

**Committee on
Standards
in Public Life**

Annual Report

July 2019 – June 2020

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

The Seven 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 or locally, and all people appointed to work in the civil service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, Non-Departmental Public Bodies, and in the health, education, social and care services. The Principles also apply to all those in the private sector 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.

Foreword

I am pleased to present the Committee on Standards in Public Life's Annual Report 2019-2020, my second as Chair of the Committee.

In last year's report, we looked forward to our 25th anniversary of the Committee in October 2019. In the autumn of that year, we produced videos explaining the role of the Committee and what the Principles mean in practice; we planned and held workshops with secondary school students; and held an open 'In Conversation with the Chair' event at the Institute for Government early in 2020. All those events provoked fascinating discussion and debate about the role of the Committee and the continuing relevance of the Nolan Principles which will help shape our future work.

What we could not have foreseen a year ago was a pandemic that is rapidly transforming the world. This global crisis is testing government, public services, businesses and families, forcing huge and rapid shifts in national priorities and in society itself. Government has had to ask a lot of the public and of public servants, and we have all had to accept unprecedented limits and restrictions on our way of life.

In a crisis of this scale, people need to trust the government and see that it is acting in their best interests. Government must make difficult judgements and complex decisions to steer the country. Inevitably not all of those decisions will prove right. Being honest with the public, and as open as possible, will be important to maintaining the public's consent and compliance – and their trust in the longer term. The long-standing Nolan Principles set the standards for all those serving the public – from Ministers to front line workers.

At times like these it is understandable that normal processes may be curtailed in order to respond to critical events. Nevertheless, as we move towards a new normal, effective scrutiny and challenge will be vital in order to ensure that standards are embedded in the new structures and processes that emerge.

The Committee's AI report examined how to maintain high standards in the face of new and fast-moving technology, and has some clear parallels for dealing with the risks to accountability, objectivity and openness posed by dealing with COVID-19.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life will maintain an active watching brief over the coming year on the impact of COVID-19 on standards in local and national government, and intends to contribute to reviews and inquiries on these issues. We have also announced a new review into electoral regulation, an issue that is important to the integrity of elections and public confidence in our democracy.

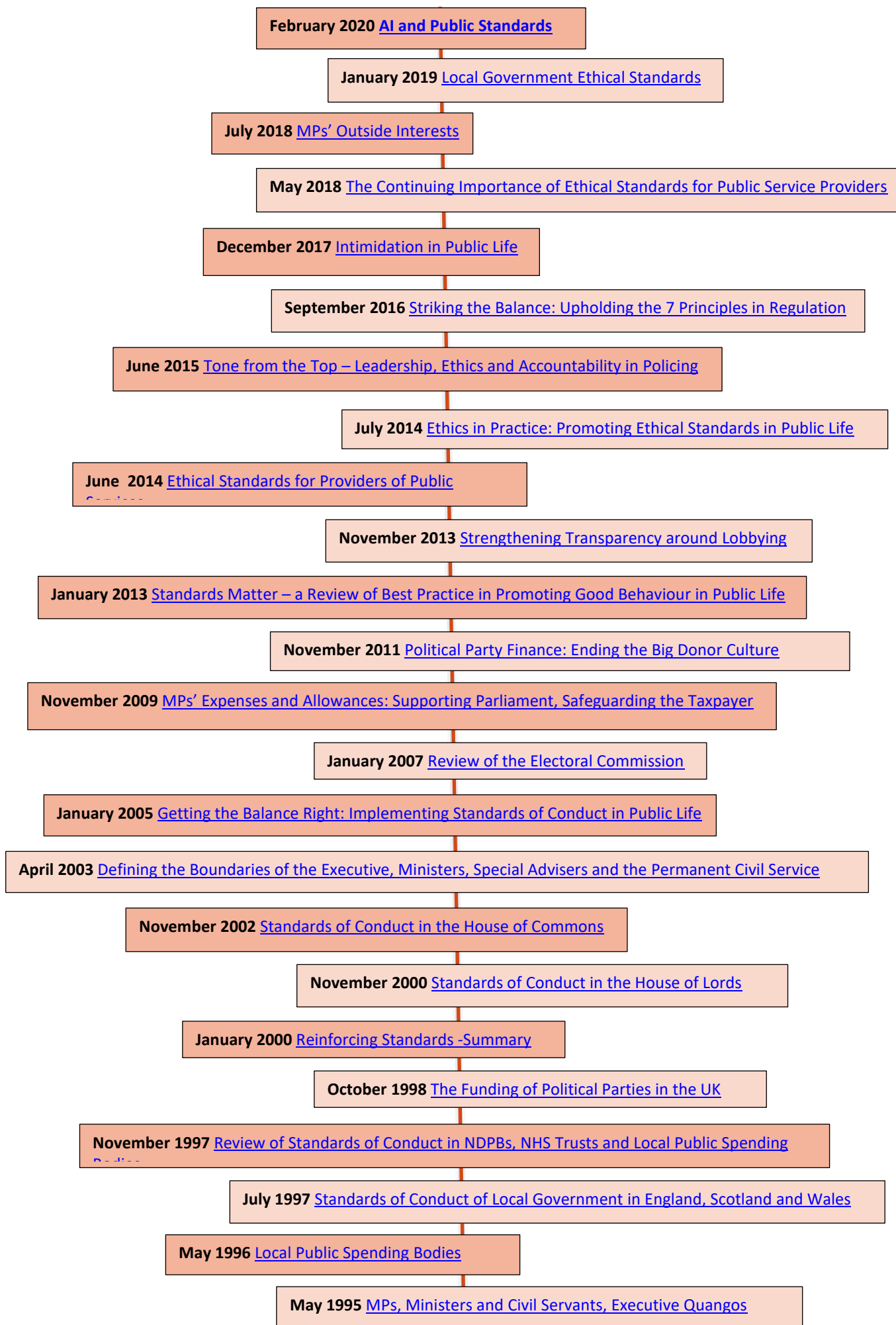
The highlight of this year for me was the workshops we held with young people asking for their views on the Principles. The students were, without exception, bright, engaged and committed to the highest standards in public life. They understood the challenges and the complexities, but recognised the overriding importance of 'doing the right thing'.

