

PRESS NOTICE

Committee on Standards in Public Life

17 June 2014

NEW INDEPENDENT RESEARCH – PUBLIC EXPECT COMMON ETHICAL STANDARDS FROM OUTSOURCED PUBLIC SERVICES.

Ethical standards must be formalised into the contracts and monitoring arrangements for companies and charities delivering outsourced public services according to a new report published today by the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

The report draws on new qualitative research conducted for the Committee by Ipsos MORI with commissioners of services, providers and the public. Key findings from the research were:

- the public felt that the same ethical standards should be upheld by any organisation providing public services regardless of sector and be supported by codes of conduct
- the public felt that good outcomes and quality of user/provider interaction - particularly from front line staff behaving with integrity and objectivity - were crucial to ethical service delivery
- commissioners do not necessarily articulate ethical standards to providers explicitly
- whilst many thought efficiency and flexibility gains had been achieved through new ways of working, there was some concern that certain providers would “cut corners” or “deliver below par services” or risk quality of service, in order to achieve value for money or payment by results demanded by commissioners.

Lord Bew, Chair of the Committee, said:

“It is clear that the public want all providers of public services to adhere to and operate by common ethical standards, regardless of whether those providers come from the private, public or voluntary sectors. For the public “how” things are done is as important as “what” is done.

“The government has made clear that the Seven Principles first set down by Lord Nolan - honesty, integrity, accountability, leadership, openness, selflessness and objectivity - should apply to all those delivering services to the public.

“Ethics matter. This is increasingly recognised by the business community as a necessary part of winning trust and building confidence in the public service markets. Ethical standards should not be taken for granted and they have not been taken seriously enough to date. These risks are recognised by some commissioners and providers but they are rarely addressed explicitly.

“ This report makes a number of recommendations to Government to ensure that proportionate ethical standards are made explicit in commissioning, contracting and monitoring and that these standards apply to anyone delivering public services on behalf of the taxpayer.“

Jim Bligh, Head of Public Services at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) said:

"200,000 charities and companies of all sizes help government provide the public services that we depend on all over the country. This can generate innovation, investment and efficiency, but also requires standards of conduct that are appropriate for organisations funded by and working for taxpayers. The Committee's investigation is a welcome, up to date assessment of what the public expect from their public services, which the CBI is delighted to support."

The report and research can be downloaded from www.public-standards.gov.uk

Notes to Editors

1. Media enquiries please contact Maggie O’Boyle on 07880 740627.

2. The report and IPSOS MORI research are both available on the CSPL website: www.public-standards.gov.uk
3. The Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) commissioned Ipsos MORI to carry out research into public and stakeholder views with regard to what ethical standards providers of publicly funded services should conform to, and how closely they relate to the Seven Principles of Public Life. The first stage encompassed 15 in-depth telephone interviews with commissioners, providers and individuals from national representative organisations. Stakeholders reflected on what ethical standards providers should conform to, and how to achieve this. The second stage involved six evening discussion groups with members of the general public, lasting 90 minutes, in three locations (Leeds, London, and Nottingham). Participants discussed what ethical standards should be met by those delivering public services. The Committee has also conducted semi-structured interviews with commissioners and providers to understand how organisations ensure that they meet the high ethical standards expected for delivery of public services and the managing of public resources.
4. The Committee on Standards in Public Life is an Advisory Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) sponsored by the Cabinet Office. The Chair and Members are appointed by the Prime Minister. The Committee was established in October 1994 with the following terms of reference: “To examine current concerns about standards of conduct of all holders of public office, including arrangements relating to financial and commercial activities, and make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements which might be required to ensure the highest standards of propriety in public life.” Additional terms of reference were announced on 12 November 1997: “To review issues in relation to the funding of political parties, and to make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements.” On 5 February 2013 the terms of reference were clarified by the Government in two respects: ‘...in future the Committee should not inquire into matters relating to the devolved legislatures and governments except with the agreement of those bodies’ and ‘...the Committee’s remit to examine “standards of conduct of all holders of public office” [encompasses **For**] all those involved in the delivery of public services, not solely those appointed or elected to public office.’ [Hansard \(HC\), 5 February 2013, Col 7WS](#). The Committee’s terms of reference were further clarified in a House of Lords written Parliamentary Question on 28th February 2013 to explain that the Committee’s remit means it “*can examine issues relating to the ethical standards of the delivery of public services by private and voluntary sector organisations, paid for by public funds, even where those delivering the services have not been appointed or elected to public office.*” [Hansard \(HL\) Column WA347](#).
5. The current members of the Committee are: Lord (Paul) Bew, Chairman, Rt Hon Lord Alderdice, Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett MP DBE, Sheila Drew Smith OBE, Patricia Moberly, Dame Denise Platt DBE, David Prince CBE, Richard Thomas CBE and Dame Angela Watkinson MP DBE.
6. To contact the CBI Press Office call 020 7395 8239 or press.office@cbi.org.uk