

The ethical framework for local government

Summary: This document provides key information and answers to frequently asked questions about the ethical framework for local government and the role of the Standards Board for England.

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Key facts

- The current ethical framework for local government first emerged from the Committee on Standards in Public Life's third report in 1997.
- The report responded to concerns over a series of high-profile political scandals during the 1990s and that public confidence in councillors was being undermined.
- It formed part of the broader drive by government to modernise local government and make it more accountable to local communities.
- The key elements of the ethical framework are the Code of Conduct for elected and co-opted members of local authorities, local authority standards committees and the Standards Board for England.
- The Standards Board for England was formally established in March 2001, by an Act of Parliament in Part III of the Local Government Act 2000. Its powers were changed by the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.
- The Standards Board for England is independent of government, although it reports to the minister of state for local government.

Frequently asked questions

Q1 What is the current legislation?

- Every local authority is required to adopt the Code of Conduct and most elected, co-opted, appointed and independent members are covered by it.
- Each principal authority is required to have a standards committee, comprising members of the authority and at least one independent representative. The chair is independent.
- Standards committees have specific and general functions, including promoting standards of ethical conduct of members, and dealing with allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct.
- Establishment of the Standards Board for England as an independent body to promote high ethical standards in local government and to investigate the most serious cases referred to us by standards committees.

Q2 What is the difference between the Standards Board for England and the Adjudication Panel for England?

The Standards Board's main roles are to ensure that standards of ethical conduct are maintained across authorities and to deal with complaints of misconduct against individual members.

This differs from the Adjudication Panel for England, which is an independent judicial tribunal set up to deliver judgement on matters concerning the Code of Conduct of local authority members. The Adjudication Panel considers cases referred to it by ethical standards officers of the Standards Board for England and also considers appeal cases.

Q3 What are the general principles of standards in public life?

The ten general principles of public life come from the Nolan Committee's First Report on Standards in Public Life. They define the standards that members should uphold, and serve as a reminder of the purpose of the Code of Conduct.

The principles, as set out in the Relevant Authorities (General Principles) Order 2001, are:

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| ■ selflessness | ■ personal judgement |
| ■ honesty and integrity | ■ respect for others |
| ■ objectivity | ■ duty to uphold the law |
| ■ accountability | ■ stewardship |
| ■ openness | ■ leadership |