The Committee's vision then remains to reinforce clear expectations across public life of high standards of conduct. Now, more than ever, it is a time to make the Principles heard.

Lord (Jonathan) Evans of Weardale KCB DL
Chair



Our reports



July 2019/June 2020

Key areas of focus for the Committee

AI and Public Standards

AI report published February 2020
Interviews
Meetings
Roundtables
Focus groups
Conferences
Written submissions
Desk research
Speeches

The Committee's 25th Anniversary 1994 - 2019

Produced 8 films about the Principles of Public Life and the work of the Committee
Held workshops for 6th form students to discuss the Principles
Produced map of the standards landscape
Held 'In Conversation with the Chair' event

Intimidation in Public Life

Follow up work with political parties and The Jo Cox Foundation on a joint statement of behaviour
Attending external meetings, interviews, blogs, articles

Local Government Ethical Standards

Follow up work. Liaising with government, the Local Government Association, speaking at sector conferences – Centre for Public Scrutiny Conference, December 2019 and the LGA civility in public life programme launch, December 2019.

Parliament: Bullying and Harassment

Close watching brief, reviewing Parliamentary authorities' responses
Meetings with parliamentary authorities
Blogs and articles

Contributed to external consultations, speeches, participation in external meetings, induction events, articles, blogs, presentations to international delegations.

Committee membership: June 2019 -July 2020

Terms of appointment



Dr Jane Martin CBE
(1 Jan 2017 – 31 Dec 2021)



Dame Shirley Pearce DBE
(31 Mar 2018 – 30 Mar 2023)



Jane Ramsey
(1 Sep 2016 – 31 Aug 2021)



Monisha Shah
(1 Dec 2015 – 30 Nov 2020)



Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP (Labour) (Reappointed 31 Oct 2019 – 30 October 2022)



Simon Hart MP (Conservative)
(24 Jul 2017 – 28 Jul 2019)



Rt Hon Lord Stunell OBE (Liberal Democrat)
(Reappointed, 1 Dec 2019 – 30 Nov 2022)



Rt Hon Jeremy Wright QC MP
(21 Nov 2019 – 20 Nov 2022)



Chair, Lord Evans of Weardale KCB DL
(1 Nov 2018 – 31 Oct 2023)

Independent Chair and 4 independent members, appointed under the governance code for public appointments, for 5 years, non-renewable appointments.

3 political representatives, appointed for 3 years, renewable appointments.

