**CSPL (19) 43**

**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE**

**TWO HUNDRED AND SIXTY-SIXTH MEETING**

**HELD AT 10.00 ON THURSDAY 25 APRIL 2019**

**IN** **70 WHITEHALL, LONDON**

**MINUTES**

Present: Lord Evans KCB DL, Chair

Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP

Simon Hart MP

Dr Jane Martin CBE

Dame Shirley Pearce DBE

Jane Ramsey

Monisha Shah

Professor Mark Philp, Chair, Research Advisory Board

Lesley Bainsfair, Secretary

Nicola Richardson, Senior Policy Adviser

Aaron Simons, Senior Policy Adviser

Amy Austin, Policy Adviser

Lesley Glanz, Executive Assistant

Maggie O’Boyle, Press Officer

Apologies Rt Hon Lord Stunell OBE

In attendance Julie Harding, Independent Director of Cultural Transformation,

House of Commons

Ahead of formal business, the Committee welcomed Julie Harding, Independent Director of Cultural Transformation, House of Commons, for a confidential discussion on how Parliament was addressing Dame Laura Cox’s recommendations to deliver cultural change in the organisation.

**1. REGISTERS**

Members were asked to let the Secretariat know of any changes to their register of interests.

Members noted the Chair’s resignation from HSBC.

**2 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2019 were agreed.

**Matters arising:**

**Chair’s update**

The Chair updated the Committee on:

* His introductory meeting with Baroness Browning, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOBA). In discussion, members expressed concern about the particular problem whereby senior public officer holders not employed under the Civil Service Management Code are not subject to the Business Appointment Rules. This lack of a clear and transparent process has the potential to damage the integrity of the business appointment system as a whole. The Committee would return to this issue.
* The forthcoming visit of a delegation from the Kazakhstan Agency for Civil Service Affairs and Anti-Corruption on Tuesday 30 April. The Agency had approached the Committee requesting a meeting. The visit had been cleared by the FCO.
* The Chair’s intention, 6 months in post, to discuss with colleagues, on a one to one basis, about how the Committee was working with the aim of bringing a paper about the effectiveness of the Committee to the September meeting.

**3. WESTMINSTER HARASSMENT**

The Committee noted the paper which updated members on various strands of work underway.

The Committee noted:

* The Chair and Jane Ramsey’s meeting with Lord McFall, Chair of the Lords Privileges and Conduct Committee. The meeting was held to discuss the Privileges and Conduct Committee’s report which proposed changes to the Code of Conduct to incorporate the Behaviour Code and implement new procedures for dealing with complaints of bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct. This followed a consultation of peers. The report was due to be debated in the House of Lords on 30 April; and
* The Chair and Jane Ramsey’s meeting with Dr John Benger, Clerk of the Commons. The meeting was an introductory meeting and arranged to discuss Parliament’s response to the issue of bullying and harassment in Parliament and the parliamentary authorities response to the issue.

The Committee asked the Secretariat to prepare a further paper reviewing the Committee’s considerations to date, and to aid the Committee in its decisions and responses going forward, in areas such as transparency, treatment of historic cases, and independence of any new system for considering complaints against Parliamentarians.

The Committee would actively maintain its close and serious interest in the issue.

**4. INTIMIDATION IN PUBLIC LIFE**

The Chair reported to the Committee the outcome of the second, constructive meeting with political parties to discuss the recommendation that there should be a joint code of conduct for political parties at times of general elections. This meeting had been held on 27 March. The parties had agreed to work towards a ‘joint statement of principle’ (no longer naming it a ‘code of conduct’); and to work with a trusted third party in drafting the high level statement.

Consideration would be given as to how to include new parties in any agreement going forward.

**5. AI AND PUBLIC STANDARDS**

The Committee noted the review’s draft, outline structure. Key comments were:

* given the continually moving nature of AI, it was important for the review to reflect that ‘non-static’ state of the subject;
* it was essential to use the forthcoming roundtables to validate the challenges identified so far;
* suggestions regarding attendees at the roundtables, and distribution of the experts at the various roundtables.

Committee members noted the planned dates of the three roundtables: 23 May; 29 May and 5 June but noted it would have been helpful to have had prior warning of the dates. Members requested that in future they were given advance notice of such dates.

**6. 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF CSPL**

Options for marking the 25th anniversary of the Committee were discussed and three proposals agreed.

A further paper with more worked-up proposals would be brought back to the Committee for their consideration.

**7. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ETHICAL STANDARDS FOLLOW UP**

The Committee noted the positive response in the media and from the sector to the report to-date. The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had engaged constructively with the report. It was important though to continue to emphasise to the Ministry that the report’s recommendations are a package and should be seen as such rather than recommendations being ‘cherry picked’. It was also important to continue to emphasise that the report, in line with the evidence received by the Committee from the sector did not recommend a return to a centralised, standardised system. The Government response would be a key stage in determining the Committee’s immediate next steps.

The plan for following up implementation of the report’s best practice recommendations was noted.

**8. STANDARDS CHECK**

The standards check for March/April was noted. Members noted with concern the results of the Hansard Society’s 2019 audit of political engagement which showed that opinions of the governing system were at their lowest point in the 15 year audit series - worse now than in the aftermath of the MPs’ expenses scandal.

**9. FORWARD AGENDA AND FORWARD LOOK OF EVENTS**

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

**10. AOB**

**Communications Update**

The Committee noted the communications update for March 2019.

**PACAC Inquiry into Electoral Reform**

The Committee noted that PACAC had launched an inquiry into Electoral Reform. Members agreed that the Committee should contribute.

**Architects Registration Board**

The Committee noted an invitation from the Architects Registration Board (ARB) for a member to speak at a forthcoming meeting of their Board. The Secretariat would circulate the dates to see whether it might be possible for a Committee member to speak as requested

**Date Of Next Meeting**

**Thursday 16 May 2019 to be held in Conference Room E, 70 Whitehall.**