

# A place for standards

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2010 Annual Assembly of  
Standards Committees  
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Advance programme

**Monday 18 and Tuesday 19 October 2010**

International Convention Centre, Birmingham



# Welcome to a place for standards

**The Annual Assembly is the place to be if you want to build your knowledge of the Code of Conduct and the local standards framework.**

We've developed this year's programme in partnership with monitoring officers and standards committee members from a range of authorities. It includes breakout sessions for all levels of experience, from the experienced independent chair who wants to boost member engagement and build the reputation of the standards committee, to sessions designed to help those new to the standards framework to build their confidence in managing local assessment, investigations, hearings and determinations

Delegates will have many opportunities to share notable practice, discuss how to promote high standards and local democracy and to get support and advice on managing a proportionate, cost effective local standards framework.

Further information on session content and speakers will be added to the Standards for England web pages regularly over the next few months, so please keep visiting **[www.standardsforengland.gov.uk](http://www.standardsforengland.gov.uk)** for the latest news.

## **Choosing your breakout sessions**

This year there are 20 breakout sessions to choose from. There are also two main plenary sessions which all delegates are encouraged to attend.

Descriptions of all the sessions are provided on pages 4 to 15, where you'll find further information on their content, format and who they are recommended for.

Places in breakout sessions are limited and available on a first-come, first-served basis, so please complete and return your session preference form as soon as possible to avoid disappointment. You can also select and submit your session preferences online via our website.

It's helpful to co-ordinate your breakout session choices with colleagues who are also attending, to ensure your authority gets the benefit of as wide a range of information and training as possible.

# Guide to session formats



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



**Theatre-style sessions:** Presentations and information from expert speakers and an opportunity for audience discussion and questions and answers. Use theatre-style seating.



**Workshops:** Take a practical approach, for example by working through case examples or group exercises. Delegates sit at round tables in groups of 8-10.



**Fringe events:** Optional early-evening sessions run by a range of organisations from the local government family. Further information on fringe events at this year's Assembly will be added to our website, [www.standardsforengland.gov.uk](http://www.standardsforengland.gov.uk).



**Drop in sessions:** Short 1-2-1 sessions, held in the early morning and at lunchtime, where delegates can talk to a Standards for England team member about a specific Code or local standards framework query. Session slots can be booked in advance via our website. Any slots which are not booked in advance will be available to book on the day at the Delegate Information Desk.

## Induction loop information

An induction loop system, which can be linked to visitor's hearing aids, is operated in selected halls at the ICC. If you require an induction loop you can collect it from the Delegate Information Desk in the registration area. A user guide will be also be provided.

**If you would like a copy of this advance programme in another format or language, please contact Standards for England by emailing [annualassembly2010@standardsforengland.gov.uk](mailto:annualassembly2010@standardsforengland.gov.uk) or call 01483 205432**

08.30-10.30

**Registration and breakfast.**

09.30-10.15

**1-2-1 Drop-in sessions**

An opportunity to talk to a Standards for England team member about a specific Code or local standards framework query. Session slots can be booked in advance via our website from April 2010. Any slots which are not booked in advance will be available to book on the day at the Delegate Information Desk.

09.30-10.15

**Welcome session: Getting up to speed**

*Aimed at: Ideal for anyone who is new to the Code or the Annual Assembly.*  
An introductory session designed to bring you up to speed with the role and responsibilities of Standards for England and other organisations in the standards community. The session will also provide a quick overview of latest developments to the Code of Conduct and the local standards framework, and give delegates a chance to meet over coffee.

10.30-11.15

**Opening address: A place for standards**

*Aimed at: All delegates.*

A briefing on the national picture, providing the latest statistics and trends from quarterly monitoring and annual returns, plus a review of the challenges and priorities for the year ahead.

11.15-11.30

**Move to next session**

11.30-12.45

**Local standards, local decisions, local differences**

*Aimed at: All delegates.*

This session looks at the challenges of managing and making decisions during local assessment, investigations and hearings. It's your chance to talk in-depth about consistency, clarity and cost effectiveness. These are just some of the questions we hope the session will open up for debate:

- How do you sort out what is significant from a wealth of information and how do you know you have got the right information in the first place?
- What makes a proportionate and cost-effective investigation?
- How can we reflect local circumstances while having regard to national precedents? Do local differences really have an impact on the standards committee's decisions, and is this something we should be concerned about?
- What do we need to take into account to help us to make the 'right' decision?

12.45-13.00

## Move to lunch

13.00-14.00

## Lunch

13.00-14.00

### 1-2-1 Drop-in sessions



An opportunity to talk to a Standards for England team member about a specific Code or local standards framework query. Session slots can be booked in advance via our website from April 2010. Any slots which are not booked in advance will be available to book on the day at the Delegate Information desk.

14.00-14.15

## Move to next session

14.15-15.30

### Breakout sessions

Please choose one of the following sessions. All sessions last for 1 hour 15 minutes.