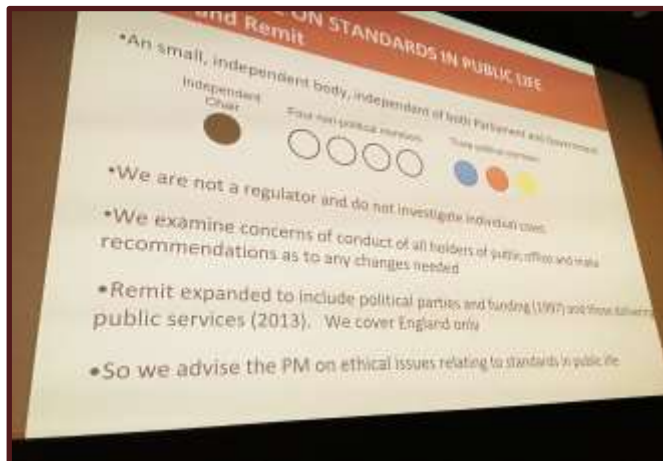
All appointments made by the Prime Minister.

Introduction

The Committee was established in 1994 with a clear purpose: to examine areas of concern about the standards of conduct of public office holders, to advise the Prime Minister accordingly, and to promote the highest standards of conduct across public life.

The maintenance of high standards in public life is important for the good functioning of society as a whole, it helps maintain public trust in institutions, and is important for democracy. High standards of conduct underpin public confidence in every aspect of public life, from the delivery of health and social care services to education, policing and legislation.

The Committee seeks to identify areas of concern in conduct and behaviours and undertakes impartial, balanced and comprehensive reviews with recommendations based on robust evidence. Our independence of both Government and Parliament is key. We make informed contributions to public debates about ethical standards, including submissions to public consultations; and we proactively identify and respond to emerging ethical risks, and engage with a wide-range of partners on the ethical standards agenda.



The Committee plays a key role in examining areas of concern and maintaining a watching brief on standards in public life. We are not a regulator so we have no statutory powers and no remit to investigate individual cases. Instead we use a variety of means to do our work, to gather evidence, to influence, and to make sure our voice is heard.

It is a broad field so we are committed to working with others to ensure this vision of high ethical standards is met and that the Principles of Public Life are understood and embedded

across public life. We have been pleased to hear directly from those also playing important roles in this landscape.

Our effectiveness depends on our ability to build powerful arguments using research and evidence which convinces others to take forward our recommendations for change.

In this report, we describe how we have carried out these activities in areas that have been our priorities in the period July 2019 – June 2020.

Factual information about the Committee's remit, membership, data protection, financial information, reports published, speeches and meetings, and our Research Advisory Board can be found in Annexes A-G and on our website.

We are fully committed to openness in our activities. We will ensure that we communicate our work effectively, to make it visible to everyone with an interest in ethical standards.

Review of activities: July 2019 – June 2020

AI and Public Standards



“Demonstrating high standards will help realise the huge potential benefits of AI in public service delivery. However, it is clear that the public need greater reassurance about the use of AI in the public sector.”

Lord Evans, 10 February 2020

The main focus of our work during 2019 was a major review into artificial intelligence and public standards. This was a new area of research for the CSPL, but highly relevant as technologically assisted decision-making is adopted more widely across the public sector. The report examined the future of public service delivery and sought to identify any challenges or opportunities for public standards as advanced data-driven technology is introduced to the public sector.

We collected a wide range of evidence, meeting individually with experts in the field from government, academia, and the public and private sectors, holding roundtables and attending external conferences and workshops. We held focus groups with the public and commissioned public polling on attitudes to AI. The Committee is indebted to all those who willingly gave up their time to contribute to our review.



AI roundtables held at 1 Horse Guards Road, 23 May 2019; Imperial College, 29 May 2019; and Admiralty House, London, 5 June 2019.

The report found that three of the Seven Principles of Public Life were of particular relevance to AI: openness, accountability and objectivity. The Committee recognised the huge opportunities offered by AI but determined that the government is currently failing on openness regarding its use of this new technology, and that risks needed to be mitigated to uphold accountability and openness.

The report made a number of recommendations to government, regulators, and public bodies on the regulation and governance of AI in the public sector. Notably, the Committee found that all regulators will need to adapt to a new data-driven world, and that a central body will need to assist in this transformative process.

The Committee endorsed the government's plan for the CDEI to be put on a statutory footing to oversee the regulatory landscape and to advise the government on the issues associated with AI. We also recommended that new guidance be developed on the Equality Act, to ensure that our anti-discrimination law is fit for purpose in the 21st century.

