

APPENDIX A – EXTRACT FROM COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE REPORT, JANUARY 2013

Conclusions and best practice points

23. Our conclusions include some practical steps which organisations can take to help ensure that they establish and maintain high standards. Our key message is that unless individuals and organisations genuinely take responsibility for their own standards, remaining vigilant to ensure they are upheld, they risk failing to meet the standards to which they aspire.

Conclusion 1

The basic building blocks for promoting high standards remain much as identified by the original Nolan Committee – a set of broadly expressed values which everyone understands, codes of practice elaborating what the principles mean in the particular circumstances of an organisation, effective internal processes to embed a culture of high standards, leadership by example and proportionate, risk-based external scrutiny.

- Many organisations delivering public services, including those voluntary, private sector, mutual or social enterprise organisations taking on contracts from the public sector, already regularly assess how well they measure up to best practice in ethical governance. All organisations need actively to review their current practices as a matter of routine, making sure that they consider all those factors affecting individual behaviour, including recruitment processes, appraisal and reward structures, leadership and contemporaneous prompts to good behaviour alongside formal codes and sanctions for poor behaviour.

Conclusion 2

The need now is for ethical standards issues to be addressed actively at organisational level. High standards do not occur automatically. Nor should they be taken for granted. High standards are everyone's personal responsibility. But personal behaviour is shaped by organisational culture. High standards need to be driven actively by leadership and example.

- Ethical issues should feature regularly on the agendas of the boards of public bodies and, where appropriate, on risk registers. All such boards should consider whether ethical risks have been adequately addressed and actively monitor standards of behaviour throughout their organisations, either themselves, or through their audit and risk committees.

- Permanent secretaries and chief executives of all organisations delivering public services should take personal responsibility for ethical standards in their organisations and certify annually in their annual report or equivalent document that they have satisfied themselves about the adequacy of their organisation's arrangements for safeguarding high standards.

Conclusion 3

New ethical risks are being created by the development of new models of service delivery. There is a growing area of ambiguity occupied by people contracted to deliver public services who may not be public officeholders. We strongly believe that the ethical standards captured by the seven principles should also apply to such people.

- In all cases where new methods of delivering public services are being created, commissioners and providers should give careful thought to the mechanisms necessary to maintain expected high standards of behaviour and promote the seven principles of public life.
- Public servants designing and commissioning services should, in a consistent and proportionate way, address ethical issues throughout the procurement process. Contractors and others should acknowledge the particular responsibilities they bear when delivering public services, paid for by public money, to individuals who may not have the choice of going elsewhere.
- Where powers to regulate standards are devolved to promote local responsibility and leadership, care should always be taken to ensure that there is independent scrutiny, that the results of such scrutiny are made publicly available and that those who have responsibility for imposing sanctions have adequate legal or other powers to do so.

Conclusion 4

Low and declining levels of confidence in the integrity of public institutions remain a matter of concern. While trust is a complex phenomenon, there is scope for trying to increase public confidence in public office-holders and public institutions by addressing the outstanding standards issues identified in this report and by being more attentive to, and active in, addressing emerging issues rather than waiting until pressures for reform become irresistible.

- Public office-holders and organisations should seek to improve their own trustworthiness by consistently and reliably exemplifying high standards of ethical behaviour, openness and accountability and establishing and promulgating robust mechanisms for detecting and dealing with wrongdoing. They should endeavour to increase public understanding of their role and work and should aim to create a culture which harnesses the power of the media to promote high standards and deter or expose misconduct.
- The outstanding ethical issues identified in this report should be addressed actively before they become even more problematic and further undermine confidence in our public institutions.