

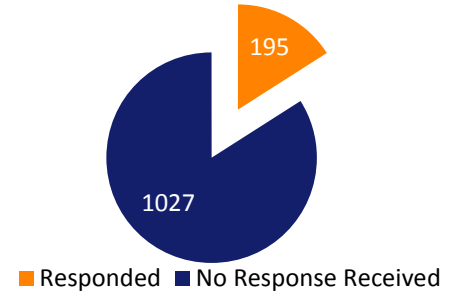


## Ethical Standards Framework: Survey to Assess Views of Councillors of Scottish Local Authorities

We would like to thank everyone who took the time to respond to the Standard Commission's first ever survey of Councillors in February 2013. This briefing paper provides an overview of the key findings and how the Standards Commission plans to follow up the conclusions.

Nearly 200 Councillors from across Scotland took the opportunity to submit their responses. A range of views were offered with some useful suggestions for improving the support that the Standards Commission provides to Councillors and Council staff.

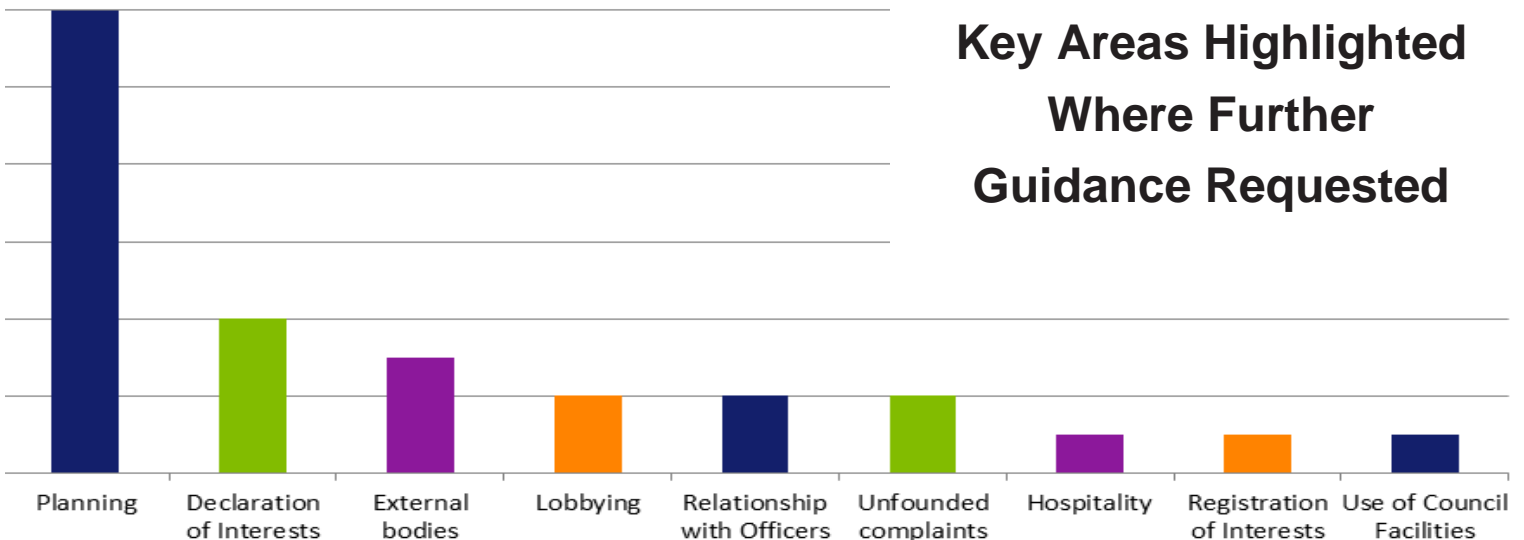
Number of Councillor Respondants



Key findings included:

- The majority of respondents believe that they and their colleagues are aware of the ethical standards framework;
- Four out of five respondents are satisfied that the Councillors' Code of Conduct set out by Scottish Government is straightforward with a small proportion flagging up specific sections that they would like to see clarified;
- A similar proportion find the Guidance Notes produced by the Standards Commission helpful with a small number suggesting that they would prefer a shorter and more concise format;
- Almost two thirds of respondents believe the Code of Conduct has resulted in higher standards of behaviour amongst their colleagues, although some flag up the need for improvement amongst a small minority and some offer ideas on how the Code could be further improved.

