriate information on the regime may be met, including, for example, advertising in one or more local newspapers, a local authority's own newspaper or circular and the authority's website.

d) Guidance on timescale for making initial assessment decisions

11. In order to achieve sensible consistency in the way allegations are dealt with across local authorities, we think it is appropriate for good practice guidance by the Standards Board to indicate the time scale in which a standards committee would be expected to reach a decision on how a misconduct allegation should be dealt with, for example 20 working days, as well as to provide other guidance to assist standards committees in complying with the timescale.
12. Since it is our intention that the new ethical regime should be implemented by light-touch regulation, we do not propose that such a deadline is prescribed by regulations accompanied by any statutory penalty for failure to meet the time scale. Our proposal is that the Standards Board, in considering the operation of the ethical regime by authorities would take into account the overall compliance each authority has demonstrated with the guidance, including guidance on the timetable for action, so that lack of compliance with the timescale on its own would not of itself trigger intervention action by the Board. This kind of regime would suggest that it would be preferable if the timescale was retained as part of the guidance rather than imposed as a statutory requirement.

*Question***Q3. Are you content with our proposal that the timescale for making initial decisions should be a matter for guidance by the Standards Board, rather than for the imposition of a statutory time limit?****e) Requirement for a standards committee to provide a written summary of an allegation to the subject of the allegation**

13. To ensure that the ethical regime is fair and transparent for all parties, new section 57C(2) of the 2000 Act requires a standards committee to take reasonable steps to give a written summary of an allegation it receives to the person who is the subject of it. This will make sure that he or she knows what the allegation is. However, we consider that there may be certain circumstances where it may not be appropriate for a standards committee to provide information to the subject of an allegation at the time it receives the allegation. We wish to provide by regulation that where the standards committee forms the reasonable view that it would be in the public interest not to provide the written summary, it would have the discretion to defer doing so. We propose to provide that standards committees would be required to take into account advice on the withholding of information provided by the monitoring officer and guidance from the Standards Board. The regulations can stipulate when the duty to provide the summary must be complied with. We propose that the obligation to provide the summary should normally arise after a decision is made on the initial assessment, but in cases where the concerns referred to above apply, it should instead arise after the monitoring officer or ethical standards officer has carried out sufficient investigation, but before any substantive hearing of a case against the subject of the allegation.
14. Guidance from the Standards Board would give advice on the circumstances in which a standards committee would be entitled to operate its discretion to defer giving the written summary of the allegation. This guidance might include taking such action in the following circumstances.
- Where the disclosure of the complainant's personal details or details of the allegation to the person who is the subject of the allegation, before the investigating officer has had the opportunity to interview the complainant, may result in evidence being compromised or destroyed by the subject of the allegation.
 - Where there is the real possibility of intimidation of the complainant or witnesses by the subject of the allegation.
15. Where a standards committee is relieved of the duty to give a written summary of an allegation to a member, it might exercise its discretion to give some more limited information to the member for example by redacting certain information, if this would not prejudice any investigation.

Question

Q4. Do you agree that the sort of circumstances we have identified would justify a standards committee being relieved of the obligation to provide a summary of the allegation at the time the initial assessment is made? Are there any other circumstances which you think would also justify the withholding of information? Do you agree that in a case where the summary has been withheld the obligation to provide it should arise at the point where the monitoring officer or ethical standards officer is of the view that a sufficient investigation has been undertaken?

f) Requirement for a standards committee to give notice of decisions under section 57A and 58 of the 2000 Act

16. In addition to the requirement outlined in the above section, the 2000 Act, as amended, requires a standards committee and the Standards Board to 'take reasonable steps' to give written notice of a decision to take no further action, including the reasons for its decision, to the complainant and the subject member. In addition, a standards committee is required to notify the subject of an allegation, if it receives a request from the complainant to review its decision to take no action regarding a misconduct allegation.
17. We propose that guidance issued by the Standards Board will set out best practice for committees including practice with respect to the notification of a complainant, a subject member or any other appropriate person of the progress of the handling of the allegation. We propose that such guidance would include advice that the Standards Board or the standards committee should take reasonable steps to notify the complainant and the subject member where:
- the Standards Board decides under section 58 of the 2000 Act, to refer a matter back to the relevant standards committee or refer the allegation to an ethical standards officer for investigation;
 - a standards committee decides to refer a matter to another relevant authority under section 57A(3) of the 2000 Act, to the Standards Board under section 57A(2)(b) of the 2000 Act or the monitoring officer under section 57A(2)(c) of the 2000 Act; or
 - a monitoring officer decides to refer a matter back to a standards committee under section 57A of the 2000 Act. Such a notice may include the reasons why a monitoring officer has decided to refer the case back.

g) References to monitoring officers under section 57A(2)(a) of the 2000 Act

18. Section 57A(2)(a) of the 2000 Act, provides that a standards committee may refer an allegation it receives to the monitoring officer of the authority. We propose to provide for the monitoring officer to be able to investigate and make a report or recommendations to the standards

committee. However, in addition, we propose to provide in the regulations that when a standards committee refers a case to a monitoring officer it may also direct the monitoring officer that the matter should be dealt with otherwise than by investigation. Dealing with an allegation other than by investigation would allow the monitoring officer the discretion, assisted by guidance from the Standards Board, to tackle the problem identified in ways such as the provision of training or mediation to the particular member or making amendments to the authority's internal procedures, for example, arrangements for the provision of training to all members.

