

Title: Update on Local Assessment

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For the latest update on the forthcoming changes, the Minister for Local Government, John Healey gave the following statement on 3 April 2008:

"The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 provides for a reformed conduct regime for local authority members in which responsibility for standards of conduct and dealing with allegations of misconduct by members is largely devolved to each council's independently chaired standards committee. The Standards Board for England will have the role of a light touch regulator, providing guidance to councils and their standards committees, monitoring the handling of misconduct allegations, and itself dealing with the most serious misconduct cases.

We intend this reformed conduct regime should be in force this May, following the local government elections. From this point all allegations of misconduct by council members will in the first instance be considered by the council's standards committee, which may thereafter pass the most serious cases to the Standards Board.

Accordingly, we will shortly be making the necessary order to commence the relevant provisions of the 2007 Act, and laying before Parliament regulations making provision about the procedures standards committees must follow when considering allegations of misconduct by Members.

Earlier this year we consulted local authorities and stakeholders about the provisions for such regulations. I am today placing in the Libraries of both Houses a summary of the 571 responses that we received together with the Government's response to the issues which have been raised.

Having regard to the consultation responses, we intend the procedure regulations will in particular make provision to ensure that standards committee members avoid any conflicts of interest when considering allegations; that given the personal nature of allegations that might be unfounded, there will be no public access to standards committee meetings or papers when allegations are being initially assessed; and to increase the maximum sanction available to standards committee from three to six months suspension from office."

The Standards Board is producing guidance to support local authorities in the implementation and function of the new framework. This guidance is subject to the regulations that will support the changes to the framework and will reflect the content of these regulations. They will publish their guidance as soon as possible after the regulations are confirmed.