#### Principles of public life and the Code of Conduct

*Aimed at: A discussion aimed at all delegates.*

*Selflessness... Integrity... Objectivity... Accountability... Openness... Honesty... Leadership*

Do you think the Code of Conduct captures the spirit of the seven general principles of public life?

This session explores the link between the principles and the local standards framework. It gives you the chance to debate whether the principles are right for today – are they a powerful tool that can help us to increase public trust in local government – or are they just words? How can we use the principles to help uphold and promote high standards amongst elected members? Do you think there is a good fit between the principles and the Code of Conduct? Do standards committees really reflect the principles in their management of the framework and in their responses to complaints about member behaviour?



#### Working with town and parish councils

*Aimed at: Suitable for town and parish council representatives and anyone who works with town and parish councils.*

An opportunity to discuss some of the specific standards challenges town and parish councils can face, such as breakdown in relations between different groups, poor understanding of procedures, major disputes over local 'hot topics' and registering and declaring interests. The session will look at how standards committees, town and parish representatives and monitoring officers can work with town and parish councils to help resolve these challenges.



### **Getting to grips with predetermination and bias**

*Aimed at: A 'technical' workshop suitable for officers, but may also be useful for some standards committee members.*

This workshop will provide practical advice on how to understand, manage and advise on the complex issues of bias and predetermination.



### **Independent chairs: Skills, knowledge and development**

*Aimed at: For new or aspiring independent chairs of standards committees or those involved in the development and training of independent chairs.*

This session gets to grips with the role of the independent chair, explaining the responsibilities and the challenges of the job and providing practical guidance on the key skills and experience you need in order to do it well.



### **First steps for standards committees: Building the right foundations**

*Aimed at: Mainly suitable for standards committee members, but would be also be useful for officers who want to improve their authority's understanding of the Code and the local standards framework.*

This session starts with a look at the foundations for effective management of the local standards committee. It explains what you need to do to ensure your committee complies with requirements such as being properly constituted and making decisions within appropriate timeframes.

Once these foundations are in place, standards committees can help to ensure that councillors and the wider authority are aware of the practical implications of the local standards framework and the Code of Conduct. The session looks at some of the ways standards committees can raise awareness and ensure councillors have the right training and guidance on the Code and the framework.



### **Local standards live**

*Aimed at: All delegates.*

96% of delegates who attended this session in 2009 thought it was excellent – so here it is again, with a brand new range of Code scenarios.

Watch a series of performances and spot the potential Code breaches. You'll get to question and advise the actors, drawing on your own experiences to challenge situations and raise issues. You'll pick up tips from colleagues on different ways of dealing with the scenario, and discuss good practice ideas and the pros and cons of your preferred approach.



### **Local assessment: Building confidence**

*Aimed at: Less experienced officers and/or new standards committee members.*

A practical guide to managing proportionate, transparent and cost effective local assessment of complaints, designed to help you to build your confidence and knowledge. Scenarios and case examples are used to explain the process, including filtering complaints, convening sub-assessment committees, and how and when to make assessment decisions public.



### **Managing challenging behaviour**

*Aimed at: All delegates.*

We are often asked for advice on how to deal with 'difficult' members, such as those who will not take on board the monitoring officer's advice, engage with the standards committee or pay heed to the Code of Conduct. The session looks at how this kind of behaviour can impact on the standards committee, officers and on the reputation of the authority, and provides advice on the skills and techniques you can use to cope with it and make positive changes.



### **Discussion forum: Officers**

*Aimed at: Officers.*

An opportunity to share experiences, challenges and solutions with colleagues, and to ask Standards for England your questions on the framework and the Code.

**15.30-16.00**

### **Refreshments and move to next session**

**16.00-17.15**

### **Breakout sessions**

Please choose 1 of the following sessions. All sessions last for 1 hour 15 minutes.



### **Appeal decisions: Discussion with the First Tier Tribunal**

*Aimed at: All delegates.*

Get an update on tribunal processes, followed by an opportunity to discuss the lessons learnt from the past 12 months of hearings and appeals. What issues and challenges frequently come up? Where and why do interpretations between local standards committees and the Tribunal differ?



### **Prevention better than cure?**

*Aimed at: Officers.*

Is it a good idea to informally 'intervene' to resolve potential Code breaches, before the more costly formal elements of the framework are initiated? This session hears examples of how liaising informally with political group leaders and providing advice to individual members can work in practice, and considers key questions such as when is informal intervention appropriate, what are the benefits and are there any dangers to look out for?



### **Successful investigations**

*Aimed at: New or less experienced officers or those who want to improve their management of investigations.*

A practical session working through each stage of a local investigation to build your knowledge of the process and improve your investigations management. The session will also provide advice on how to successfully manage tricky issues such as historical complaints, those involving longstanding political disputes, bullying and how and when to link police or audit investigations to Code investigations.