19. Enabling a standards committee to refer a case to the monitoring officer for action other than investigation is intended to address situations where the standards committee considers that a case has relevance for the ethical governance of the authority, eg where there are disagreements between members or cases of repeated poor behaviour, which do not require a full investigation, but where a committee feels that some action should be taken.

h) References to monitoring officers – procedure for referring allegations back to a standards committee

20. We propose to set out in the regulations the circumstances where a monitoring officer may refer an allegation back to the standards committee under section 66(2)(f) of the 2000 Act, and the procedure for doing so. We propose that such a referral would apply in the following circumstances:
 - where, during an investigation or following a referral for action other than investigation, evidence emerges that, in the monitoring officer's reasonable view, a case is materially either more serious or less serious than originally seemed apparent, which might mean that, had the standards committee been aware of that evidence, it would have made a different decision on how the matter should be treated;
 - where a monitoring officer becomes aware of a further potential misconduct allegation which relates to the matter he or she is already investigating. In such circumstances, the monitoring officer may refer the matter back to the standards committee to decide on how the new matter should be treated;
 - where the member subject to the allegation has resigned, is terminally ill or has died.
21. With regard to the procedure which a monitoring officer must observe when referring an allegation back to a standards committee, we propose to set out in the regulations that where a monitoring officer refers back an allegation to a standards committee he or she must send written notification of his or her decision to refer a case back and the reasons for the decision to the relevant standards committee. In such

circumstances, the standards committee will then be required to undertake a further assessment of the allegation and reach a decision under section 57A(2) to (4) of the 2000 Act.

Question

Q5. Do you agree that circumstances should be prescribed, as we have proposed, in which the monitoring officer will refer a case back to the standards committee?

i) Referral of matters from a standards committee to the Adjudication Panel for England for determination

22. With the introduction of the more locally based conduct regime, we consider that it is likely that standards committees will be required to make determinations in respect of more serious cases, which are currently dealt with by the Standards Board, its ethical standards officers and subsequently referred to the Adjudication Panel. We consider that providing a standards committee with the right to refer to the Adjudication Panel, where it considers that a breach of the code may merit a sanction higher than that available to the committee, will allow any sanction imposed to match the level of seriousness of the breach of the code.
23. We propose that it would be a matter for the standards committee to make a decision following the receipt of the monitoring officer's report that, if the member was found to have committed the breach, the appropriate sanction would be higher than that which the standards committee would be able to impose. Such a provision would ensure that the subject of the allegation would not be required to face both a standards committee hearing and then a separate hearing of the Adjudication Panel in respect of the same allegation.
24. In order to ensure that standards committees only refer the most serious cases to the Adjudication Panel, we propose to provide in the Regulations that the Adjudication Panel may refuse to accept a referral from a standards committee under certain circumstances, for example, where the Adjudication Panel does not consider, on the face of the evidence, that the matter would attract a sanction of greater than that currently available to standards committees.

j) Increase the maximum sanction available to standards committees

25. As stated above, with the introduction of the more locally based conduct regime, we consider that standards committees will be required to consider more serious cases. Accordingly, we propose to increase the maximum sanction which a standards committee can impose on a member who it has found to have breached the code from a three months partial suspension or suspension to six months.

Question

Q6. Are you in favour of an increase in the maximum sanction the standards committee can impose? If so, are you content that the maximum sanction should increase from three months to six months suspension or partial suspension from office?

k) Composition of a standards committee and sub-committees of standards committees

26. Section 53(4) of the 2000 Act requires that a standards committee should be chaired by a person who is neither a member nor an officer of a relevant authority (“an independent member”). The existing rules relating to independent members will continue to apply so that the independent member must not have been a member or officer of the authority within the previous 5 years. As indicated earlier, committees are likely to appoint sub-committees in order to undertake the three separate functions involved in the ethical regime for local authority members:
- The initial assessment of a misconduct allegation (section 57A of the 2000 Act).
 - Any review of a decision to take no action (section 57B of the 2000 Act).
 - A hearing to determine whether a member has breached the code and whether to impose a sanction.
27. In order to maintain the robustness and independence of decision-making, we consider that it is important for an independent member to chair each of the sub-committees discharging each of the functions listed above.
28. We propose that the rules should remain as currently provided under the Relevant Authorities (Standards Committee) Regulations 2001 with regard to the size and composition of standards committees (including providing that where a committee has more than three members, at least 25% of them should be independent), and on the proceedings and the validity of the proceedings of committees and sub-committees (including that a meeting should not be quorate unless there are at least three members present).

Question

Q7. Do you have any views on the practicability of requiring that the chairs of all sub-committees discharging the assessment, review and hearing functions should be independent, which is likely to mean that there would need to be at least three independent chairs for each standards committee? Would it be consistent with robust decision-making if one or more of the sub-committee chairs were not independent?

l) Public access to information on decisions on initial assessments of allegations under section 57A and reviews under section 57B

29. We consider that it would not be appropriate for a meeting of a standards committee to undertake its role on making an initial assessment under section 57A to be subject to rules regarding notices of meetings, circulation of agendas and documents and public access to meetings, as set out in the Relevant Authorities (Standards Committees) Regulations 2001. We take the view that it would not be appropriate for the above rules to apply to meetings which make the initial assessment decisions, as they may be considering unfounded and potentially damaging allegations about members which it would not be appropriate to make available to the general public. Currently, the Standards Board does not publish any information about cases that it does not decide to refer for investigation, which may include, for example, cases which are malicious or politically motivated. Consistent with this approach, we do not take the view that it would be appropriate to give such allegations of misconduct any publicity during the initial assessment phase.

