

## National Assembly Commissioner for Standards

### Report to the Committee on Standards of Conduct: 9 March 2005

1. It is now 12 months since my appointment as Commissioner for Standards, and in bringing this (my third) report to the Committee I would like to reflect on activities over the last year before looking ahead to what is on the horizon.
2. Engaging with Assembly Members has been an important part of my role over the last year. My approach has been to take forward a message mainly about the role of the Commissioner and the revised procedure for dealing with complaints against Assembly Members but also about my thoughts on the further development of a Standards Culture.
3. I have previously reported to the Committee the main points that have emerged from my meetings with Members, that:
  - There is little cause for concern currently amongst political groups in relation to Standards of Conduct in the Assembly.
  - There is an understanding and acceptance of the importance of maintaining high ethical standards within the Assembly as well as an acceptance that all political parties have a part to play in developing a robust standards culture.
  - There is a willingness to co-operate in developing practices to streamline standards processes.
4. I very much view this as an on-going process, and I make a commitment to taking this forward throughout my time as Commissioner.

#### Standards Commissioner's Web-site

5. An important step was the launch of the Commissioner's web-site which provides core information on both my role as Commissioner and how the office can be accessed and which also provides a dedicated E-mail address for the Commissioner enabling direct contact to my office.
6. The web-site has been well used over recent months. I have received many e-mails, both generally in respect of my role as Commissioner and more specifically in relation to complaints about Assembly Members.

7. This has however brought additional problems such as unsolicited mail and correspondence about matters outside my remit. This has inevitably raised the workload, particularly of the Secretariat, and I am grateful for the support provided. I am keen that the Commissioner's office continues to receive the support it needs to develop and I propose to discuss with the Secretariat how this can be accommodated.

### Complaints

8. During my time as Commissioner I have undertaken investigations into seven formal complaints against Assembly Members - one of these being referred to the Committee as 'admissible'.

9. This is also the first year that the new Complaints Procedure has been used. I'm sure the Committee will agree that the new Procedure offers a more open and transparent process for dealing with complaints. Having used the Procedure over the last year, it is clear that it provides a more robust basis from which complaints are considered.

10. However I am aware that the Secretariat is planning to review the process regularly, taking into account the views of all those involved, and I am keen to play a part in these reviews in whatever way possible.

### Future Work

11. I will continue to engage with Assembly Members to take forward an agenda to build a Standards Culture in the Assembly and I will be looking at ways to use the Commissioner's web-site to take forward key messages.

12. I will be producing an Annual Report in the near future detailing my activities over the last 12 months together with my future plans. This will be published and made available to all Assembly Members.

13. Finally, I am pleased that the Government of Wales Bill has received its Second Reading. The Bill will result in the Assembly being able to frame its own legislation in relation to Standards. I look forward to working with the Committee in taking forward developments in this area - including the prescription of new Standing Orders - which will, I'm sure, help strengthen standards of conduct in the Assembly.

**Richard Penn**  
**National Assembly Commissioner for Standards**  
**March 2006**