**CSPL (19) 70**

**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE**

**TWO HUNDRED AND SIXTY-EIGHTH MEETING**

**HELD AT 10.00 ON THURSDAY 20 JUNE 2019**

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

**MINUTES**

Present: Lord Evans KCB DL, Chair

Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP

Simon Hart MP

Dame Shirley Pearce DBE

Jane Ramsey

Monisha Shah

Rt Hon Lord Stunell OBE

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

Apologies: Dr Jane Martin CBE

Maggie O’Boyle, Press Officer

Professor Richard Susskind OBE joined the Committee ahead of formal business for a discussion on AI and public standards. The Committee were very appreciative to Richard for his time and expertise, and his thought-provoking and stimulating presentation. They welcomed his offer of meeting again, possibly with the Lord Chief Justice’s Advisory Group on AI, which Richard chaired.

**1. REGISTERS**

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

**2 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 May 2019 were agreed subject to one amendment.

**Chair’s update**

**Meeting with Commons Committee on Standards**

Jane Ramsey reported on the meeting held with the Commons Committee on Standards earlier in the month.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Committee considered the change in procedure agreed in July 2018 in the House of Commons whereby cases in the course of investigation by the Commissioner on Standards were no longer published. (Before the launch of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) in July 2018, the practice of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards was to publish online the fact that she had started an investigation into the conduct of a named Member, along with an indication of the rule which might have been breached. When the ICGS was introduced, the House agreed to end this practice for all complaints under the Code. The then Chair of the Standards Committee tabled an amendment against this proposal, but it was not agreed.)

The Committee’s current public position was concern that ‘a welcome step forwards in drawing together a policy on bullying and harassment could have the effect of reducing transparency in investigations about declarations or registration of interests for example’.

The Committee considered it was important to defend the Nolan Principle of transparency. Political members pointed out the potential for politically-motivated allegations and the adverse impact on MPs named as being investigated with an indication of the rule that might have been breached but without any further detail or context. There were added complications around the timing of investigations e.g. if an investigation was started and Parliament was then prorogued without the investigation being resolved. It was formally noted that it was difficult for political members to be part of the Committee decision-making process on this due to potential or perceived potential conflict of interest. The Committee asked the Secretariat to consider this further.

**Meeting of Chairs of Independent Offices**

It was noted that a meeting of the Chairs of Independent Offices would be held in early July. This would explore the standards landscape, the remits of the different bodies, and any potential for taking a group position on certain standards issues.

**Chair’s meeting with Philippa Foster Back, Institute of Business Ethics (IBE)**

The Chair’s meeting with Philippa Foster Back, Director of the IBE, was noted.

**Secretariat meeting with the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO)**

The Committee noted the Secretariat’s meeting with the ICO and agreed to seek opportunities to work with the ICO on issues of openness and transparency.

**3. WESTMINSTER HARASSMENT**

The Committee noted the paper which summarised the latest position on the various strands of activity underway in response to allegations of bullying and harassment in Parliament. The Committee would continue to stay close to the issue, keeping up-to-date on activities and actively monitoring developments.

**4. INTIMIDATION IN PUBLIC LIFE**

The Committee noted the current state of play on the Committee’s work with The Jo Cox Foundation to encourage political parties to draw up a common statement of understanding around conduct and behaviour. A further meeting was planned for July.

The Committee also noted that the Chair and Jane Ramsey were due to meet Jess Phillips MP and Sam Smethers, Chief Executive of the Fawcett Society, at their request, to discuss harassment of women.

The references to the Committee’s Intimidation in Public Life’s report in the online harms [White Paper](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/799873/Protecting-the-Debate-Government-Response-2019.05.01.pdf) were welcomed.

**5. AI AND PUBLIC STANDARDS**

The Committee noted the progress with the AI review. Key issues to bear in mind going forward included: not neglecting outcomes when considering principles and AI development, especially with regard to procurement; unintended consequences of AI take-up; and to consider the positive aspects of AI, the opportunities - there was the potential to focus on risks and dangers.

It was also important to ensure the Committee consulted with groups focusing on equality and diversity, and to try to bring people with a more diverse background into the evidence gathering.

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

The Committee noted the progress in following up the local government ethical standards report. Jane Ramsey had presented to the Lawyers in Local Government annual Monitoring Officers conference on 14 June (the 4th conference since publication of the report) and Dr Jane Martin had attended a positive meeting with the ADSO/LLG/SLCC [[2]](#footnote-2) Task Force set up to help take forward the report’s recommendations.

It was agreed that the Chair should write to the new Chair of the Local Government Association once elected in July 2019.

**7. ANNUAL REPORT**

The Committee noted the second draft of the Annual Report. Members were asked to let the Secretariat have any comments on the draft. The report would be published at the end of July.

**8. CSPL 25th Anniversary**

The Committee noted progress with plans to mark the Committee’s 25th anniversary.

**9. STANDARDS CHECK**

The standards check for May/June was noted.

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

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

**11. AOB**

**Communications Update**

The Committee noted the communications update for May 2019.

**Date of Next Meeting**

**Thursday 18 July 2019 to be held in Conference Room E, 70 Whitehall.**

Professor Cees Van der Eijk (RAB) will attend the meeting before the start of official business to talk to the Committee about his work on public perceptions of electoral fairness.

1. The meeting was a private discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Association of Democratic Service Officers/Lawyers in Local Government/Society of Local Council Clerks. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)