

National Assembly Commissioner for Standards - Report to the Committee on Standards of Conduct

1. This is my first report to the Committee, outlining the activities I have undertaken as National Assembly Commissioner for Standards. I welcome the Chair's agreement that this should be a standing item on the Committee's agenda at future meetings.
2. I have been concerned to send a clear message from the outset about the role of the Commissioner for Standards. It is vital that the Commissioner is seen as more than just a 'policeman' investigating complaints. There is a much wider role to play in working with Assembly Members and officials to build a robust Standards Culture in the Assembly.
3. The Report by Professor Woodhouse recommended that the Committee seek the co-operation of party managers in the development of a standards culture. At its last meeting, the Committee agreed that I should take this recommendation forward. This forms a good platform on which the wider engagement of Members can be built.
4. Building a standards culture is an on-going process, and one that I plan to take forward throughout my time as Commissioner. Outlined below are the actions I have undertaken since my appointment in March 2005.

The Office of Commissioner for Standards

5. An important step forward has been the establishment of dedicated support for the Commissioner, which will mean that much of the work required in taking forward my agenda for building a Standards Culture can be pursued more effectively. Gareth Rogers (who has worked with the Standards Committee for some years) will act in this supporting role.

Meetings with Assembly Members

6. As outlined above, engaging with Assembly Members will be a major part of the process in building a standards culture and I am working on a programme of meetings to take this agenda forward:
 - Meetings have been arranged with the four Party Leaders at which I will outline my initial plans as Commissioner in the building of a Standards Culture.
 - I will soon meet formally with the Committee Chair where I hope to discuss those areas where the Commissioner and the Committee can work together. Along similar lines I have introduced monthly 'get-together' meetings with the Secretariat to the Standards Committee where any on-going issues can be discussed.

- I have already held meetings with the Presiding Officer and the Assembly's Permanent Secretary where, again, I have outlined my plans for developing my role.

Development of a Web-site

7. One of the key tasks I am undertaking is the development of a web-site for the office of the Commissioner for Standards. This site will provide core information to both Assembly Members and the public on the role of the Commissioner and how the office can be accessed. The site will also contain detailed information on the complaint process and will provide a dedicated E-mail address for the Commissioner which is has not been previously available. The web-site is at present under construction and I hope to be in a position for a formal 'launch' some time in June 2005.

Future plans

8. Further meetings are planned with the Clerk/Deputy Clerk to the Assembly and I also hope to meet with outside organisations such as the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

9. I aim to write to all Assembly Members in the next few weeks, setting out my role as Commissioner and how I can be contacted. A key message I want to take to Assembly Members is that I have an 'open door' policy, so that any Member can arrange to see me confidentially at any time whether in relation to complaint or standards issues more generally.

Richard Penn
National Assembly Commissioner for Standards
June 2005