



## Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees

13 - 14 October 2008, International Convention Centre, Birmingham

### Advance programme

## Delivering the Goods: Local Standards in Action



Welcome to the Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees. The Assembly continues to be the leading conference on all issues concerned with the local government Code of Conduct and improving standards.

This year, **Delivering the Goods** will address the bigger picture. It will highlight key issues of governance and ethics, including how to develop an exemplary standards committee, promote good governance of partnerships and build public confidence in your members.

The wide range of sessions also covers the local standards system, including managing local assessment, investigations and determinations, mediation, and handling complex complaints. We'll also be providing guidance on the Code in a number of sessions, including **The Code made clear**, and a specialist session focusing on the ever-contentious issue of planning.

Last year, more than 97% of delegates attending the conference reported they were either satisfied or very satisfied with it. Judging by this year's packed programme, I am sure that this year's Assembly will be even more useful to you, giving you the advice, best practice examples and skills training you need to put standards into action.

I wish you a successful and productive conference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anthony Holland', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

**Sir Anthony Holland**

Chair, the Standards Board for England

**If you would like a copy of this advance programme in another format or language, please contact the Standards Board for England by emailing [annualassembly2008@standardsboard.co.uk](mailto:annualassembly2008@standardsboard.co.uk) or call 01483 205432.**

## Key to conference session symbols

Delegates can attend breakout sessions at several points during the conference. The definitions of each type of session are as follows.



**Plenary sessions** are attended by all delegates and take place in Hall 1. There are four plenaries in this year's conference programme. They include presentations from expert speakers and an opportunity for delegates to ask questions.



**Mini plenary sessions** include information from expert speakers and an opportunity for questions and answers. Most of these sessions have a maximum attendance of 100.



**Workshops** take place in smaller halls, with a maximum attendance of 70. These sessions take a practical approach to topics. They give delegates the chance to get hands-on experience, for example by working through case examples.



**Q & A sessions** take place in smaller halls, with a maximum attendance of 70. They provide an open house for delegates to put questions to the Standards Board for England. This year, there are four different Q&A sessions, one for new standards committee members, one for more experienced members, one for monitoring officers, and one session open to all delegates.



**Fringe events** are optional. They are run by a range of organisations from the local government family. Further information on fringe events at this year's conference will appear on [www.annualassembly.co.uk](http://www.annualassembly.co.uk).

## Choosing breakout sessions

There are 21 breakout sessions to choose from. These include several sessions with a practical focus, such as ***The Code made clear*** and ***Delivering local assessment***. These sessions are designed to help you put the local standards framework and the Code into action in your authority. There are also several sessions which address wider issues of governance, leadership and ethics, including ***Mind the gap: Accountability and joint working*** and ***Joining the dots: Understanding corporate governance***.

Delegates will have the opportunity to attend four breakout sessions during the conference. In addition to these breakout sessions, there are two main plenary sessions: ***A higher level*** and ***Making an impact?***, plus the opening and closing plenaries which all delegates are encouraged to attend.

Feedback from authorities shows that it can be useful to discuss your breakout session choices with colleagues who are also planning to attend. This helps to ensure you do not all attend the same breakout sessions, and your authority gets the benefit of as wide a range of information and training as possible.

Each breakout session description includes information on who we think may find it useful. However, this is just a suggestion, and any delegate can attend any session they choose.

## DAY 1

# Monday 13 October 2008

**08.30 - 10.00**



**REGISTRATION**

### Registration

Refreshments available.

**09.15 - 10.00**



**MINI  
PLENARY  
SESSION**

### Getting up to speed

A quick beginner's guide to the Code of Conduct and the Standards Board, aimed at delegates who are new to the Code or the conference.

**10.15 - 11.15**

**Hall 1**



**PLENARY  
SESSION**

### Opening plenary

Welcome to the Seventh Annual Assembly of Standards Committees. This session is open to all delegates and includes speeches from the Chair and Chief Executive of the Standards Board, and an opening address from the Minister.

**10.15 - 10.25**

### Welcome

**10.25 - 10.40**

### Supporting local standards

The Minister opens the conference by setting out the government's commitment to local standards and its proposals for the future.

