

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 2019/20 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. In working towards this we:

- Published and issued quarterly Standards Updates, which included news about the work of the Standards Commission and future events, along with information about decisions made at Hearings, and issued media and press releases in respect of all Hearings held and interim suspensions imposed.
- Held a workshop with the Monitoring Officers of Scotland’s 32 councils to identify potential improvements to the Councillors’ Code of Conduct.
- Actively participated in a Working Group that was set up by the Scottish Government to review and redraft the Councillors’ Code of Conduct and Model Code of Conduct for Members of Devolved Public Bodies.
- Produced and published guidance for councils on the extent to which a councillor should engage in activities which are, or could be perceived to be, the activities of a councillor during a period of full

suspension that has been imposed (either on the finding of a breach of the Councillors' Code of Conduct at a Hearing or as an interim measure while the ESC's investigation into their conduct is ongoing).

- Produced an Advice Note for Members of Health and Social Care Integration Joint Boards, which provided an overview of their responsibilities under the ethical standards framework and sought to assist them in recognising and dealing with potential conflicts of interest. We also produced and published a flowchart for members of devolved public bodies on identifying and making declarations of interest.
- Responded to all enquiries received from councillors, members of devolved public bodies, the media, the public and officers of councils and devolved public bodies on the ethical standards framework and how the Codes of Conduct should be interpreted within the timescales outlined in its Service Charter. Used our social media platforms to promote awareness of the ethical standards framework, the provisions in the Codes of Conduct and the Standards Commission's role, remit and work (including forthcoming events and decisions made at Hearings).

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, its office is based in the Scottish Parliament building and we continued to support the Parliament's effort in meeting their sustainability and environmental targets through compliance with their 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 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. The Standards Commission disseminates 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. Steps taken by the Standards Commission in 2019/20 included:

- Delivering its services within its allocated annual budget, making cost savings where possible.
- Continuing to develop shared service agreements with the Scottish Parliament for provision of accommodation, finance and payment services, internal audit services, mailroom and photocopying facilities, and IT support.
- Holding seven Hearings to determine whether eight councillors had contravened the Councillors' Code of Conduct. In the cases where the Hearing Panel found that a breach of the Code had been committed, appropriate sanctions were then applied.
- Conducting all but two cases within an average of 12 weeks from receipt of a report from the ESC to the issuing of the written Hearing decision. The two cases in question took slightly longer after requests for postponements from either or both parties were agreed.
- Conducting surveys of participants and attendees on how Hearings were organised and managed. Suggestions made, and any other feedback obtained were then used to improve processes and decision-making procedures. This included making revisions to the Hearing Rules and public information literature, to ensure that they continued to be accessible and fit for purpose.
- Continuing to hold pre-Hearings when appropriate and proportionate to do so, in order to resolve any procedural issues in advance of Hearings. This helps to ensure that the focus of the Hearings remains on the production and analysis of relevant evidence and that they were conducted in as fair, impartial and efficient a manner as possible.