### Key Areas Highlighted Where Further Guidance Requested



## Reminder of Survey Key Questions

1. *How effective do you believe the Councillors' Code of Conduct has been in raising standards of behaviour?*
2. *What is your perception of the awareness of the ethical standards framework among Councillors?*
3. *Do you understand the different roles exercised by the Standards Commission and the Public Standards Commissioner for Scotland (PSC\*)?*
4. *Are there any sections or areas of the Code which you find confusing or difficult to understand?*
5. *Is the Standards Commission's Guidance on the Councillors' Code of Conduct helpful in terms of assisting you to understand the Code?*
6. *Have you attended an event for Councillors hosted by the Standards Commission?*
7. *Do you have experience of the Hearings process under the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000?*
8. *How often does your Council ask you to review your entry in your Register of Interests?*

*\* NB: With effect from 01 July 2013 the role of the PSC became the responsibility of the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland (CESPLS).*

## Feedback Comments

*"As a relatively 'new' Councillor the Code of Conduct serves as a baseline for acceptable behaviour and expectations."*

*"Councillors are made very aware of exactly how they should conduct themselves"*

*"It is only effective when elected members read it and more importantly understand its contents!"*

*"There is still the usual antagonism between certain members of different political persuasions"*

*"The Code provides clear and concise guidelines and this coupled with the scrutiny of complaints by an independent body is proving to be fairly effective in raising standards"*

*"It has helped to remind all Councillors of the need for the highest standards in public life when dealing with constituents, developers etc."*

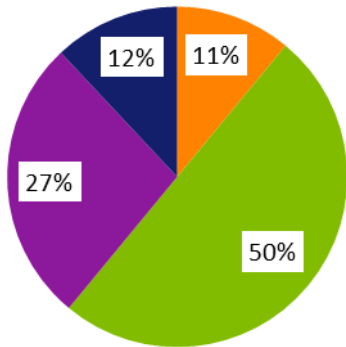
*"Some councillors do not keep to the spirit of the code ... Although they may not go so far as to demonstrably breach the code."*

*"Inter party allegations have increased, the Standards Commission being used by Councillors to try to denigrate other Councillors from differing parties in multi-party wards for their own political advantage".*

*"All our Councillors seem to be very aware of the Code of Conduct and take care to get advice whenever they are in doubt."*

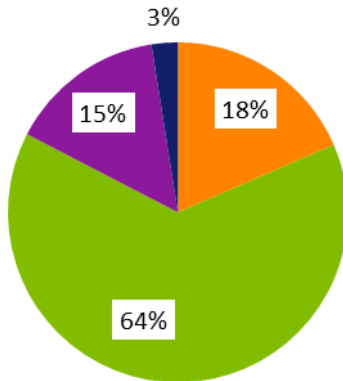
**Section 1:  
Effectiveness of Councillor's Code?**

Very Fairly Not Very Not At All



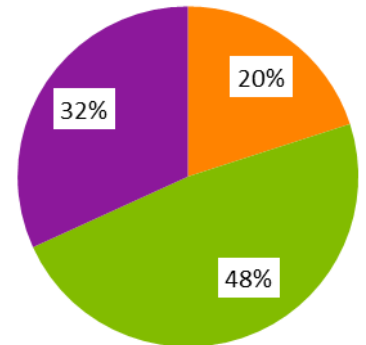
**Section 2:  
Level of awareness amongst fellow councillors?**

