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| <b>MEETING:</b>         | <b>STANDARDS COMMITTEE</b>                                      |
| <b>DATE:</b>            | <b>2 JULY 2010</b>  |
| <b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b> | <b>THE FUTURE OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT STANDARDS FRAMEWORK</b>   |
| <b>REPORT BY:</b>       | <b>ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC (INTERIM)</b> |

**Classification: Open**

## **Purpose**

To inform Members of information received regarding the future activities of Standards for England.

## **Recommendation**

**THAT the report be noted.**

## **Key Points Summary**

- A letter has been received from Dr Robert Chilton, Standards for England Chairman concerning the recent Government announcement about the future of the local government standards framework. The letter is attached at Appendix A for information
- The proposed Decentralisation and Localism Bill will include proposals to 'abolish the Standards Board regime'. The budget for Standards for England has also been reduced for this year by £1.45m (18%).
- Until such time as the relevant legislation is passed, the statutory framework remains operative.
- Standards for England are interested in hearing views about how future arrangements could most effectively work.
- The Board of Standards for England has begun a process to review its activities and to update its Business Plan, which will include a postponement of the quarterly monitoring return. Once the Board has concluded its review Standards for England will advise local authorities of any future monitoring requirements.
- Standards for England have also announced their decision to cancel the Annual Assembly which was to take place in Birmingham on 18 and 19 October 2010. The letter outlining the reasons for the cancellation is attached at Appendix B for information.

## **Alternative Options**

- 1 There are none.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

- 2 To inform Members of the Government's planned Decentralisation and Localism Bill, the published 2010/11 Government Savings and their current impact on Standards for England's activities.

## **Introduction and Background**

- 3 The Coalition: Our Programme for Government was published on 20 May in which it was stated that; 'We will abolish the Standards Board regime'.

## **Key Considerations**

- 4 The Decentralisation and Localism Bill was announced in the Queen's Speech on 25 May 2010. The Bill would devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities control over housing and planning decisions. One of the elements of the Bill will be to abolish the Standards Board regime.
- 5 On 10 June, the Government published details of the contributions required to the £6.2bn cross government savings in 2010/11. This included the £0.405bn (26 per cent) savings which are to be made from Local Government DEL (the Departmental Expenditure Limit). As part of the reductions in the Local Government DEL, it was announced that the Standards (Board) for England would deliver efficiency savings of £1.45million during 2010/11 which equates to 18% of Standards for England's total budget.
- 6 In the first parliamentary questions for CLG's new ministerial team on 8 June, Andrew Stunell, Local Government Minister confirmed that the Localism Bill would include legislation to scrap the local government Standards Board meeting the commitment made in The Coalition Agreement. Mr Stunell referred to the fact that the Standards Board costs £7.8 million a year, but dealt with only 1,000 real complaints last year, which is £7,800 per complaint.
- 7 The immediate impact of the announcement to abolish the Standards Board regime and the need to deliver efficiency savings has been that Standards for England have cancelled their Annual Assembly, due to be held in Birmingham in October. It was stated that given current uncertainty about any future local standards arrangements Standards for England did not feel it was appropriate to continue with the event.
- 8 A letter, dated 1 June 2010, has been received from Sir Robert Chilton, Standards for England Chairman, outlining whilst changes are expected that currently Standards for England does not currently have clear details of the scope or implications of the proposal, but emphasises that the statutory framework remains operative.
- 9 Further correspondence from the Standards for England on 18 June (following the savings announcement) stated that they have postponed quarterly monitoring return arrangements and that the Board was beginning a process to review activities and to update our Business Plan.

## **Community Impact**

- 10 It is important to ensure that the community at large is aware that the statutory framework

remains operative.

## **Financial Implications**

- 11 Four places had been reserved for Members of the Standards Committee and the Monitoring Officer to attend the Standards for England Annual Assembly on 18 and 19 October; this equates to £1,720 (plus VAT) and excludes any travel or accommodation costs.

## **Legal Implications**

- 12 Until such time as the relevant legislation is passed, the statutory framework remains operative

## **Risk Management**

- 13 There is a need to ensure that, until otherwise known, the statutory framework is adhered to.

## **Consultees**

- 14 There are none

## **Appendices**

1. Letter received on 1 June 2010 from Dr Robert Chilton, Standards for England Chairman
2. Letter received on 11 June 2010 from Glenys Stacey, Chief Executive, Standards for England

## **Background Papers**

None