30. For similar reasons, we also do not consider that a standards committee's function of reviewing a decision to take no action regarding a misconduct allegation should be subject to the access to information rules in respect of local government committees.

31. Accordingly, we propose that initial assessment decisions under section 57A of the 2000 Act, and any subsequent review of a decision to take no action under section 57B of the 2000 Act, should be conducted in closed meetings and should not be subject to notice and publicity requirements under Part 5A of the Local Government Act 1972. This approach was supported strongly by those authorities who participated in the Standards Board's recent initial assessment pilot schemes.

Question

Q8. Do you agree with our proposal that the initial assessment of misconduct allegations and any review of a standards committee's decision to take no action should be exempt from the rules on access to information?

Chapter 3

The Standards Board's new monitoring function and the circumstances where it may suspend a standards committee's function of undertaking the initial assessment of misconduct allegations and for other committees or the Standards Board or joint committees to undertake this role

Purpose

32. Under the new locally based ethical regime, the Standards Board will provide guidance and support to standards committees and monitoring officers on undertaking their new roles and will monitor their performance to ensure consistency of standards across the country.
33. In order to support this role, the Standards Board will be putting in place monitoring arrangements to ensure that the local regime is operating efficiently and effectively. This will involve authorities completing periodic online returns in relation to the cases they handle and producing an annual report, which the Standards Board will monitor. The Board's monitoring will be undertaken against a series of criteria which they will set out in guidance.
34. The Board's approach has been developed in consultation with a range of local authorities and the aim is to provide support for authorities in ensuring the efficient operation of the local regime and to be easy for authorities to use. The information gathering system will enable the Standards Board to analyse the information received in order to identify and share good practice, which will assist authorities in assessing and improving their own performance. It will also allow the Standards Board to identify those standards committees and monitoring officers who are encountering difficulties in undertaking any aspect of their roles, as well as to identify how to assist them to improve their performance.

Proposals

35. Section 57D of the 2000 Act provides that the Standards Board may, in circumstances prescribed by regulations by the Secretary of State, direct that a standards committee's function of undertaking the initial assessment of misconduct allegations be suspended until the Board revokes such a suspension. The Standards Board's decision on whether to suspend a standards committee's initial assessment function will be made on a case-by-case basis and will be informed by information gathered by the Board about the performance of standards committees and monitoring officers. The Board's consideration of the suspension of a committee's powers may be triggered by one or a number of circumstances such as:

- a breakdown of the process for holding hearings;
 - a disproportionate number of successful requests to review a standards committee's decision to take no action;
 - repeated failure to complete investigations within reasonable timescales;
 - repeated failure to carry out other duties expeditiously, including repeated failures to comply with the proposed 20 working days deadline for making an initial assessment of an allegation;
 - failure to implement standards committee's decisions; or
 - repeated failure to submit periodic returns to the Standards Board under section 66B and information requests under section 66C.
36. In circumstances where a standards committee's initial assessment functions have been suspended, the standards committee must refer any misconduct allegation it receives to the Standards Board or a standards committee of another relevant authority in England, with its consent, to undertake the initial assessment function.
37. Our aim is that the Standards Board should use its power to suspend a standards committee's initial assessment functions only as a last resort, and after strenuous attempts to improve the authority's performance have failed, resulting in the committee's failure to operate an effective initial assessment process. The Standards Board will endeavour to provide support, guidance and advice to local authorities throughout.
38. As there are numerous circumstances in relation to the performance of the ethical regime which may lead the Standards Board to direct that a standards committee's initial assessment function be suspended, we propose that the regulations should allow for any circumstances where the Standards Board is satisfied that a suspension of the standards committee's functions would be in the public interest. In operating this discretion, the Board would be required to have regard to the range of factors set out in paragraph 35, above.

Question

Q9. Have we identified appropriate criteria for the Standards Board to consider when making decisions to suspend a standards committee's powers to make initial assessments? Are there any other relevant criteria which the Board ought to take into account?

Arrangements for undertaking initial assessments

a) Circumstances where the initial assessment functions may be undertaken by another standards committee

39. Section 57D(2) of the 2000 Act provides that where the initial assessment function of one authority has been suspended, that function may be undertaken by the standards committee of another authority. We propose to allow for such arrangements to be made where the Standards Board and the receiving standards committee agree that it would be appropriate. Provision would also be made to allow a committee to withdraw from such an agreement if it chose to. We will make regulations as necessary, to facilitate such arrangements.

b) Possibility of providing for the Standards Board or standards committees to charge those standards committees which have had their initial assessment functions suspended for undertaking those functions on their behalf

40. Because of the impact which a transfer of responsibility for initial assessment to another standards committee could have, one option might be to allow an authority or the Standards Board to levy a charge against the authority whose standards committee has had its initial assessment functions suspended, to meet the cost of carrying out its functions.
41. There is no express provision in the 2000 Act dealing with the imposition of charges and we do not intend at this stage to make any provision to provide for any.
42. However, we would be grateful for views from consultees about whether the ability to charge a fee to recover the costs of undertaking another committee's role would contribute to the effective operation of the new ethical regime. For example, allowing a charge for the recovery of costs for undertaking the initial assessment role may help to encourage high performing standards committees to agree to undertake another standards committee's functions during the period that its functions are suspended. Such an approach may also encourage standards committees to undertake their responsibilities under the 2000 Act efficiently and effectively, in order to avoid having to pay the costs of another authority taking over their role if their functions are suspended.

Question

Q10. Would the imposition of a charging regime, to allow the Standards Board and local authorities to recover the costs incurred by them, be effective in principle in supporting the operation of the new locally-based ethical regime? If so, should the level of fees be left for the Board or authorities to set; or should it be prescribed by the Secretary of State or set at a level that does no more than recover costs?

c) Proposed procedures for the suspension of a standards committee's initial assessment functions and the re-instatement of those functions

43. In relation to the procedure which the Standards Board should follow when using its power to direct that a standards committee's initial assessment function is suspended, we propose that the Regulations should set out the following requirements and procedures.

- Before a direction to suspend, the Standards Board should send the authority's chief executive a written notice of intention to suspend the functions of the standards committee. Copies of this would be sent to the person who chairs the standards committee and the monitoring officer. The notice may include any recommendations and directions aimed at improving the performance of a standards committee.
- The Standards Board will exercise the suspension power under section 57D of the 2000 Act by written direction, sent to the relevant authority's chief executive and copied to the person who chairs the standards committee and the monitoring officer. The standards committee's functions will be suspended from the date specified in the written notice of direction from the Standards Board. Under that section, the Standards Board may direct that the standards committee must refer any misconduct allegations for action either to the Board itself or to the standards committee of another authority if that committee has consented.
- A direction to suspend the local assessment function may be revoked where the Standards Board is satisfied that the suspension should cease based on evidence and undertakings given by the relevant standards committee. The revocation takes effect from the date specified in the notice of revocation.
- The standards committee should be required to publicise the fact that their power to make initial assessments has been suspended and what alternative arrangements will apply for the handling of misconduct allegations, including the fact that new allegations will be dealt with elsewhere, in one or more local newspapers. Where a committee's power to make initial assessments is reinstated, the committee should similarly be required to publicise the arrangements which will apply for handling allegations following the reinstatement.

44. During a suspension, we envisage that the Standards Board should maintain communication with the monitoring officer and the standards committee chair, as well as other relevant people within the authority, in order to develop an action plan for improving the authority's performance. The aim of the action plan will be to set out the action which the standards committee and the monitoring officer need to take which would then justify the reinstatement of the standards committee's functions in the shortest possible time. We consider that the authority should be required to demonstrate improvement, through evidence, in its ability to discharge its functions under the Act. We propose that the Standards Board will provide various types of support throughout the process including, but not limited to, giving advice and guidance, sharing best-practice or participating in peer reviews, advising that training be undertaken or that a relevant authority enter into joint working arrangements with other local authorities.
45. In order for a standards committee's functions to be re-instated as soon as practically possible, the Standards Board will require cooperation from the suspended authority to ensure the Section 57A, 57B and 57C functions can be carried out. We propose to include within regulations governing the functions of standards committees an obligation to co-operate with the Standards Board during any period of suspension of its initial assessment functions, and to have regard to guidance issued by the Standards Board regarding the re-instatement of those functions, as a means to promote and maintain high standards of conduct, including the publication by the standards committee of a notice of any decision by the Standards Board to suspend the committee's functions or to revoke such a decision.

d) Joint working

46. In order to promote more effective ways of working, we propose to enable a standards committee to work jointly with one or more other standards committees in exercising their new functions under the local decision-making regime for allegations of misconduct, which might allow, for example, for more efficient use of common resources and aid the sharing of information, expertise, advice and experience.

i) Functions applicable for joint working

47. In common with the wishes expressed by many standards committees in recent pilot exercises on joint working run by the Standards Board, we wish all standards committees' functions to be available for joint working, but for each standards committee to decide which of the ethical regime functions it would like to operate jointly with other standards committees. For instance, the majority of those authorities involved in the pilots intended only to operate jointly the initial assessment functions under section 57A of the 2000 Act, whilst other authorities expressed an interest in extending joint arrangements to cover the holding of hearings and determinations of whether a member has breached the code.

ii) Structure and procedural rules of joint standards committees

48. Following the results from the joint working pilot, we believe relevant authorities may best establish joint standards committees within schemes which reflect the regulatory requirements, and which are agreed by each participating local authority. The regulations will specify the functions in relation to which joint working arrangements may be made. Guidance from the Standards Board will give advice on the content of these arrangements, including:

- size of joint committee, number of independent members and independent chair (ie to follow the rules on the size and composition of individual standards committees)
 - residual functions retained by standards committees (if any)
 - process for dissolution
 - process for appointment of members of a joint standards committee, including independent members and parish representatives
 - process for individual relevant authorities to withdraw from the joint standards committee
 - the appointment of a lead monitoring officer for the joint standards committee or outline division of monitoring officers duties between the relevant authority monitoring officers
 - payment of allowances
 - arrangements for where the Standards Board suspends the functions of the joint standards committee
49. Guidance issued by the Standards Board will help local authorities decide what joint arrangements might be suitable for them. The options available would include the creation of a joint committee which would undertake all the functions of the individual committees, which could be particularly appropriate and represent a sensible use of resources for single purpose authorities, who are the source of fewer complaints than other authorities. Alternatively, agreements would be possible to allow one or more of committees' functions, ie the initial assessment of allegations, the review of a decision to take no action or the determination hearing, to be undertaken by the joint committee. In either model, it would be possible for the joint committee to establish sub-committees to deal with particular functions.

