STANDARDS COMMITTEE **30 SEPTEMBER 2010**

ABOLITION OF STANDARDS FOR ENGLAND

Report of the Chief Solicitor

The purpose of this short report is to inform Members that the Government's "Programme of Government" of 20 May 2010 contained a commitment to "abolish the Standards Board regime". Primary legislation is required to do this and it is anticipated that provisions will be included in the Decentralisation and Localism Bill which is due to be presented in late 2010, with Royal Assent expected between July and October 2011.

This is likely to result in the closure of the organisation between January and March 2012.

In the meantime, the local standards framework still exists. Standards for England plan to continue to fulfil its statutory duties and Standards Committees and Monitoring Officers have an obligation to keep the system operating.

More recently in an announcement made on 20 September 2010 Communities Minister Andrew Stunell stated that Standards for England, the councillor watchdog, had 'become a vehicle for malicious and frivolous complaints'.

The government will legislate to make serious misconduct by councillors an offence that will be tried in court. It has also promised to give the Local Government Ombudsman 'real teeth'. Local authorities will be legally obliged to implement the findings of the ombudsman, which investigates public complaints over the way they have been treated by their council.

Stunell said: 'The Standards Board regime ended up fuelling petty complaints and malicious vendettas. Nearly every council had investigations hanging over them – most of which would be dismissed but not before reputations were damaged and taxpayer money was wasted.

'Frivolous allegations undermined local democracy and discouraged people from running for public office.'

Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles added: 'Failure to register or declare an interest, or deliberately seeking to mislead the public about an interest, will become a criminal offence while a newly empowered Local Government Ombudsman will investigate incompetence on behalf local people."

Recommendation

That the Committee notes the contents of this report.