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Response to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's 12th Inquiry: Local Leadership and Public Trust: Openness and Accountability in Local and London Government

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this inquiry. We continue to strongly support the recommendations made by the Committee in their 10th report - Getting the Balance Right - in relation to whistleblowing. However to ensure they translate into good practice it is vital the leaders of Local and London Government absorb those recommendations so they may become the basis for an open ethical working culture. In light of the existing recommendations, we will restrict our comments to the value of whistleblowing in supporting and embedding the Seven Principles of Public Life as outlined by the Committee. Such comments cut across all levels of Local and London Government.

We think it important to re-iterate that leadership is paramount for successful whistleblowing arrangements and the messages within need to be kept alive. In order to deter and detect malpractice, it needs to be continually made clear from the highest levels of all organisations that they treat malpractice seriously and welcome employee concerns. If employees are unsure of their organisation's commitment to this, it is unlikely they will raise a concern about malpractice. The same applies to Local Government and it is vital that leaders in this field demonstrate their commitment to a culture that encourages whistleblowing. In turn this draws clear lines of accountability and will mean those at the top of an organisation will have to answer if they fail to act when they are informed of a problem.

In July 2008 we launched the jointly published *Whistleblowing Arrangements: Code of Practice* with the British Standards Institution. It builds on the Committee's previous recommendations and is a comprehensive guide for any organisation that wants to get whistleblowing right. The BSI Code of Practice can be downloaded for free at www.pcaw.co.uk/bsi.

We recommend the Committee urge Local Government to follow the guidance contained in the BSI Code of Practice. We are happy to suggest ways in which the BSI Code could be promoted. We further recommend Local Authorities be encouraged to review the efficacy of their whistleblowing arrangements as part of their annual review including what they have done to ensure their whistleblowing arrangements comply with best practice. Local Authorities could also be reminded that the Audit Commission includes the existence of a whistleblowing policy as one of its performance measures.

We hope our comments are useful and would be happy to provide further assistance if required.

Francesca West
Senior Policy Officer
25 February 2009