### **Next steps for standards committees: Building a wider work programme**

*Aimed at: Standards committee members.*

Many standards committees are ready for the next step on from simply fulfilling their statutory obligations. They are looking for ways to proactively promote ethical standards and integrate them into the culture and governance of their authority. Against this backdrop, this session gives you the opportunity to share ideas about how you can use your expertise and influence more widely and build a wider programme of work for your standards committee. The session will also consider the implications of doing this, such as how to balance this wider way of working with maintaining independence, and how to evaluate the impact of your work – how will you know when you've made a difference?



### **Local determinations: Building confidence**

*Aimed at: new or less experienced delegates.*

A practical guide to managing local determinations. This session is designed to help you to build your confidence and knowledge of the local determinations process. Scenarios and practical examples are used to explain key stages of the process, including consideration meetings, hearings, sanctions, and how and when to make the findings public.



### **Social networking, the internet and the Code: Advising councillors**

*Aimed at: Suitable for all delegates, with particular interest for officers who may need to advise members on this issue.*

Do you know your 'Tweety Hall' from your 'Tweetminster'? Have you dipped your toe into the 'blogosphere'?

Many councillors already understand that when it comes to reaching the electorate quickly and cheaply, online methods are hard to beat. But it can be a tricky area. This workshop provides advice on how to guide councillors on getting the most out of social media – without falling foul of the Code. You can also take the opportunity to ask speakers how you can use social media to communicate the work of your standards committee.



### **Code refresher**

*Aimed at: New or less experienced delegates or those who would benefit from a refresher.*

A chance for delegates to get guidance and answers to their frequently asked questions on the most frequent Code breaches. The session will focus on working through practical examples.

Visit the Standards Forum at [www.standardsforengland.gov.uk](http://www.standardsforengland.gov.uk) to vote for the areas of the Code you think this session should cover.



### **Recruiting independent standards committee members**

*Aimed at: All delegates.*

This workshop will give practical advice on how to successfully recruit and retain independent members for the standards committee.

The workshop will also look at how to develop 'job descriptions' for independent members, how to promote opportunities to join the committee (for example through effective advertising, web content and recruitment packs), and the best ways to support and train your new members.



### **Discussion forum: Standards committees**

*Aimed at: Standards committee members.*

An opportunity to share experiences, challenges and solutions with colleagues, and to ask Standards for England your questions on the framework and the Code.

**17.30-18.30**

### **Fringe events**

Provided by a range of local government organisations. For further information, please visit [www.standardsforengland.gov.uk](http://www.standardsforengland.gov.uk).



**19.45 – late**

### **Drinks reception and conference dinner**

Dress code: Smart casual

**09.00-10.00****Registration for 1 day delegates**  
**Light refreshments available****09.00-10.00****1-2-1 Drop-in sessions**

An opportunity to talk to a Standards for England team member about a specific Code or local standards framework query. Session slots can be booked in advance via our website from April 2010. Any slots which are not booked in advance will be available to book on the day at the Delegate Information Desk.

**10.00-11.15****Breakout sessions**

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*Aimed at: A discussion aimed at all delegates.*

*Selflessness... Integrity... Objectivity... Accountability... Openness... Honesty... Leadership.*

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**Developing your role: Fire, police, integrated transport and park authorities**

*Aimed at: Standards committee members and officers working with fire, police, integrated transport and park authorities.*

This session looks at examples of how these authorities can expand their terms of reference and build their work programme. Delegates can get practical advice on working with the leadership of your authority on issues including member development, remuneration and performance.



### **Getting to grips with predetermination and bias**

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**11.15-11.45**

**Refreshments and move to Hall 1 for next session**

**11.45-12.45**

### **Plenary**

*Aimed at: All delegates.*

Expert speakers on a topical issue to be confirmed.



**12.45-13.00**

**Move to lunch**

**13.00-14.00**

**Lunch**

**13.00-14.00**

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**Move to next session**

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**15.30-16.00**

**Refreshments**

**16.00**

**Close of conference**

# How to get there

The International Convention Centre is in the centre of Birmingham.

## 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 or visit [www.nationalrail.co.uk](http://www.nationalrail.co.uk) for further information.

## 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.

## Car

Birmingham is easily accessible via a network of motorways. There are five public multi-storey car parks close to the ICC.

**Further details on travelling to the ICC, including a map, locations of train stations, motorways and car parking will be provided in the Delegate Information Booklet, sent out to all delegates shortly before the Assembly.**

# 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

Tel: 01483 205 432

Fax: 01483 202 335

Email: [annualassembly2010@standardsforengland.gov.uk](mailto:annualassembly2010@standardsforengland.gov.uk)

Or visit our website: [www.standardsforengland.gov.uk](http://www.standardsforengland.gov.uk)

All information contained within this programme was correct at the time of publication, but may be subject to change.

## Environmental information

We are committed to ensuring that the Assembly is as environmentally responsible as possible. All our event materials have been printed on FSC accredited paper using vegetable inks.