**CSPL (18) 23**

**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE**

**TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY-THIRD MEETING**

**HELD AT 10.00 ON THURSDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2018 IN**

**70 WHITEHALL,** **LONDON, SW1A 2AS**

**MINUTES**

Present: Lord Bew, Chair

Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP

Sheila Drew Smith OBE

Dr Jane Martin CBE

Jane Ramsey

Monisha Shah

Rt Hon Lord Stunell OBE

Rt Hon Peter Riddell CBE, Commissioner for Public Appointments for item 1

Lesley Bainsfair, Secretary

Ally Foat, Senior Policy Advisor

Dee Goddard, Senior Policy Advisor

Stuart Ramsay, Senior Policy Advisor

Maggie O’Boyle, Press Officer

Apologies: Simon Hart MP

**1. PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS**

The Committee welcomed Peter Riddell, Commissioner for Public Appointments (CPA). Peter updated the Committee on the operation of the public appointments code.

Themes of transparency, diversity, panel membership and exemptions to the process were discussed. Peter reported that the Code was largely working well although he said he was far from complacent. There was variation between departments on the transparency of their data, and whilst there had been improvement on gender balance, there was more to do on ethnic minority and particularly disabled public appointment representation. The Committee stressed the value of transparency of data which was a powerful lever to ensure the proper operation of the code and the holding of Ministers to account.

Pre-appointment checks and due diligence were considered.**[[1]](#footnote-0)** In particular, whether there ought to be a ‘statute of limitations’ on earlier public statements by applicants that might be out of line with the Nolan Principles?

Challenges including the potential impact of Brexit - the likely increase in public bodies and appointments - and how to influence appointments made to bodies outside the remit of the CPA were also discussed.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Peter for all his work and was grateful to his offer to stay in touch and to keep the Committee updated on the operation of the code.

2. **REGISTERS**

Monisha Shah reported that she had been appointed a member of the Queen’s Counsel Appointments Selection Panel from 1 February 2018.

Jane Martin reported that she had been appointed to the Board of the Legal Ombudsman from 1 May 2018 and would therefore step down from the Legal Services Consumer Panel.

**3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2018 were agreed.

**Matters arising:**

**Intimidation in Public Life**

The Committee noted and welcomed the Prime Minister’s letter of 6 February responding positively to the Committee’s December 2017 report on Intimidation in Public Life. A full government response was expected by the end of February.

**4. FOLLOW UP TO ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDERS**

The Committee noted the latest draft report on ethical standards for public service providers.

Drafting changes to the report were suggested, particularly around tightening the recommendations. These were noted as was the revised timetable for publication.

The final draft would be considered at the March meeting which Sheila Drew Smith, lead member on this report, whose term of appointment ends on 16 February 2018, kindly agreed to attend.

**5. MPs’ OUTSIDE INTERESTS**

The Committee noted the discussion paper on MPs’ outside interests. The Committee noted the revised structure and agreed that the Secretariat, with the assistance of a PhD student, should undertake a full analysis of the Commons’ register of interests.

The Committee noted Simon Hart’s comments which he had provided before the meeting.

The Committee fully discussed the complex and wide-reaching issues that the issue of MPs’ outside interests encompassed.

The first draft of the report would be presented to the March Committee meeting.

**6. WESTMINSTER HARASSMENT**

The Committee strongly welcomed the report, published that morning, of the cross-party working group on an independent complaints and grievance policy. The Committee considered that it was a strong, cross-party set of proposals which offered a standard of protection and independent support in line with those that the best employers offer their staff. The Committee welcomed the strengthening of the roles of the independent Parliamentary Commissioners for Standards and House Committees, and, for the first time, the proposal to establish a shared and binding behaviour code.

The Committee agreed to issue a supportive statement, and keep a close watching brief on the development and implementation of the working group’s recommendations.

**7. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ETHICAL STANDARDS REVIEW**

The Committee noted the update on progress with the local government ethical standards review which had been launched on 29 January 2018.

**8. BUSINESS APPOINTMENT RULES**

The Committee noted the government’s response to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee’s (PACAC) 2017 report on the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments and PACAC’s immediate response.[[2]](#footnote-1)

Finding a way through the complex issues which surrounded the Business Appointment Rules - balancing the propriety of Ministers’ subsequent roles with the right of individuals to pursue their career - was not straightforward. This is particularly acute at the moment when the Civil Service needed to recruit people from the private sector with specialist skills to deliver Brexit.

The Committee considered there might be merit in meeting separately to focus on the issue, perhaps hosting a seminar. The Secretariat was asked to consider this further.

**9. STANDARDS CHECK**

The standards check for January was noted.

**10. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD LOOK OF EVENTS**

The Committee noted the forward agenda and forward look of key events.

Jane Martin noted additionally that she would be representing the Committee at the Ethical Leadership meeting of the Association of School and College Leaders on 28 February 2018.

**11. AOB**

**Independent Commission on Referendums**

The Committee noted that the Constitution Unit had invited the Committee to contribute to their Independent Commission on Referendums’ call for evidence.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING:**

**Thursday 15 March 2018 to be held in Conference Room E, 70 Whitehall.**

**FAREWELL TO SHEILA DREW SMITH**

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair expressed his deep gratitude to Sheila Drew Smith, at her last formal meeting, for her unswerving support and work for the Committee since her appointment in 2012. Sheila had worked tirelessly on all aspects of the committee’s work, including leading on the report on ethical standards for providers of public services, the guidance and the report’s follow-up, as well as providing essential support for the reviews on ethics for regulators and intimidation in public life. Sheila would be sincerely missed.

**CSPL Secretariat**

**February 2018**

1. Jane Ramsey and Maggie O’Boyle both declared conflicts of interest. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Maggie O’Boyle declared a conflict of interest. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)