50. Regulations will make clear that joint standards committees are bound by the same rules and procedures that apply to standards committees. However, we believe an exception should be made in relation to the requirement that a parish representative be present when a matter relating to a parish council in the relevant authority's area is discussed. For joint standards committees, this requirement should be satisfied if a parish representative from any parish in the area covered by the joint standards committee is in attendance. That is, it is not necessary for the parish representative to come from the area of the particular parish a member of which is the subject of the matter being considered.

Question

Q11. Would you be interested in pursuing joint working arrangements with other authorities? Do you have experience of joint working with other authorities and suggestions as to how it can be made to work effectively in practice? Do you think there is a need to limit the geographical area to be covered by a particular joint agreement and, if so, how should such a limitation be expressed? Do you agree that if a matter relating to a parish council is discussed by a joint committee, the requirement for a parish representative to be present should be satisfied if a representative from any parish in the joint committee's area attends?

Chapter 4

Adjudications by case tribunals of the Adjudication Panel

Purpose

51. To extend the range of sanctions available to case tribunals of the Adjudication Panel, to prescribe the circumstances in which a reference to the Adjudication Panel following an investigation or an interim report by an ethical standards officer may be withdrawn, and to make provision for a case tribunal to give notice of its decision that a member has breached the code to a standards committee and to prescribe the purpose and effect of such a notice.

Proposals

a) To extend the range of the sanctions available to a case tribunal of the Adjudication Panel

52. To ensure that a tribunal has a full range of sanctions available to it in cases where it has found that a member has breached the code, we intend to make available to a tribunal a wider range of less onerous sanctions equivalent to those already available to standards committees (which are contained in regulation 7 of the Local Authorities (Code of Conduct)(Local Determination) Regulations 2003, as amended by regulation 8 of the Local Authorities (Code of Conduct)(Local Determination)(Amendment) Regulations 2004)). We consider that they should be available to a tribunal of the Adjudication Panel when reaching a decision on which sanction it should impose, so that the seriousness of the breach of the code can be matched by the level of the sanction imposed. We intend to make regulations which will enable a case tribunal to impose sanctions including the censure of the member, the restriction of the member's access to the premises of the authority and the use of the authority's resources, and a requirement for the member to undertake training or conciliation.
53. The full range of sanctions which we propose to make available to the Adjudication Panel is as follows:
- No sanction should be imposed.
 - Censure of the member.
 - Restriction for a period of up to 12 months of the member's access to the premises of the authority and the member's use of the resources of the authority, provided that any such restrictions imposed on the member –
 - (a) are reasonable and proportionate to the breach; and

(b) do not unduly restrict the member's ability to perform his functions as a member.

- Requirement that the member submits a written apology in a form specified by the case tribunal.
- Requirement that the member undertake training as specified by the case tribunal.
- Requirement that the member undertake conciliation as specified by the case tribunal.
- Suspend or partially suspend the member for a period of up to 12 months or until such time as he or she submits a written apology in a form specified by the case tribunal.
- Suspend or partially suspend the member for a period of up to 12 months or until such time as he or she undertakes such training or conciliation as the case tribunal may specify.
- Suspend or partially suspend the member from being a member or co-opted member of the relevant authority concerned or any other relevant authority for up to 12 months or, if shorter, the remainder of the member's term in office.
- Disqualify the member from being or becoming a member of that or any other authority for a maximum of 5 years.

Question

Q12. Are you content that the range of sanctions available to case tribunals of the Adjudication Panel should be expanded, so the sanctions they can impose reflect those already available to standards committees?

b) Withdrawing references to the Adjudication Panel

54. We propose to prescribe in the regulations that an ethical standards officer may withdraw a reference to the Adjudication Panel in certain circumstances. These would include circumstances where:

- after the ethical standards officer has determined that the case should be referred to the Adjudication Panel for adjudication, further evidence emerges that indicates that the case is not as serious as thought originally so that, in the ethical standards officer's view, there is no longer any justification for presenting the case to the Panel;
- a penalty imposed by another body meant the Adjudication Panel could do no more (for example, a sentence of imprisonment of three months or above for a related or non-related offence which would disqualify the member from office for 5 years); or

- the pursuit of the case would not be in the public interest, such as where the member accused has been diagnosed with a terminal illness or has died.
55. Before an ethical standards officer withdraws a reference to the Adjudication Panel, we propose that the regulations should require the ethical standards officer to notify the complainant, the subject of the allegation and the monitoring officer of the relevant authority of the proposed withdrawal. These people would therefore have the opportunity to make representations to the ethical standards officer in advance of the final decision of the withdrawal of the case being taken. We would also provide that the consent of the President of the Adjudication Panel would need to be obtained before a case could be withdrawn. We propose equivalent provision as regards the referral of interim reports from ethical standards officers to the Adjudication Panel.