Very Well Fairly Well Not Very Well Not At All



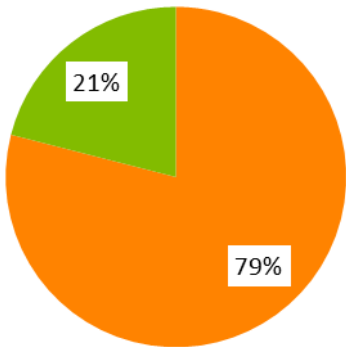
**Section 3:  
Understand difference about who does what in process?**

No Yes Partly



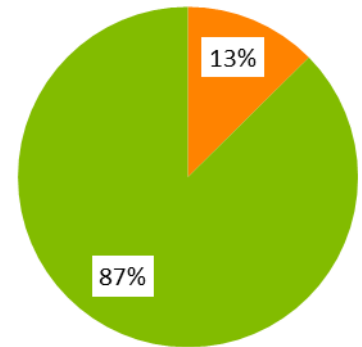
**Section 4:  
Sections of Code confusing?**

No Yes



**Section 5:  
Are the Guidance Notes helpful?**

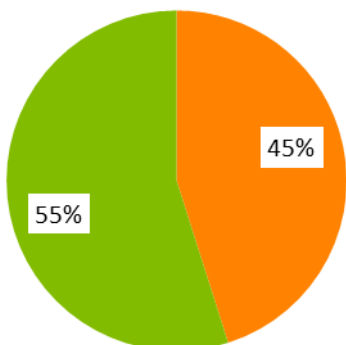
No Yes



**Overall Results**

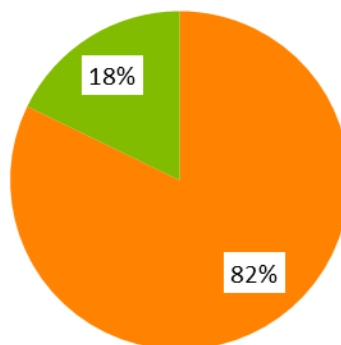
**Section 6:  
Ever attended a Standards Commission event?**

No Yes



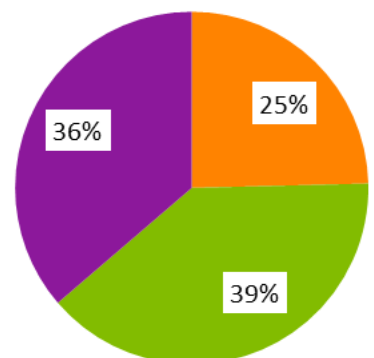
**Section 7:  
Had experience of Hearings process?**

No Yes



**Section 8: Frequency of updating Register of Interests?**

Every 6 months Annual Other



# ‘What You Suggested, What We Are Doing’

Ideas for improvement that will now be taken forward by the Standards Commission include:

## 1. Tailor training sessions to particular needs of a Council

- Bespoke training events offered to Councils

## 2. Use more practical examples to demonstrate Code in reality

- Produce case studies for website
- Publish FAQs/ answers to queries
- Circulate details of real cases dealt with
- Ensure Guidance reflects real issues facing Councillors

## 3. Tackle behaviour of a small minority

- Draw to attention of Commissioner for Ethical Standards who investigates complaints
- Highlight at workshops for Council staff

## 4. Complete investigations & Hearings as quickly as possible

- Draw to attention of Commissioner for Ethical Standards who investigates complaints
- Review Commission procedures for Hearings

## 5. Help Council officers to provide right advice

- Hold workshops for Council staff to share best practice



INTEGRITY IN PUBLIC LIFE

For further information on what support we can offer Councillors, please either speak with your Monitoring Officer or look out for new information coming on our website.

Alternatively, please contact us at:

Room T2.21  
Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH9 1SP

T: 0131 348 6666

E: [enquiries@standardscommission.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@standardscommission.org.uk)

W: [www.standardscommissionscotland.org.uk](http://www.standardscommissionscotland.org.uk)