

Annual Plan 2013-14

**Committee on Standards
In Public Life**

April 2013

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

The principles of public life apply to anyone who works as a public office-holder. This includes all those who are elected or appointed to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the civil service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, NDPBs, and in the health, education, social and care services. All public office-holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources. The principles also have application to all those in other sectors delivering public services.

SELFLESSNESS

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.

INTEGRITY

Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.

OBJECTIVITY

Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

OPENNESS

Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.

HONESTY

Holders of public office should be truthful.

LEADERSHIP

Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

The seven principles were established in the Committee's First Report in 1995; the accompanying descriptors were revised following a review in the Fourteenth Report, published in January 2013.

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FOREWORD

This is the CSPL's first annual plan following the publication in October 2012 of our Strategic Plan for 2012-15.¹ This plan sets out the work we intend to carry out in the business year commencing 1 April 2013.

The plan has been developed in the light of the recommendations of the Committee's Triennial Review, which were broadly accepted by the Government on 5 February 2013.² The Review's recommendations had implications for the Committee's terms of reference, structure and working practices.

As a Committee we would like to express our thanks to the outgoing chair, Sir Christopher Kelly, who concluded his five year non-renewable term at the end of March 2013. The recruitment campaign for Sir Christopher's successor is currently underway, and expected to be completed by July 2013.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life

The Lord Alderdice

Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP

Sheila Drew Smith OBE

Patricia Moberly

Sir Derek Morris MA DPhil

Dame Denise Platt DBE

David Prince CBE

Richard Thomas CBE

Dame Angela Watkinson DBE MP

April 2013

¹ <http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/our-work/annual-reports/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/committee-on-standards-in-public-life-triennial-review>

ABOUT THE CSPL

Our remit

1. On 25 October 1994, the then Prime Minister, the Rt Hon John Major MP, announced the setting up of the Committee on Standards in Public Life 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.

For these purposes, public office should include: ministers, civil servants and advisers; Members of Parliament and UK Members of the European Parliament; members and senior officers of all non-departmental public bodies and of national health service bodies; non-ministerial office holders; members and other senior officers of other bodies discharging publicly-funded functions; and elected members and senior officers of local authorities.”³

2. On 12 November 1997 the terms of reference were extended by the then Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Tony Blair MP:

“To review issues in relation to the funding of political parties, and to make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements.”⁴

3. 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.”

“...the Committee’s remit to examine ‘standards of conduct of all holders of public office’ [encompasses] all those involved in the delivery of public services, not solely those appointed or elected to public office.”⁵

³ Hansard (HC) 25 October 1994, col. 758

⁴ Hansard (HC) 12 November 1997, col. 899

⁵ Hansard (HC) 5 February 2013, col. 7WS

Our purpose

4. Standards of ethical behaviour among public office holders underpin every aspect of public life from the delivery of health and social care services to the passing of new laws and their application in the courts. The maintenance of high ethical standards is important for society. Decisions made impartially and objectively promote the best outcomes and provide a degree of predictability. Appointments made fairly allow everyone to compete on the same footing. Public trust in institutions which demonstrate high ethical standards enables things to happen. There is increasing recognition that high ethical standards are good for efficiency and tax-payer value.
5. The Committee on Standards in Public Life monitors, reports and makes recommendations on all issues relating to standards in public life.
6. As an independent, advisory Committee we are uniquely placed to consider the ethical landscape as a whole – from the standards of local councillors to the ethical behaviour of senior NHS staff and the conduct of MPs, peers and other elected representatives. As a standing committee we have a constant presence, which enables us to monitor progress on different issues, including our own recommendations, over time. It also enables us to respond quickly when an ethical issue arises which requires our consideration.
7. Our purpose is to help promote and maintain ethical standards in public life and thereby to protect the public interest through:
 - Monitoring standards issues and risks across the United Kingdom (by invitation in the devolved areas).
 - Conducting inquiries and making practical and proportional recommendations that are generally implemented.
 - Researching public perceptions on standards issues relating to specific areas of concern, and also over time.
8. Our remit does not allow us to investigate individual allegations of misconduct. That is the role of the relevant regulator. We do, however, seek to draw any general lessons that can be learned from individual instances.