**10.40 - 11.00**

### Local standards in action: The first six months

By October 2008, the new local system for complaints will have been in action for several months. The Standards Board reports back on what local delivery has meant in practice, bringing you the latest performance statistics and feedback on local and national cases.

**11.00 - 11.15**

### Over to you

An opportunity to pose questions to the morning's speakers.

**11.15 - 11.30**

### Comfort break

Delegates move to their breakout sessions.

11.30 - 13.00

## Breakout sessions

Delegates should select **one** of the following sessions. All sessions last for one hour 30 minutes. **All 11.30 to 13.00 sessions are repeated at 16.00.**



### Alternative action masterclass

Mentoring, mediation and guidance can be effective alternative actions to investigation. They can also help authorities to resolve longstanding issues of inappropriate member behaviour. This session gives an overview of the processes and benefits of alternative actions. Delegates work through scenarios to build their understanding of when an alternative action may be appropriate, and how to implement it.

**Who should attend?** This session is useful for **all delegates**.



### What went wrong?

What happens if investigations and hearings don't go to plan? This session highlights learning from case examples where these processes have not worked as effectively as they could. Delegates hear what went wrong and how they can use these lessons to improve their management of local investigations and hearings.

**Who should attend?** This session is useful for **all delegates**.



### Balancing act

Is it possible, or even desirable, to have a consistent, national approach to managing standards? Should standards committees take into account local attitudes, opinions and precedents? This session gives delegates a chance to discuss these issues and start to consider their criteria for consistent and effective handling of local cases.

**Who should attend?** This session is useful for **all delegates**.



### Mind the gap: Setting standards for joint working

Joint working is high on the agenda of many standards committees, and ensuring partnership organisations work in line with local authority standards is a key issue. This session

uses the results of research from the Standards Board and the University of Manchester to assess the accountability gap in partnerships and joint working. It helps delegates to identify appropriate behaviours and governance for joint working, including the role of council leaders and chief executives in ensuring accountability.

**Who should attend?** This session is useful for **all delegates**.



### Delivering local assessment

This session is for all delegates who really want to get to grips with the local assessment process and understand the key steps involved. Using case examples, delegates work through each stage of the process, from the point the authority receives the complaint, to when the member is notified of the result of the assessment.

**Who should attend?** This session is for **all delegates** who are new to local assessment, or want to improve their understanding of the process.



### Delivering local investigations

This session brings delegates up to speed with each stage of the investigations process. Delegates will work through case examples to build their understanding of the key steps involved and how to implement them in their authority.

**Who should attend?** This session is for **all delegates**, particularly monitoring officers who need to have a good grounding in the investigations process, especially those who are not currently experienced in this area.



### First response

This session focuses on how to manage the assessment of complex and challenging complaints, for example, those that cover more than one part of the Code, include more than one member or span a long period of time. Using case scenarios, it explains how to review and organise evidence and present complex complaints to a standards committee for assessment. Delegates hear how to decide what action to take in response

to a complaint, how to identify potential conflicts of interest, and decide when to refer cases back to the Standards Board.

**Who should attend?** This is an in-depth session, mainly aimed at **monitoring officers** who already have experience of handling local assessments.



### The Code made clear

An informative presentation and discussion, taking delegates through cases which help to illustrate and clarify complex, problematic or new areas of the Code.

**Who should attend?** This session is useful for **all delegates**, but may be particularly helpful for standards committee members, particularly those who are new to the role or would like to build on their existing knowledge in this area.



### Communicating with communities

A frequent comment from delegates at the 2007 Assembly was that they wanted their communities to understand what they did, and the difference this made. This session provides practical suggestions on how standards committees can improve their communication with the local community, including finding out what your community already knows, communicating clearly in your written materials, and working well with the media to raise awareness of your work.

**Who should attend?** This session is particularly useful for **standards committee members**.



### Questions and answers: New standards committee members

An open house Q&A session for new or recently appointed standards committee members and chairs.

**Who should attend?** This session is mainly aimed at independent and elected members who have **recently joined a standards committee**.



