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Press Release

The Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors welcomes the 10th Enquiry Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (Graham Committee) and the recent consultation document on the Code of Conduct issued by the Standards Board for England.

ACSeS gave evidence to the Graham Committee and we are pleased to note that many of our proposals have been adopted in the recommendations from the Committee.

We welcome in particular the move to locally-based arrangements proposed by the Committee. Many Standards Committee members, local Councillors and Monitoring Officers see such a move as a positive step towards increasing confidence in the ethical framework. It must, however, be recognised that there is some reluctance in a number of authorities to take on a locally-based arrangement due to lack of resources as well as the potential for interference in the role performed by Monitoring officers in particular. However, if these concerns can be effectively addressed by the Government (by providing additional resources directly to local authorities) and the Standards Board for England (by devolving further statutory powers to local authorities), local authorities, can see no reason why the ethical framework can not be more effectively managed at the local level by local Councils.

We are also pleased to note the move to strengthen the local Standards Committees. There are many able members of Standards Committees who are willing to take proactive steps to promote the ethical framework and to take appropriate action under the Code when necessary. It would be a shame to lose such talented group of people if they get frustrated from having to wait too long for 'work to do.'

The Graham Committee also recommended changes to the Code of Conduct. We are delighted that in response to this the Right Honourable Nick Raynsford, Minister for Local Government has asked the Standard Board for England to carry out a review of the Code of Conduct.

The Consultation document on the Code of Conduct is welcomed. Whilst ACSeS does not propose a wholesale rewrite of the Code, there are however some significant changes which we would like to see made to the Code.

Some of these changes are:

- Removal of the Whistle blowing provisions
- Changes to the rules on prejudicial interests so that Councillors' human rights are not breached
- Further clarification of the issue of 'bias', lobbying and similar matters.

ACSeS looks forward to working with the Government, the Standards Board for England and relevant stakeholders to take forward the ethical framework.

Gifty Edila,

President, Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors