

	
STANDARDS COMMITTEE	22 OCTOBER 2010
Report of the Monitoring Officer	

Update on Government Proposals Relating to the Standards Regime

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Government announced in May that it intended to introduce legislation to abolish the “Standards Board Regime”. This report provides further clarification of the Government’s proposals.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Government intends to introduce a Decentralisation and Localism bill during the Autumn. While, at the time of writing this report, that Bill has not yet been laid before Parliament, Government Ministers have made recent announcements which clarify some of the Bill’s likely contents.
- 2.2 When it was announced in the Queen’s Speech that the Government intended to abolish the “Standards Board Regime” there was a great deal of uncertainty as to whether that simply meant abolishing the Standards Board or whether the Government’s intention was to do something more fundamental. A recent press announcement from the Communities and Local Government department makes it clear that it is in fact the latter. That press announcement indicates that “the whole Standards Board Regime, consisting of a centrally prescribed code of conduct, Standards Committees with a power to suspend councillors and AN unelected central body, will be axed in the upcoming localism bill”.
- 2.3 The press release also indicates that there will continue to be a register of interests and that failing to register or declare an interest will become a criminal offence. The Government also intends to legislate to make it clear that councillors can campaign and vote freely on issues such as planning matters. The common law rules relating to pre-determination are therefore to be relaxed. The Local Government Ombudsman is to gain some enhanced powers, although the detail of these remain to be seen.
- 2.4 As previously reported to the committee, the Standards Board has already started to wind down its operations. The Board has recently announced that in considering whether to accept referrals from Standards Committees for investigation it will have regard to its remaining resources, although the Board has also indicated that its criteria for accepting referrals remains valid.
- 2.5 For the time being the Standards Committee will continue to have its role part set out in Statute and in the Council’s Constitution. The Committee may wish to

consider whether it needs to take any specific action to ensure that existing requirements continue to be adhered to pending their replacement. The Committee may also wish to consider, either at this meeting or a future one, whether to make recommendations as to how City and Parish Councillors in York can best be supported in meeting the new requirements going forward.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That the Standards Committee note this report and give consideration to the issues highlighted.

Author:	Chief Officer Responsible for the report:		
<i>Andy Docherty Monitoring Officer Ext: 1004</i>	Andy Docherty		
	Report Approved	✓	Date 12/10/10

Background papers: None