



Office of the  
Deputy Prime Minister

Creating sustainable communities

Paul Rowsell  
Head of Democracy and Local Governance  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
LONDON  
SW1E 5DU

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

Enquiries: 020 7944 8765  
Fax: 020 7944 4109  
GTN: 3533 x 8765  
email: [william.tandoh@odpm.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:william.tandoh@odpm.gsi.gov.uk)

Web site: [www.odpm.gov.uk](http://www.odpm.gov.uk)

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The Clerk:  
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:  
Parish Councils in England

Dear Colleague

## **STANDARDS OF CONDUCT IN ENGLISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT: THE FUTURE**

I am writing to inform you that the Government has today published the enclosed Discussion Paper which sets out its vision for a future comprehensive conduct regime for local authority members and employees.

Earlier this year, the Committee on Standards in Public Life (Graham Committee) made recommendations about the local government conduct regime including the role of the Standards Board for England, in Chapter 3 of its 10<sup>th</sup> report *Getting the Balance Right*. The ODPM Select Committee also made recommendations following its Inquiry into the *Role and Effectiveness of the Standards Board for England*. Subsequently, this Autumn, the Standards Board presented recommendations to the Office following its review of the code of conduct for members which Ministers had asked the Board to conduct.

This Discussion Paper reflects the Government response to the Graham and Select Committees, as well as having regard to the Standards Board's recommendations for amending the code of conduct for members.

The Paper also indicates the approach the Government is minded to follow on the conduct of employees, in particular on the political restrictions which apply to local government employees, the pay of political assistants and a code of conduct for employees. In reaching these views, the Government has had regard to the responses received to the consultation that the Office undertook on these issues last year.

The overall approach to conduct set out in the Paper would involve the following principal changes to current arrangements:

#### Conduct regime for local councillors

- Initial assessment of all misconduct allegations to be undertaken by standards committees, rather than the Standards Board;
- Local standards committees to be responsible for investigating and determining most cases;
- The Standards Board to adopt a more strategic, advisory and monitoring role, but retaining responsibility for investigating the most serious misconduct allegations;
- Improvements to the operation and composition of local standards committees, with independent chairs and committees to include independent members with a balance of experience; and
- A clearer, simpler code of conduct, including changes to the rules relating to personal and prejudicial interests.

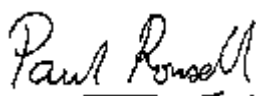
#### Conduct regime for local government employees

- Issue a code of conduct for local government employees;
- Retain the current principle that senior and sensitive posts should be politically restricted, but to ensure that only the most senior and sensitive posts *are* covered;
- Discontinue the post of the Independent Adjudicator, and provide for authorities' standards committees to make decisions on posts exempt from restrictions;
- Uprate the current rate of pay for political assistants by Statutory Instrument, and provide for future increases to be permanently linked to local government pay scales.

The Government believes that such an approach would both deliver a clearer and more proportionate conduct regime for local government members and employees, and ensure that the public can continue to have confidence in those who serve them. We now intend to work with the Standards Board and other stakeholders to carry forward the changes identified in the Paper, having regard to any comments and debate the Paper itself generates. The Government recognises that certain of these changes would require primary legislation and it intends to seek this at the next convenient opportunity Parliamentary time allows.

Any queries or comments you may have on this Discussion Paper should be directed to William Tandoh (tel 0207 944 8765) [william.tandoh@odpm.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:william.tandoh@odpm.gsi.gov.uk), or Cathryn Evans (tel 0207 944 4262).

Yours sincerely



**PAUL ROWSELL**