

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Corporate Director of Support Services
to
Standards Committee
on
13th September 2010

Report prepared by: John Williams,
Head of Legal & Democratic Services

**Agenda
Item No.**

5

Standards for England – Update

A Part 1 Agenda Item

1. Purpose of Report

This report updates the Standards Committee on recent information about the future of Standards for England (formerly the Standards Board for England).

2. Recommendation

That the Committee notes this report.

3. Background

3.1 As Members will no doubt have seen from recent press coverage, the Government has announced that its planned Decentralisation and Localism Bill will include proposals for “the abolition of the Standards Board regime”. The Bill is expected in the Autumn.

3.2 At the time of writing this report, there is only limited information about what exactly “the abolition of the Standards Board regime” means. However, officers can report the following:

The Chair and Chief Executive of Standards for England issued the following statement on 28 May 2010:

“We are very disappointed at the Government’s decision to abolish the local government standards regime.

Since 2007, Standards for England has dealt only with those matters which local authorities could not deal with themselves. Our recent review of this devolved local framework found that it is delivering increased confidence in the accountability of local politicians, improved member behaviour and contributing to better governance.

We do not have clear details as yet of what is proposed for the future, but for now the local standards framework remains pending legislative change. Our priorities are to fulfil our statutory duties, to support local authorities in maintaining high standards and to assist the government in developing and Agenda Item 7 implementing any new arrangements.”

- 3.3 On 1st June 2010 the Chair of Standards for England wrote to standards committee chairmen referring to the Government’s proposals to “abolish the Standards Board regime”. He assured them that Standards for England would continue to work with them to support their work. The letter contained the following statement:

“We remain committed to ensuring that there is a proper framework of local accountability in which the public can have confidence and we wish to work with central and local government to develop any proposals.”

- 3.4 It has been Standards for England’s normal practice to ask each authority to complete a quarterly monitoring return and the next one would have been due in early July. However, in the light of the Government’s announcement and its reduction of Standards for England’s budget for this year, the Board is beginning a process to review its activities and update its Business Plan. During that review, it has decided to postpone the quarterly monitoring.
- 3.5 Standards for England’s 2010 Annual Assembly, “A place for Standards”, has now been cancelled. Given the current uncertainty about any future local standards arrangements, Standards for England “did not feel it appropriate to continue with the event”.

4. Background papers

None

5. Appendices

None