Our status

9. The Committee is an independent advisory non-departmental public body (NDPB). It is not founded in statute and has no legal powers to compel witnesses to provide evidence or to enforce its recommendations. Our secretariat and budget are provided by the Cabinet Office.

Our independence

10. To fulfil our remit effectively it is important that we remain robustly non-partisan and independent of the Government that appoints us. It is for that reason that the chair and other members, other than those representing the political parties, are now appointed through a fair and transparent public appointment process, for non-renewable terms.
11. By convention, the Committee consults the Prime Minister before starting an inquiry, and can be asked by the Prime Minister to mount an inquiry on a specific subject. From 2013-14 onwards we will also consult the Chairs of the Commons Public Administration Select Committee and the Lords Constitution Committee before beginning a substantive inquiry. But the decision on whether to proceed will remain our own. Formally our reports have always been made to the Prime Minister, but published simultaneously with the timing determined by the Committee. From 2013-14 onwards our reports will also be sent to the Chairs of the Commons Public Administration Select Committee and the Lords Constitution Committee with the expectation that the Committee may be questioned by those Committees on their contents.

OUR WORK

Building on our work in 2012-13

12. In our strategic plan for 2012-15 we identified five objectives:
 - Where appropriate, we will undertake balanced, comprehensive inquiries which enable us to develop evidence-based, practical recommendations which will help maintain or improve ethical standards across public services.
 - We will undertake robust and effective research which will provide useful information about public perceptions of ethical standards across public services. We believe that it is important to

check our perceptions of the standards the public expects of public servants and organisations, and the extent to which they are being met, against reality.

- We will make informed contributions to public debates about ethical standards.
- We will constantly be alert, identifying developments and responding promptly to emerging ethical risks, engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to develop the ethical standards agenda.
- We will improve the way we work, evolving so that we continue to be an effective, efficient organisation delivering value for money.

13. One of the recommendations of the Triennial Review was that our biennial survey of public attitudes to ethical standards should be discontinued. No rationale was provided for this recommendation in the report of the Review but we accept that it has been endorsed by Government. We therefore intend that the fifth round of the survey, conducted in November 2012 and due to be published in summer 2013, should be the last for the time being. However we intend to continue conduct or commission qualitative research on public attitudes where this seems to us to be useful in connection with specific inquiries, and may wish to revisit the justification for conducting the biennial survey in future years.
14. Our major piece of work conducted in 2012-13 was an inquiry leading to *Standards Matter: a review of best practice in promoting good behaviour in public life*, which was published in January 2013.⁶ We intend to continue to disseminate this report and promote its findings amongst relevant stakeholders during 2013-14. We plan to survey recipients of the report informally in mid-2013 in order to identify evidence about the impact which it has had.
15. The report identified a number of key issues of current concern relating to ethical standards. We intend to pursue inquiries into some of these issues during 2013-14, as discussed in the next section.
16. In April 2012 we submitted evidence to the Government's consultation on proposals for a statutory register of lobbyists. As described below we intend to follow up on this issue in 2013-14.

Our plans for 2013-14

17. Our plans for 2013-14 have been shaped by our expectation that a new Chair of the Committee will be appointed during 2013. With this in mind and drawing on the analysis of key issues of current concern

⁶ <http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/9294-2900447-TSO-Standard-Matters-ACCESSIBLE.pdf>

identified in our *Standards Matter* report, we have decided to begin the business year with a series of seminars which may or may not lead to full scale inquiries.