Question

Q13. Do you agree with our proposals for an ethical standards officer to be able to withdraw references to the Adjudication Panel in the circumstances described? Are there any other situations in which it might be appropriate for an ethical standards officer to withdraw a reference or an interim reference?

c) Decision notices of case tribunals of the Adjudication Panel

56. We propose to ensure, through regulations, that the rules relating to the suspension of a member who has been found to have breached the code by the Adjudication Panel are consistent with those which already apply in respect of disqualification.
57. Where a case tribunal of the Adjudication Panel decides that a member has breached his or her authority's code and that the breach warrants the suspension of that member, there is a requirement for the case tribunal to issue a notice to the relevant local authority. Currently, the effect of the suspension notice, unlike an Adjudication Panel's notice to disqualify a member, is not to put into effect the suspension of the member but instead merely to give notice to the standards committee that the person has failed to comply with the code of conduct. Accordingly, the local authority which receives a suspension notice from the Adjudication Panel must currently take action actually to suspend the relevant member. Section 198 of the 2007 Act amends the 2000 Act in respect of the decisions of case tribunals in England. This allows the Secretary of State to make regulations which provide for the effect that any notice issued by the case tribunal is to have. We propose to prescribe that in the case of the issue by the case tribunal of any notice, the effect of the notice will in future have the effect set out in the notice so that no further action is needed by the relevant authority before the notice can come into effect.

58. We also propose that a notice from the Adjudication Panel should have immediate effect, unless otherwise stated, and that the notice should give information on what breach of the code has been found and the sanction imposed. We propose that the notice should be sent to the chairman of the standards committee and copied to the monitoring officer and the member who is the subject of the notice. We propose that, consistent with current practice, the fully reasoned decision of the tribunal is provided to the above people within two weeks of the decision being taken.

Chapter 5

Issuing dispensations to allow councillors to participate in meetings so as to preserve political balance

Purpose

59. It is proposed to amend the Relevant Authorities (Standards Committee) (Dispensations) Regulations 2002 (“the Dispensations Regulations”), to clarify the rules relating to standards committees granting dispensations to members of local authorities.

Proposal

60. Some local authorities have from time to time expressed concern about the current drafting of the Dispensations Regulations, the effect of which is to allow standards committees to grant dispensations from the prohibition of a member to participate in any business where: more than 50% of the members participating would otherwise be prevented from doing so, and where the political balance of the committee would otherwise be upset.
61. Some authorities have identified the following concerns in the operation of these regulations:
- Regulation 3(1)(a)(i) provides that a dispensation may be issued where the number of members of the authority prohibited from ‘participating in the business of the authority’ exceeds 50% of those entitled or required to participate. It is claimed that this reference to an entitlement to participate is ambiguous, since in some authorities all members are entitled to attend all committee meetings. The reference to the entitlement to participate in meetings could be replaced with reference to the number of members able to vote on a particular matter.
 - Regulation 3(1)(a)(ii) refers to the inability of the authority to comply with section 15(4) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Since that section relates to the appointment of members to committees, and not to the attendance of members at committees it is suggested that what is meant by the term “not able to comply with any duty” under that section of the 1989 Act is ambiguous and might be clarified. Additionally, it could be clarified that the regulations are intended to deal with situations where a majority on a committee would be lost; the intention is not that they should aim to retain the precise political balance on each committee.

- The reference to section 15(4) could be interpreted as allowing dispensations to be granted in relation to committees but not in relation to full council meetings, where issues of political balance can be of concern particularly where there are hung councils or councils with small majorities.
62. To address these concerns, we propose to amend the regulations to make it more clear that they have the following effect:
- A standards committee should be able to grant dispensations if the effect otherwise would be that the numbers of members having the right to vote on a matter would decrease so that a political party lost a majority which it previously held, or if a party gained a majority which it otherwise did not hold
 - It should be possible to grant a dispensation if the matter is under discussion at a committee or at a meeting of the full council.

Question

Q14. Have you made decisions under the existing dispensation regulations, or have you felt inhibited from doing so? Do the concerns we have indicated on the current effect of these rules adequately reflect your views, or are there any further concerns you have on the way they operate? Are you content with our proposal to provide that dispensations may be granted in respect of a committee or the full council if the effect otherwise would be that a political party either lost a majority which it had previously held, or gained a majority it did not previously hold?

Chapter 6

The granting and supervision of exemptions of certain local authority posts from political restrictions

Purpose

63. The purpose of the regulations is to prescribe that a local authority which is not required to establish a standards committee, should establish a committee to exercise functions in respect of the granting and supervision of exemptions from political restrictions.

Proposals

64. Section 202 of the 2007 Act inserts a new section 3A into the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to provide that the granting and supervision of exemptions of posts from political restrictions should be a matter for relevant local authorities' standards committees. There are, however, some authorities subject to requirements with regard to politically restricted posts which are not required to establish standards committees. The only such authorities of which we are aware are waste disposal authorities.
65. In order to ensure that such authorities are able to make decisions on the exemption of certain posts from political restrictions, in accordance with section 3A of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, we propose that those relevant authorities which are not required to have standards committees should establish committees to undertake this function. We propose to provide in the regulations that the rules regarding the minimum number of members the committee should have, the proportion of members who should be independent and the requirement to have an independent chair, which apply to standards committees, as set out in the 2000 Act, as amended, and the regulations discussed above regarding standards committees should also apply to the committees of these authorities.
66. This provision should not prevent these types of authorities from instead discharging their responsibilities with regard to the granting and supervision of exemptions from political restrictions by entering into agreements with other authorities to carry out this role on their behalf, under section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972. We propose therefore that authorities should have the option of which of the above approaches to take, so that it would only be in circumstances where the authority has not made arrangements for the discharge of this function by another authority that it would be required to set up its own committee to undertake the function itself.

