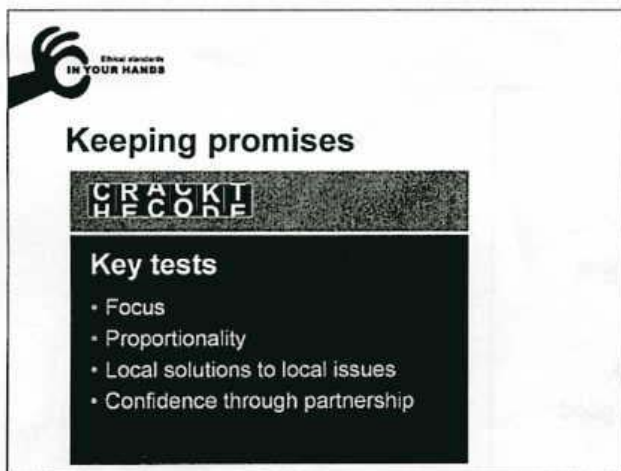


**Fourth Annual Assembly of Standards Committees
5-6 September 2005, ICC, Birmingham**

**Making it happen
David Prince, Chief Executive
The Standards Board for England**

At last year's conference I made a number of promises. I'm going to say what we've done to keep those promises. I'm also going to tell you about the outcome of our consultation on the review of the Code of Conduct. Then it will be time for a few more promises.

Those of you who were here last year will recognise the inset slide.



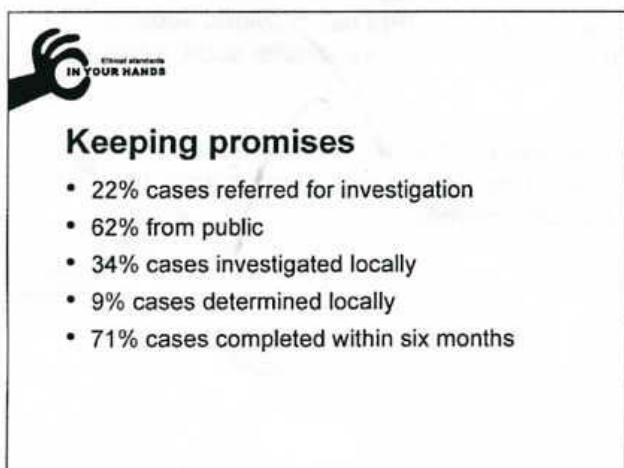
Keeping promises

CRACK! HFCODE

Key tests

- Focus
- Proportionality
- Local solutions to local issues
- Confidence through partnership

We promised regional events where you could hold us to account against these tests. Over the year, we held eleven roadshows up and down the country. We spoke to around 1,000 standards committee members and monitoring officers, as well as to leaders and chief executives in ten linked events.



Keeping promises

- 22% cases referred for investigation
- 62% from public
- 34% cases investigated locally
- 9% cases determined locally
- 71% cases completed within six months

And I am pleased to report that we have focused on the most serious cases and we have determinedly weeded out the frivolous, vexatious and politically-motivated cases.

And we've done this quickly. On average, we now process new complaints within ten working days.

We said we would go for local case handling wherever possible. Since January, 34% of cases have been referred for local investigation. Another 9% of cases have been referred to local standards committees for local determination. We predicted that half of all cases would be investigated or determined locally by 2007, and with your support we are well on track.

We have speeded up our case handling. Since April, we cleared 46% of cases within four months and hit 65% in July, both ahead of our target of 40%. We aim for 90% of cases cleared in six months, and achieved 71% last quarter, 79% in July. We are edging closer to our 90% target every month.



Ethical governance toolkit

- How well is the council meeting the ethical agenda?
- Where can improvements be made?
- How well is it meeting CPA measures?
- How can the council ensure sustained good ethical governance?

Prevention is much better than cure. The successful local ethical agenda is the one owned and driven locally, the one that is part of the day job and the way things are done daily. That is why we have worked with the IDEa and the Audit Commission to jointly badge the Local Government Diagnostic, and why the ODPM has provided support through the local capacity building fund. It consists of a comprehensive audit, a member survey and interactive workshops.

Culture starts from the top. Which is why we have been working with leaders and chief executives. Their relationship and behaviour set the pattern for the entire authority. If ethical behaviour is on their agenda it will be on everybody's.



CPA – key lines of enquiry

Officers and members:

- treat each other with respect
- are clear about their ethical responsibilities
- exhibit the behaviours expected of them

That is why we have worked with the Audit Commission to add an ethical component to the capacity section of the new Comprehensive Performance Assessment. These are the essential tests.

We too have been scrutinised, as all regulators should be.



Graham Committee and ODPM Select Committee

Key questions:

- strategic regulator?
- local filtering?
- independent chairs of standards committees?
- more support and training?

We welcome Sir Alistair Graham's report and he will speak for himself. We also welcome the ODPM select committee's report. We will do all we can to implement the decisions the Minister has promised on both reports.

We are already rapidly turning ourselves into a strategic regulator, focusing on the most serious cases, reducing the size of our investigations team and refocusing our resources to support you in your core purpose of improving confidence in local democracy.

Central to this is the revision of the Code of Conduct. Thank you for your 1,200 thoughtful and thought-provoking responses. These were your headline messages.



Reviewing the Code

- 'A simpler, enabling Code'
- 'Councillors able to be community advocates'
- 'Confidentiality to be defined by the *Freedom of Information Act*'
- 'Public interest to be a defence'
- 'Personal and prejudicial interests to be simplified'
- 'Private life only an issue if a serious breach is concerned'

We have analysed your responses and agreed the scale and scope of change. We have shared this direction of travel with the Minister. Copies will be available outside and on our website. *[The report follows this transcript.]*

The devil is in the detail, but our overriding aim is to simplify and to liberalise. To underpin effective local democracy as it is experienced by local people and local communities. The way the Code of Conduct is applied is as important as what is written in it. That is as much a challenge for monitoring officers as for us. The clearer and simpler the Code, the easier it will be to get right in both the spirit and the letter.



Now it's your Code

And here is my promise this year.

As we remain committed to improving our own performance, as cases are increasingly handled by you locally, as the Code of Conduct increasingly becomes your Code that you have modified, as the need for effective ethical behaviour becomes universally accepted throughout local government, we will increasingly focus on ensuring that you are fit for purpose through support and through challenge.

The responsibility for the ethical agenda lies with us and with you: standards committee members, monitoring officers, chief executives and leaders. It is in your hands.