18. **Lobbying:** The first seminar will review the progress to date with Government proposals to improve the transparency of the lobbying process and the ethical standards of lobbyists, involving lobbyists, the lobbied and those who have identified problems with lobbying. We intend to focus on issues around lobbying from the point of view of the lobbied rather than lobbyists.
19. **New methods of delivering public services:** A second seminar will be the first in a series intended to explore how best to manage the potential ethical risks surrounding the various new methods of delivering public services which are being introduced. Organised in collaboration with the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners it will provide an opportunity to work with recently elected PCCs to discuss ways of managing, in a proportionate way, the common ethical risks and issues which they may face in fulfilling their new roles.
20. Subsequent seminars planned in this series will address the ethical issues affecting new forms of educational provision (including academies and free schools) and Clinical Commissioning Groups, potentially in collaboration with regulators and others in the education and health sectors. We envisage that the outputs of these seminars may feed into a broader inquiry into new methods of public service delivery and intend to also carry out some in-depth fact-finding research which would support such an inquiry.
21. We anticipate that the results of the fifth biennial survey will be ready for publication in summer 2013. We intend to hold a public event to disseminate the results, as well as to look back over the four previous surveys to identify trends and highlight the value of the data set as a whole. We hope that this may encourage other organisations to take on the questions we have been asking about public perceptions of standards in their own surveys so that the opportunity to carry out analysis of long term trends is not lost.
22. In line with our usual timetable we intend to publish our annual report for 2012-13 by September 2013.
23. In 2014, the year before the next general election is expected, we may undertake some work, potentially together with other relevant bodies, on the ethical induction process for new and existing MPs. We would intend that such work would be complementary to any related work being undertaken by the House itself in this area. Any work in this area may usefully be extended to Special Advisers.
24. Throughout 2013-14 we will continue to monitor the implementation of the new local government standards regime, through analysis both of media reporting and issues of principle brought directly to our attention by members of local councils and the public. Barring any unforeseen developments in the interim we expect to undertake an assessment of the state of local government standards in 2014-15,

potentially together with other relevant bodies.

25. We will also continue to monitor a number of issues including:

- progress towards resolution of the issues surrounding political party funding addressed in our Thirteenth Report;⁷
- interchange between the public and private sectors;
- the behaviour and conduct of the police;
- electoral arrangements, including the conclusions of the Electoral Commission's review of vulnerabilities to electoral fraud, expected in autumn 2013;
- the role of the media in the public sector's promotion and maintenance of standards, including the aftermath of the Leveson Inquiry;
- whistleblowing, in light of the findings of the Francis report into Mid Staffs and subsequent developments; and
- any evidence of the impact of austerity on support for maintaining high ethical standards.

MANAGING RESOURCES AND RISKS

26. Our secretariat and budget are provided by the Cabinet Office. Like most public bodies, our budget continues to follow a downward trajectory from £504k in 2012-13 to £400k in 2013-14.

27. In recent years the Cabinet Office has steadily reduced the size of our secretariat, from six in 2007, to four in 2010. Following the Triennial Review our secretariat has been further reduced to three, with each of these posts down-graded. We expect all three post-holders to change in April 2013.

28. Our reduced resources will necessarily affect the ways in which we are able to fulfil our terms of reference. We will need to prioritise the ethical risks we identify carefully and focus our work accordingly. At the same time we believe that the current economic circumstances may be creating additional and enhanced ethical risks which fall within our remit to monitor and address. We intend to explore new ways of working, including in collaboration with other interested bodies, as recommended by the report of the Triennial Review.

⁷ <http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/our-work/inquiries/political-party-finance/>

COMMUNICATIONS

29. We will continue to communicate our work and strive to make it visible to target audiences. We will continue to use our website to publish our reports, responses to consultations and so on. Where possible we will develop its functionality to increase our capacity for electronic engagement with the public including through Twitter, blogging and podcasts of public meetings.
30. In accordance with the government-wide website rationalisation project our website is due to be incorporated into the Gov.uk domain by April 2014. We understand that editorial control will remain with our staff.