Question

Q15. Do think it is necessary for the Secretary of State to make regulations under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, to provide for authorities not required to have standards committees to establish committees to undertake functions with regard to the exemption of certain posts from political restrictions, or will the affected authorities make arrangements under section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 instead? Are you aware of any authorities other than waste authorities which are not required to establish a standards committee under section 53(1) of the 2000 Act, but which are subject to the political restrictions provisions?

Chapter 7

Other Issues

(a) Maximum pay of local authority political assistants – results of earlier consultation

Purpose

67. The purpose of the proposed order is to specify the point on the local authority pay scale which will serve as the maximum pay for local authority political assistants.

Proposals

68. In August 2004, the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published the *Review of the Regulatory Framework Governing the Political Activities of Local Government Employees – A Consultation Paper*. In the paper we invited views on the pay arrangements for political assistants. There was a consensus among consultees in favour of linking the maximum pay for political assistants to local government pay scales. Various spine points on the local government scale were suggested as the maximum which should apply, and many suggested spine point 49. Authorities did not suggest that further payments such as London weighting should be added on top of the proposed maximum rate.
69. Accordingly, we propose that the order should set the maximum pay for local authority political assistants at point 49 on the National Joint Council for Local Government Services pay scale (currently £39,132 pa). Local authorities will be able to pay remuneration including any allowances to their political assistants provided remuneration to any individual does not exceed the overall rate represented by spine point 49 from time to time in force.

(b) Effective date for the implementation of the reformed conduct regime

70. We propose that those arrangements referred to in this consultation paper which will implement the reformed conduct regime for local councillors will be implemented no earlier than 1 April 2008. We are aware that this is the date which many authorities have been working to, and that there is an expectation by many in the local government world that the amendments will commence on this date. Feedback from authorities to the Standards Board has suggested that many authorities wish the revised framework to be put in place as soon as practically possible.

Question

Q16. Do you agree with our proposal to implement the reformed conduct regime on 1 April 2008 at the earliest?

Annex A: Summary of questions

Your views

We would welcome your views on the issues covered by this consultation paper and any other comments and suggestions you may have.

Questions

The specific questions which feature throughout the text of this paper are reproduced for ease of reference:

Q1. Does our proposal to prohibit a member who has been involved in a decision on the assessment of an allegation from reviewing any subsequent request to review that decision to take no action (but for such a member not to be prohibited necessarily from taking part in any subsequent determination hearing), provide an appropriate balance between the need to avoid conflicts of interest and ensure a proportionate approach? Would a requirement to perform the functions of initial assessment, review of a decision to take no action, and subsequent hearing, by sub-committees be workable?

Q2. Where an allegation is made to more than one standards committee, is it appropriate for decisions on which standards committee should deal with it to be a matter for agreement between standards committees? Do you agree that it is neither necessary nor desirable to provide for any adjudication role for the Standards Board?

Q3. Are you content with our proposal that the timescale for making initial decisions should be a matter for guidance by the Standards Board, rather than for the imposition of a statutory time limit?

Q4. Do you agree that the sort of circumstances we have identified would justify a standards committee being relieved of the obligation to provide a summary of the allegation at the time the initial assessment is made? Are there any other circumstances which you think would also justify the withholding of information? Do you agree that in a case where the summary has been withheld the obligation to provide it should arise at the point where the monitoring officer or ethical standards officer is of the view that a sufficient investigation has been undertaken?

Q5. Do you agree that circumstances should be prescribed, as we have proposed, in which the monitoring officer will refer a case back to the standards committee?

Q6. Are you in favour of an increase in the maximum sanction the standards committee can impose? If so, are you content that the maximum sanction should increase from three months to six months suspension or partial suspension from office?

Q7. Do you have any views on the practicability of requiring that the chairs of all sub-committees discharging the assessment, review and hearing functions should be independent, which is likely to mean that there would need to be at least three independent chairs for each standards committee? Would it be consistent with robust decision-making if one or more of the sub-committee chairs were not independent?

Q8. Do you agree with our proposal that the initial assessment of misconduct allegations and any review of a standards committee's decision to take no action should be exempt from the rules on access to information?

Q9. Have we identified appropriate criteria for the Standards Board to consider when making decisions to suspend a standards committee's powers to make initial assessments? Are there any other relevant criteria which the Board ought to take into account?

Q10. Would the imposition of a charging regime, to allow the Standards Board and local authorities to recover the costs incurred by them, be effective in principle in supporting the operation of the new locally-based ethical regime? If so, should the level of fees be left for the Board or authorities to set; or should it be prescribed by the Secretary of State or set at a level that does no more than recover costs?

