**CSPL (17) 29**

**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE**

**TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY-THIRD MEETING**

**THURSDAY 23 MARCH 2017 AT 10:00**

**ROOM G11, 1 HORSE GUARDS ROAD,** **LONDON, SW1A 2HQ**

**MINUTES**

Present: Lord Bew, Chair

Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP

Sheila Drew Smith OBE

Dr Jane Martin CBE

Jane Ramsey

Monisha Shah

Lord Stunell OBE

Richard Thomas CBE

In attendance: Rt Hon Peter RIddell CBE, Commissioner for Public

Appointments (CPA)

Secretariat: Lesley Bainsfair, Secretary

Dee Goddard, Senior Policy Advisor

Maggie O’Boyle, Press Officer

Apologies: Dame Angela Watkinson DBE MP *(on leave of absence)*

At the start of the meeting, Maggie O’Boyle declared her conflict of interest as Press Officer for the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA), and Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACoBA).

1. **Public Appointments Code**

The meeting began with the Committee welcoming Peter Riddell.

Mr Riddell updated the Committee on the implementation of the new public appointments code. Mr Riddell confirmed that, so far, he was pleased to report that the new code was working well. There seemed to be a good balance between proper process and ministerial accountability. OCPA was alive to any risks of excessive political interference; transparency and fairness were key. OCPA was pushing back on departments on any requests for exemptions to the process, as well as pushing hard to make sure appointment processes were not delayed. OCPA was also encouraging departments to encourage better quality and more diverse candidates to public appointments.

Mr Riddell noted the suggestion of the committee to look at how departments advertised and at the nature of the selection panels themselves, both in terms of diversity and in experience and understanding of what it takes to be a non-executive director. In some sectors, such as the health service, there were increased examples of less diversity than in others. And the weaknesses around recruitment was discussed, as was the lack of resources, cost and the somewhat patchy performance of recruitment consultants in the past which has led to a reluctance by departments to use them. Mr Riddell also referred to the possible impact of Brexit which could be considerable since regulatory and other functions currently performed at an EU level would presumably have to be done at a national level. This might mean changes in the role of existing public bodies or the creation of new ones.

There was some discussion of the desirability of induction for new non-executive directors. Even those at the top of their field were not always clear on how responsibilities differed in the public sector.

The Committee thanked Mr Riddell and congratulated him on his achievements in his first 9 months in post and welcomed his suggestion that he might return and report back at a future date.

**Formal business of the Committee**

**APOLOGIES** were received from Angela Watkinson.

**2. REGISTERS**

The Committee notedthe registers of interests and gifts and hospitality. Jane Ramsey would write to the Secretariat with a forthcoming addition to the register of interests (subsequently added to the register).

The Committee also noted the risk register, a new item on the agenda which would henceforth appear 6 monthly. Committee members would let the Secretariat have any detailed comments.

**3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

The minutes of the February meeting were agreed subject to a minor amendment.

**Matters arising:**

**MPs’ outside interests**

The Committee discussed the matter of MPs’ outside interests and agreed to launch a short consultation to see the extent to which the compromise the Committee recommended in 2009 had been put into operation, and if there was a need to explore further factors to be taken into account when considering what is meant by ‘reasonable limits’. (In its 2009 report the Committee recommended: *”MPs should not be prohibited from paid employment such as journalism outside the House, providing any such activity remains in reasonable limits. But it should be transparent and information about it should be drawn to voters’ attention at election time”*.)

The Secretariat would draft terms of reference for the review for the Committee’s consideration with the aim of running the consultation through April. This would delay the start of any review of local government standards.

It was noted that the Commons Standards Committee was due to receive shortly the Parliamentary Commissioner’s report on her consultation on the MPs’ Code of Conduct. The Commons Standards Committee would then invite views on the Commissioner’s report. The Committee’s report from the review could feed into the Commons Committee on Standards’ consultation.

**Dame Louise Casey**

The Committee noted that Dame Louise Casey’s office had asked to rearrange the planned meeting with the Chair for 25 April.

**Meetings with Electoral Commission**

The Committee noted the record of the meeting hosted by the Electoral Commission on 14 March to discuss referendums. The main issue discussed had been the difficulty around substantiating claims made during campaigns. It was agreed that the Committee should write to the Electoral Commission emphasising the need to find a way to take the matter forward.

**Party Funding**

The Committee noted that the Chair spoke on Friday 10 March in the second reading debate of Lord Tyler’s Political Parties (Funding and Expenditure) Bill [HL] 2016-17.

The Committee noted thatfollowing Mr Kinnock’s letter of 14 February about political parties and expenditure limit rules, a meeting with Stephen Kinnock and the Electoral Commission had been arranged for 26 April.

**Membership and Secretariat Issues**

The Committee noted that**:**

* Angela Watkinson, Conservative member, will return to the Committee after the Easter recess, following a period of leave of absence;
* Sheila Drew Smith’s term of appointment has, exceptionally, been approved for an extension for 9 months to February 2018 in order to assist with continuity of membership.
* Richard Thomas would be unable to attend the April Committee meeting; his last meeting would therefore be 18 May when he would attend the meeting with the agreement of the Committee, as his term of appointment formally ends on 16 May.
* The senior policy advisor vacancy in the Secretariat has been advertised externally; the deadline for applications is 12 April.
* Due to a rearrangement between HMT and the Civil Service Commission, the usual meeting room for the Committee, would no longer be available. The Secretariat had made alternative arrangements.

**4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT SCOPING NOTE**

Discussion of the local government scoping note was deferred until a later meeting in view of the new work on MPs’ outside interests. It was agreed that the terms of reference for the local government work would be amended to give a clearer focus to the review.

**5. STRATEGIC PLAN**

Discussion of the draft strategic plan was deferred until the April meeting.

**6. ETHICAL STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDERS: FOLLOW UP**

The Committee noted the update on the follow up work to ethical standards for public service providers.Sheila Drew Smith recorded her thanks to Dee Goddard for organising the roundtable held on 21 March for umbrella organisations which had been very successful. It was also noted that following conversations with the Cabinet Office, the Secretariat would send an annex for consideration for inclusion to the Cabinet Office’s Code of Conduct for suppliers.

**7. STANDARDS CHECK**

The Committee noted the Standards Check.

**8. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME AND FORWARD GRID**

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

**9. AOB**

The Committee noted the Communications Update.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Thursday 27 April 2017**

**Please note this meeting will be held in Room G24, 1 Horse Guards Road.**

CSPL Secretariat

March 2017