

Section 32 (1) (a) - SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Section 32(1)(a) of the Public Service Reform Act 2010 provides that named public bodies, which includes the Standards Commission, must publish a statement of the steps they have taken during the financial year to promote and increase sustainable growth through the exercise of its functions.

The Government Economic Strategy, which was published in November 2007, indicated that the purpose was “to focus the Government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth. By sustainable economic growth we mean building a dynamic and growing economy that will provide prosperity and opportunities for all, while ensuring that future generations can enjoy a better quality of life.

The National Performance Framework was developed to provide a clear focus and direction for the whole of the public sector in Scotland and in common with the rest of the public sector, all bodies are expected to align their activity in support of the National Outcomes set out in the Framework.

The Standards Commission’s contribution to achieving four of the Scottish Government’s National Outcomes, as provided in the National Performance Framework are outlined below:

National Outcome 1: “We live in a Scotland that is the most attractive place for doing business in Europe.”

The Standards Commission’s role to improve and maintain ethical standards in public life helps promote business confidence in Scotland as being a nation where decisions made in the public sector, which affect businesses, are made objectively, honestly and in the public interest.

National Outcome 11: “We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others.”

The Standards Commission’s work in ensuring compliance with the Codes of Conduct encourages councillors and members of devolved public bodies to take responsibility for their own actions. By reaching decisions on alleged breaches of the Codes of Conduct independently, impartially and by making our service accessible to all, the Standards Commission enables appropriate challenges to be made when a breach is identified.

National Outcome 13: “We take pride in a strong, fair and inclusive national identity.”

The Standards Commission’s work contributes towards raising confidence in those who are elected or appointed to serve within the public sector environment, which in turn promotes pride in the national identity.

National Outcome 15: “Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people's needs.”

The Standards Commission strives for improvements to services to ensure we support best value principles.

During 2018/19 the Standards Commission continued to focus on promoting the ethical standards framework and providing guidance and support to assist councillors and board members of devolved public bodies to act in accordance with the Codes of Conduct. Work towards this aspect of our remit included:

- Publishing and sharing the results of a survey we undertook of all members of devolved public bodies in Scotland, which was intended to establish whether the lack of complaints about members of devolved public bodies was the result of a high level of adherence to the Codes of Conduct (based on the Model Code of Conduct) or whether poor conduct was taking place but going unreported. The Standards Commission also sought to establish the extent of awareness amongst members of certain provisions in the Codes. Using the result of the survey to gain media coverage on the importance of having a culture of respect to help ensure good governance and to encourage Scottish Ministers to include a provision about bullying and harassment in the Model Code (similar to the one in the Councillors’ Code).
- Publishing and issuing quarterly Standards Updates, which included news about the work of the Standards Commission and future events, along with information about decisions made at Hearings.

- Consulting with the Scottish Government about proposed changes to the Councillors' Code of Conduct and advising Councils and elected members of the amendments that were then agreed.
- Providing training material on the Model Code of Conduct and ethical standards framework for inclusion in both the Scottish Government's Governance Hub for Members of devolved public bodies and the College Development Network's Governance and Training Hub.
- Producing and uploading videos explaining the key principles of public life on its website and social media platforms and providing a video using British Sign Language to explain the Standards Commission's role and remit and how a complaint about a councillor or member of a devolved public body can be made.
- Creating a Facebook page and using it and our Twitter account to promote awareness of the ethical standards framework, the provisions in the Codes of Conduct and the Standards Commission's role, remit and work.

The Standards Commission continues to work towards streamlining its procedures to ensure that Hearings are conducted fairly, impartially and in the most efficient manner. In 2018/19 this was achieved through holding pre-Hearing meetings to resolve any procedural issues in advance of Hearings; and by further revising the Standard Commission's Hearing Rules to ensure they continued to be accessible and fit for purpose. In addition, the Standards Commission continued to provide participants and attendees an opportunity to provide feedback, from their perspective, about how Hearings are organised, run and managed and we used the results and suggestions made along with all other feedback obtained to further improve processes.

The Standards Commission recognises the importance of environmental issues and sustainability and endeavours to consider these matters in all its business decisions. While the Standards Commission is not directly covered by the Greening Government commitments, it continues to support the Scottish Parliament's effort in meeting their sustainability and environmental targets through compliance with the Parliament's policies and procedures. This included making use of waste and recycling facilities and encouraging staff and Members to car share or use public transport. The Standards Commission continues to use electronic means to promote its communications with stakeholders in order to further reduce its printing and photocopying requirements.

The Standards Commission also aims to reduce its carbon footprint and continually seeks to develop and improve its processes to achieve this. The requirement to produce photocopies and printed documents has decreased as the Standards Commission continues to correspond by, and encourage the use of, electronic communications with its Members, key stakeholders and parties to Hearings; along with disseminating all educational, promotional and training material via its website, social media and by email.

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

Section 32(1)(b) of the 2010 Act provides that each listed public body must publish a statement of the steps it has taken during that financial year to improve efficiency, economy and effectiveness in the exercise of its functions.

The Standards Commission delivered its services within its allocated annual budget, making cost savings where possible. The number of Hearings held in 2018/19 was eight to determine whether eight councillors had contravened the Councillors' Code of Conduct. Improvements in respect of the efficiency of the Hearings process contributed to a 55% reduction in Hearings related costs in comparison to the level of Hearings expenditure in 2016/17. This was achieved through the application of the Standards Commission's policy to hold Hearings within council or Devolved Public Body premises at no cost to the public purse, wherever possible.

In addition, the Standards Commission held pre-Hearing meetings where appropriate and proportionate to do so to resolve procedural issues in advance of Hearings. These measures contributed to ensuring that Hearings were conducted in the most efficient and proportionate manner, with a resulting impact on duration and costs and reduced the average overall time taken by the Standards Commission from receipt of a report from the ESC to the issuing of the written Hearing decision from 12 weeks to 10.5 weeks. This represents a 34% reduction on the time taken in 2016/17 (the average that year was 16 weeks).

The Standards Commission's office is located within the Scottish Parliament building, which has enabled the Standards Commission to continue to develop and implement Shared Service Agreements. Facilities provided to the Standards Commission on a nil costs basis include accommodation, finance and payment services, internal audit services, access to mailroom and photocopying facilities, and the provision of IT support and services.

The Standards Commission recognises the importance of environmental issues and sustainability and endeavours to take such matters into consideration when making business decisions. While the Standards Commission is not directly covered by the Greening Government Commitments, as its offices are located within the Scottish Parliament building, it continues to support the Scottish Parliament's efforts in meeting their sustainability and environmental targets through compliance with the SPCB's policies and procedures. This includes making use of waste and recycling facilities and, where possible, encouraging staff and Members to car share or use public transport.

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