Q11. Would you be interested in pursuing joint arrangements with other authorities? Do you have experience of joint working with other authorities and suggestions as to how it can be made to work effectively in practice? Do you think there is a need to limit the geographical area to be covered by a particular joint agreement and, if so, how should such a limitation be expressed? Do you agree that if a matter relating to a parish council is discussed by a joint committee, the requirement for a parish representative to be present should be satisfied if a representative from any parish in the joint committee's area attends?

Q12. Are you content that the range of sanctions available to case tribunals of the Adjudication Panel should be expanded, so the sanctions they can impose reflect those already available to standards committees?

Q13. Do you agree with our proposals for an ethical standards officer to be able to withdraw references to the Adjudication Panel in the circumstances described? Are there any other situations in which it might be appropriate for an ethical standards officer to withdraw a reference or an interim reference?

Q14. Have you made decisions under the existing dispensation regulations, or have you felt inhibited from doing so? Do the concerns we have indicated on the current effect of these rules adequately reflect your views, or are there any further concerns you have on the way they operate? Are you content with our proposals to provide that dispensations may be granted in respect of a committee or the full council if the effect otherwise would be that a political party either lost a majority which it had previously held, or gained a majority it did not previously hold?

Q15. Do you think it is necessary for the Secretary of State to make regulations under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to provide for authorities not required to have standards committees to establish committees to undertake functions with regard to the exemption of certain posts from political restrictions, or will the affected authorities make arrangements under section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 instead? Are you aware of any authorities other than waste authorities which are not required to establish a standards committee under section 53(1) of the 2000 Act, but which are subject to the political restrictions provisions?

Q16. Do you agree with our proposal to implement the reformed conduct regime on 1 April 2008 at the earliest?

Comments should be sent by e-mail
or post by **15 February 2008** to:

William Tandoh
Department for Communities and Local Government
Local Democracy and Empowerment Directorate
5/G10 Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
e-mail: william.tandoh@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Annex B: The Consultation Criteria

1. The Government has adopted a code of practice on consultations. The criteria below apply to all UK national public consultations on the basis of a document in electronic or printed form.
2. Though they have no legal force, and cannot prevail over statutory or other mandatory external requirements (for example, under European Union law), they should otherwise be regarded as binding on UK departments and their agencies, unless Ministers conclude that exceptional circumstances require a departure.
3. The criteria are:
 - a. Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
 - b. Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the timescale for responses.
 - c. Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
 - d. Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
 - e. Monitor your department's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.
 - f. Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out an Impact Assessment if appropriate.
4. The full consultation code may be viewed at http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/consultation_guidance/the_code_and_consultation/index.asp#codeofpractice
5. Are you satisfied that this consultation has followed these criteria? If not, or you have any other observations about ways of improving the consultation process, please contact:

David Plant, Head of Better Regulation Unit,
 Department for Communities and Local Government,
 Zone 6/H10, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU

e-mail: David.Plant@communities.gov.uk

**PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE
DATE 29 JULY 2008 at 13:30**

APPENDIX 3

Application Number	Site Description	Outcome	Vote	Conservative						Ind	
				MT	FB	CB	CD	PK	PT	SL	CA
08/00462/FUL	45 Gunthorpe Road, Gunthorpe, Peterborough	Approved officer recommendation approved	5 for, 1 against 1 NV, 1 NP	NV	√	X	√	√	NP	√	√
07/06197/FUL	Bretton Woods Community School, Flaxland, Bretton, Peterborough	Approved officer recommendation approved	7 for, 1 NV	NV	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
07/01698/R4OUT	Bretton Woods Community School, Flaxland, Bretton, Peterborough	Approved officer recommendation approved	7 for, 1 NV	NV	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
07/01738/R4OUT	John Mansfield School, Western Avenue, Dogsthorpe, Peterborough	Approved officer recommendation approved	6 for, 1 NV, 1 NP	NV	√	√	√	√	√	√	NP
08/00169/FUL	50 School Road, Newborough, Peterborough	Approved officer recommendation approved	7 for, 1 NV	NV	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
08/00292/FUL	Cross Keys Homes, Shrewsbury Avenue, Woodston, Peterborough	Approved officer recommendation approved	6 for, 1 NV, 1 NP	NV	√	√	√	√	√	NP	√
08/00561/OUT	Clay Lane, Rear Of Farm Close And Allotment Lane, Castor	Policy									

NB **NP = Not Present**
NV = No Vote

**PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE
DATE 9 SEPTEMBER 2008 at 13:30**

Application Number	Site Description	Outcome	Vote	Conservative								Ind	
				MT	PH	CB	CD	PK	PT	FB	IW	KS	
07/01666/FUL	Change of use to A1 Community Pharmacy, at Old Chapel, Church Hill, Castor	Approved officer recommendation approved	8 for, 1 NV	NV	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
08/00286/FUL	Phase 1 regeneration of Werrington Centre, Staniland Way, Werrington, Peterborough	Refused contrary to officer recommendation	1 for, 7 against, 1 NV	NV	X	X	X	√	X	X	X	X	X
08/00671/FUL	Change of use from shop to takeaway, 64 Canterbury Road, Werrington, Peterborough	Refused contrary to officer recommendation	7 against, 1 NV, 1 NP	NV	X	NP	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
08/00731/FUL	Change of use from LA open land to residential use at 2 Rose Avenue, Stanground, Peterborough	Refused contrary to officer recommendation	7 against, 1 NV, 1 NP	NV	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	NP	X

NB **NP = Not Present**
NV = No Vote