13.00 - 14.15  
Hall 3



### Lunch

14.15 - 15.30  
Hall 1



### A higher level

What makes a standards committee effective? What knowledge and resources are required to help you improve the performance of your committee, and can an effective standards committee contribute to the good governance of your authority? This session aims to answer these questions. Expert speakers give examples of how you can raise the standard in your authority, move beyond basic compliance with the Code and make a real difference to your community. This session includes an opportunity for delegates to ask questions and discuss with the panel.

**Who should attend?** This session is for **all delegates**.

15.30 - 16.00



### Refreshments

Tea and coffee available.

16.00 - 17.30



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**Who should attend?** This session is useful for **all delegates**.

16.00 - 17.30



### What went wrong?

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**Who should attend?** This session is for **all delegates** who are new to local assessment, or want to improve their understanding of the process.

#### **The Code made clear**

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#### **Communicating with communities**

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#### **Delivering local investigations**

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**Who should attend?** This session is for **all delegates**, particularly **monitoring officers** who need to have a good grounding in the investigations process, especially those who are not currently experienced in this area.



WORKSHOP

**First response**

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**Who should attend?** This is an in-depth session, mainly aimed at **monitoring officers** who have some experience of handling local assessments.



QUESTIONS  
& ANSWERS

**Questions and answers: Monitoring officers**

An open house Q&A session for monitoring officers.

**Who should attend?** This session is mainly aimed at **monitoring officers**.

17.30

**Close of day one**

18.00 - 19.00



FRINGE  
EVENT

**Fringe events (optional)**

A range of fringe events from local government organisations. For further details, please visit [www.annualassembly.co.uk](http://www.annualassembly.co.uk)

19.30 - 20.00  
Hall 3

**Drinks reception**

20.00 - 23.00  
Hall 3



CONFERENCE  
DINNER

**Conference dinner**

Dress code is smart or smart-casual.  
Cash bar available.  
Live music.

8.00 - 9.00

**REFRESHMENTS****Refreshments**

Tea and coffee available.

Delegates attending for today only should register at the enquiries desk.

09.00 - 10.30

**Breakout sessions**

Delegates should select **one** of the following sessions.

All sessions last for one hour 30 minutes. **All 09.00 to 10.30 sessions are repeated at 13.30.**

**MINI  
PLENARY  
SESSION****In confidence**

The move to local regulation means that standards committees, as well as monitoring officers, will be responsible for protecting the personal information of both complainants and members. It is therefore important that they have a good awareness of issues relating to confidentiality of information. This session uses case examples to provide guidance on key areas of the Data Protection Act, Freedom of Information Act and other relevant areas of the legal framework. It also outlines the pitfalls of poor information management and how to avoid them.

**Who should attend?** This session is useful for **all delegates**.

**MINI  
PLENARY  
SESSION****Keeping track of standards: Monitoring and support**

This session explains how the Standards Board will monitor how local arrangements are working. It describes how we will support authorities which are experiencing difficulties and how we can help them to improve their performance.

**Who should attend?** This session is useful for **all delegates**.

**WORKSHOP****Delivering local assessment**

This session is for all delegates who really want to get to grips with the local assessment process and understand the key steps involved. Using case examples, delegates will work through each stage of the process, from the point the authority

receives the complaint, to when the member is notified of the result of the assessment.

**Who should attend?** This session is for **all delegates** who are new to local assessment, or want to improve their understanding of the process.



### Delivering local determinations and setting sanctions

A work-through of the local determinations process, using case examples to demonstrate each step. This session uses case examples to demonstrate what factors should be considered when setting sanctions. The session also includes information on how to prepare and present cases to the Adjudication Panel for England.

**Who should attend?** This session is aimed at **all delegates** who need to know more about the local determinations process and understand sanctions.



### Joining the dots: Understanding corporate governance

This session looks in detail at the relationship and shared agenda between standards committees and corporate governance, scrutiny and audit committees. Delegates will discuss how to manage the possible overlaps and tensions between these committees, and how to ensure they work effectively together to deliver real benefits for the community.

**Who should attend?** This session is useful for **all delegates**.



### Mediation in action

A practical workshop giving delegates an introduction to mediation skills. This session gives an overview of the key skills mediators need to use this valuable tool, and gives delegates a chance to discuss and experience how they can be applied.

