

Section 32 (1) (a) - SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

The Standards Commission for Scotland is a statutory body that encourages high ethical standards in public life through the promotion of an ethical standards framework and the enforcement of the Councillors' Code of Conduct and the Codes of Conduct for Members of Devolved Public Bodies. The Standards Commission adjudicates on cases referred to it by the Commissioner for Ethical Standards in Public Life in Scotland where he considers that, at the conclusion of an investigation into complaints made to his office, a contravention of a Code of Conduct may have occurred.

In addition to the Standards Commission's adjudicatory role, the Standards Commission issues guidance and advice to aid understanding and interpretation of the requirements of the Codes of Conduct for Members of Devolved Public Body Boards and Councillors. The Standards Commission assists and supports Local Authorities and Devolved Public Bodies with their work to promote the ethical standards framework through the provision of educational material and participation in local training events.

The combination of the Standards Commission's adjudicatory and educational roles helps to ensure high ethical standards in public life are achieved, which in turn ensures public confidence in local government, public bodies and the democratic process itself is maintained.

Section 32 (1) (b) - EFFICIENCY, ECONOMY and EFFECTIVENESS

During 2015/16 the Standards Commission worked towards improving the way it manages Hearings to ensure they are conducted in the most fair, efficient and transparent manner. This included conducting a survey of all Hearing participants and an annual review of all decisions made in order to identify and implement improvements to policies and procedures.

In addition, Guidance on the Relevancy of Evidence was issued to parties to Hearings and published on the Standards Commission's website. Pre-Hearing meetings were held where appropriate and proportionate in order to ensure potential issues were resolved before Hearings. These measures helped ensure that Hearings were conducted in the most efficient manner, which in turn reduced the overall costs and time commitments for all parties.

The Standards Commission has continued with its policy to hold Hearings within local authority or devolved public body premises where suitable accommodation is available, on a low or no costs basis to ensure that value for money is achieved.

In order to promote the ethical standards framework and assist Councillor and Members to understand the requirements and provisions in the Codes of Conduct, the Standards Commission redesigned and updated the content on its website to ensure the information contained is more comprehensive and accessible. The Standards Commission produced and issued revised guidance on the Councillors' Code of Conduct and also issued advice notes to devolved public bodies on the role of Standards Officers, Relations between Members and Employees and The Use of Social Media. The Standards Commission also provided support to key stakeholders by publishing quarterly Professional Briefings on issues that arise and key learning points from Hearings and by providing

training events on request. It is hoped that this promotional activity will reduce the likelihood of potential breaches occurring due to lack of understanding of the requirements of the Codes.

The office of the Standards Commission is located within the Scottish Parliament building, which continues to provide opportunities to develop and implement Shared Service Agreements. The facilities provided to the Standards Commission on a nil costs basis include Accommodation, Finance Office and Payment Services, Internal Audit, Mailroom, access to photocopying facilities and the use of meeting rooms. During 2015/16 the Standards Commission implemented a Service Level Agreement for the provision of IT support and services. The provision of these facilities and services continues to reduce the Standards Commission's overall running costs.

The Business Manager of the Standards Commission continues to attend a Commissioners and Ombudsman's Group, which shares best practice ideas and opportunities.