

**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE
TWO HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SECOND MEETING
HELD AT 10.00 ON THURSDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2019
IN 70 WHITEHALL, LONDON**

MINUTES

- Present:
- Lord Evans KCB DL, Chair
 - Dr Jane Martin CBE
 - Dame Shirley Pearce DBE
 - Jane Ramsey
 - Monisha Shah
- Professor Mark Philp, Chair, Research Advisory Board
Rebecca Dobson, University of Sussex, for item 1
- 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 Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP
 - Rt Hon Lord Stunell OBE
 - Ally Foat, Senior Policy Adviser

As no political members were able to be present due to the pre-election period, a note of the meeting was sent to political members subsequently and agreed by correspondence.

1. STANDARDS MAPPING

The Committee welcomed Rebecca Dobson, doctoral student at the University of Sussex, who had been commissioned by the Committee to write a paper outlining the various standards institutions across Westminster, Whitehall and local government.

Rebecca presented her report and outlined a number of areas of concern in relation to the standards regime that then formed the basis for a wider discussion in the Committee that reflected on a number of points:

- The greater codification of standards and institutional innovation over the past 25 years, in part due to the influence of the CSPL. This development had created accountability challenges, shifting from political to institutional accountability, but with political accountability operating in a much less certain environment as the erosion of two-party politics and majoritarian governments seem to have left people less able to be confident that they can hold their representatives of (often more importantly) those in government to account;
- This was exacerbated by the 'post-openness' age in which it was relatively easy for anyone to find information if they wanted to about a range of aspects of political behaviour or individual conduct, but which increases a sense of frustration at not being able to make that information count against them - people don't resign and they seem less receptive to public pressure or to a system of norms or an ethos of public office;

- Were members of the public convinced that the system could be trusted and the political elite held to account?
- With an expanding range of institutions it was often not wholly clear who was accountable to whom - and that was coupled with a tendency for things to have moved from what were previously forms of accountability that functioned at the political level, to less visible institutional mechanisms of accountability.
- That was also coupled with tensions between institutional and political sanctions - in which there are more of the former but people might feel that there is much less of the latter.
- Whether there was a need for the CSPL to re-visit those institutions/roles it had established to review whether they were fit for purpose in the current age;
- The need to disseminate the Principles to the wider public.

The Committee thanked Rebeca for an excellent paper which would be published on the Committee's website once the pre-election period was over.

2.. REGISTERS

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

3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2019 were agreed.

Chair's update

The Committee noted the Chair's update which reported his meeting with the Chairs of Independent Offices and his introductory meeting with Gareth Davies, Comptroller & Auditor General and Head of the NAO.

Committee members suggested that the Chairs of Independent Offices group would be a good sounding board for any work on reviewing the Principles, considering the effectiveness of them and how they can be used to further the cause of improved public life. In discussion, it was noted that the Principles were grounded in the attitudes of the general public, but the CSPL itself had a very restricted range of powers and could not 'call out' bad behaviour, having to rely on the regulatory system and the wider culture of public life to do that.

Whilst it was agreed it would be desirable for members of the Committee to attend future meetings of this group of Chairs of Independent Offices, it was agreed that this may widen the group impractically (due to Chairs of the Offices then inviting members of their own Boards/Commissions). It was suggested instead that a special meeting of the group be arranged in the new year to which all CSPL members and the Chair of the Research Advisory Board were invited so as to hold a structured discussion on the Principles.

The Committee members were also pleased to note that the Chair, members and the Secretariat were staying in touch with allies in the standards world, including the NAO, the ICO and the UK Statistics Authority.

The Committee noted that three files relating to the first report of the CSPL had been released to The National Archives and would be open to the public on 31 December 2019.

4. AI AND PUBLIC STANDARDS

The Committee welcomed the progress on the review and discussed the latest draft of the report which had advanced considerably since the previous version. The Secretariat noted drafting suggestions from members. A final draft would be circulated to members early in December.

5. WESTMINSTER HARASSMENT

The Committee noted that the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) had been extended to those who either have complaints pre-dating June 2017 or are no longer employed in the parliamentary community. This was in keeping with a recommendation made by Dame Laura Cox in her October 2018 independent inquiry report. Complaints regarding members or members' staff in the House of Lords that pre-date June 2017 can now be addressed to the Lords Commissioner for Standards who can also give advice on how the processes in the House of Lords apply. The Lords authorities are considering how non-recent complaints against a member of staff in the Lords Administration can be taken forward.

The Secretariat was arranging meetings with key players in Parliament for the new year, following the general election and Parliament's return. This would include setting up a meeting with the new Speaker of the House of Commons.

6. INTIMIDATION IN PUBLIC LIFE: FOLLOW UP

The Committee noted the paper which reported progress on work with The Jo Cox Foundation on the joint standard of conduct for political parties.

In parallel with negotiations with the leadership of political parties, The Jo Cox Foundation had proposed reaching out to parliamentary candidates to encourage awareness of the Joint Standard and to promote positive behaviour during the general election campaign. As a result, the Chair and the Chair of The Jo Cox Foundation had jointly written on 19 November to candidates inviting them to pledge to uphold high standards of behaviour.

7. CSPL 25th ANNIVERSARY

The Committee noted that the two sixth form workshops to hear from students about their views on the Principles had been held on 12 November. Members welcomed this work with young people and suggested that it might be developed further, building networks with students, sending out briefing packs for schools to encourage further discussion, as well as building networks with other, different demographic groups.

The facilitator's report of the workshops was due by the end of the year which the Secretariat would circulate to members for information.

8. STANDARDS CHECK

The standards check for October/November was noted.

9. FORWARD AGENDA AND FORWARD LOOK OF EVENTS

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

10. AOB

Electoral updates

Jane Ramsey updated the Committee on the Electoral Commission's sharing of election updates with a group of interested organisations.

Communications Update

The Committee noted the communications update for October 2019.

Date of Next Meeting

19 December 2019 (TBC).

The Committee discussed whether this meeting should go ahead. This was in doubt in view of difficulties around the date of the meeting - the date of the State Opening of Parliament had not yet been confirmed but might fall on 19 December which would mean that political members would not be able to attend. It was however important to have time to sign off the AI report (if that could not be done by correspondence before 19 December).

Jane Ramsey recorded that she thought it was important that the Committee met as planned.

It was agreed to keep the meeting in the diary for the time being and a decision would be taken nearer the time as to whether to meet on 19 December.

**CSPL Secretariat
November 2019**