**Who should attend?** This session is useful for **all delegates**, particularly **monitoring officers**.



### Planning ahead

Do you believe the Code of Conduct prevents you from engaging with developers and taking part in planning decisions? This workshop takes delegates through difficult planning scenarios to demonstrate when and how you can represent your community. It also discusses some of the planning pitfalls and how to avoid them.

**Who should attend?** This session is useful for **all delegates**.



### The parish perspective

Principal authorities are now responsible for receiving and assessing complaints about town and parish councillors. This makes effective engagement and clear communication more vital than ever. Expert speakers discuss the best practice approaches, resources and strategies delegates can use to engage effectively with town and parish councillors in their local area.

**Who should attend?** **Standards committee members** and other delegates who work with town and parish councils.



### Focus on fire, police and park authorities

The local standards system will bring unique challenges for fire, police and park authorities. This session gives delegates the opportunity to discuss these challenges, including building effective joint arrangements and recruitment and sharing of independent members.

**Who should attend?** This session is mainly aimed at **members of fire, police or park authority standards committees** and delegates who work with them.



### Questions and answers: Standards committee members

An open house Q&A session for standards committee members.

**Who should attend?** This session is mainly aimed at **standards committee members**.

10.30 - 11.00



REFRESHMENTS

Refreshments

Tea and coffee available.

11.00 - 12.15

Hall 1



PLENARY  
SESSION

Making an impact?

Has the standards framework made a difference? Do the public have any more confidence in members as a result? Opinion formers discuss the results of research from the Standards Board and Cardiff University on the impact of the standards framework. Delegates are invited to join the debate and pose questions to the speakers.

**Who should attend?** This session is for **all delegates**.

12.15 - 13.30

Hall 3



LUNCH

Lunch

13.30 - 15.00



MINI  
PLENARY  
SESSION

Breakout sessions

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In confidence

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**Who should attend?** This session is useful for **all delegates**.



### Questions and answers: All delegates

An open house Q&A session open to all delegates.

**Who should attend?** This session is recommended for **all delegates**.



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A practical workshop giving delegates an introduction to mediation skills. This session gives an overview of the key skills mediators need to use this valuable tool, and gives delegates a chance to discuss and experience how they can be applied.

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**Who should attend?** This session is mainly aimed at **members of fire, police or park authority standards committees** and delegates who work with them.

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15.00 - 15.15

### Comfort break

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15.15 - 15.45

Hall 1



### Closing plenary

The Chair and Chief Executive of the Standards Board for England wrap up the conference and take final questions from delegates.

15.15 - 15.30

### Delivering the goods

The Chair of the Standards Board for England sums up the key issues covered at this year's conference.

15.30 - 15.45

### Local standards in action

Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive of the Standards Board for England, outlines the next steps for delegates and the Standards Board as we put local standards into action.

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15.45 - 16.15



### Networking

Refreshments available.

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16.15

### Close of conference

## **How to get there**

The ICC is in the centre of Birmingham. You can get there in a number of ways.

### **By train**

Services to Birmingham New Street Station travel from locations all over the country. Services to Birmingham Snow Hill Station run in the local area. Please telephone National Rail Enquiries on **08457 48 49 50** for further information.

### **By taxi**

The venue is a short taxi ride from Birmingham New Street and Birmingham Snow Hill stations.

### **On foot**

The venue is approximately 10 minutes walk from Birmingham New Street Station.

### **By car**

Birmingham is easily accessible via a network of motorways.

### **Car parking**

There are five public multi-storey car parks close to the ICC.

A location map will be sent to delegates in the final mailing, shortly before the conference. The map will indicate the train stations, motorways and car parks.

## **Further information**

If you have any enquiries regarding the conference, please contact:

Benedict Business Resources  
St Jude's Place  
PO Box 617  
Albury  
Guildford  
Surrey  
GU5 9XU

Telephone: **01483 205 432**

Fax: **01483 202 335**

E-mail: [annualassembly2008@standardsboard.co.uk](mailto:annualassembly2008@standardsboard.co.uk)

Alternatively, visit our conference website at **[www.annualassembly.co.uk](http://www.annualassembly.co.uk)**

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