We are very grateful to the [Francis Crick Institute](#) which kindly hosted the launch of our report on 10 February 2020. We are also grateful to all those that contributed so generously with their time and expertise, throughout the course of the review, in particular Professor Nick Jennings CB, FEng, [Vice-Provost for Research and Enterprise](#) and Professor of Artificial Intelligence at [Imperial College London](#) who chaired and hosted one of our roundtables and also chaired the launch of the report.

"The report ought to be seen as the beginning of a conversation, rather than the end."
Lord Evans, Public Technology.net

The report was well received and we are pleased that government and regulators are moving forward with our recommendations and look forward to the government's formal response.

Committee members have been invited to speak at conferences and AI policy roundtables in late 2020 (to be confirmed due to COVID-19).

"Although it's aimed primarily at government, regulators and public bodies, it's a superb resource for anyone thinking about AI governance"
CogX

Local Government Ethical Standards – follow up

The Committee continued to follow up its report into local government ethical standards, published in January 2019. The Committee has had a long-standing interest in local government - the Committee's third report, in 1997, was on local government - and many of the institutional changes that have taken place in local government standards in the last two decades have been in response to the Committee's recommendations.



"The starting place is the maintenance of high standards and this is primarily about personal responsibility. All organisations make mistakes and things go wrong from time to time. What is important is people taking responsibility, setting clear expectations around standards of conduct and maintaining a vigilant, ethical culture to support that."

Dr Jane Martin, 3 December 2019.

The review, published on 30 January 2019, considered the structures, processes, and practices for local government standards in England, including codes of conduct, sanctions, investigatory processes, the roles of Monitoring Officers, Clerks, and Independent Persons, and an ethical culture in local government.

The report was well received in the sector. Since publication, we have followed up by liaising with leadership organisations in the sector, the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Dr Jane Martin, our independent member who led the report, was invited to speak at the Centre for Public Scrutiny's Local Government Scrutiny Conference on 3 December 2019.

We are delighted that the Local Government Association (LGA) has launched its consultation on a Model Member Code of Conduct (June 2020). A (non-mandatory) code of conduct was a key recommendation of our report. Dr Martin was the opening speaker at the launch of the LGA's civility in public life programme in December 2019. The three broad aims of this programme were to address a new model code of conduct for councillors; the toxicity of public debate; and the intimidation of people in public life.

We still await, however, the government's response to our report.

We stated in the report, that we would review local councils' take up of our best practice recommendations in 2020. We still intend to follow up those best practice recommendations in 2020, but in view of the urgent pressures local councils are facing, we will hold off doing so until later in the year when circumstances allow.

Intimidation in Public Life – follow up



We have continued actively to follow up our December 2017 report, Intimidation in Public Life - a review the Committee undertook at the request of the Prime Minister in July 2017.

The report examined the shocking intimidation experienced by candidates at the 2017 General Election, and significantly highlighted the wider effect intimidation has on public life. The problem has not gone away and intimidation remains a real danger to our democracy.

In that report, we made 33 recommendations to:

- government
- social media companies
- political parties
- press organisations
- MPs
- candidates
- other public office-holders.

The government responded formally to the report in March 2018 committing to action on most of the recommendations made to it. The government published a further response on 7 March 2019 giving an update on action taken in response to the report. We welcomed the government's 'Protecting the Debate' – the Government's response to their consultation on proposals aimed at protecting the electoral system against intimidation and undue influence of candidates, campaigners and voters.

Since the publication of the report, we have been actively following up responses to our recommendations. This reporting year we have received further [correspondence](#) from social media companies. The Committee has attended meetings with the Parliamentary authorities to discuss the security offer to MPs and the Chair has written a [blog post](#) and given media interviews on the impact of intimidation on our democracy. In September the Chair wrote an [open letter](#) to all public office holders on the tone of public debate and the importance of upholding public standards. In October the Chair and Committee member, Jane Ramsey, gave [oral evidence](#) to the Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC) inquiry into Hate Crime and its Violent Consequences.

The Committee continued its partnership with [The Jo Cox Foundation](#). We have been working with The Foundation to agree with political parties a consensus on the behaviour that party members should aspire to and the conduct that parties agree is not acceptable. This follows the Committee's meetings with the political parties with seats in Westminster in November 2018 and March 2019.

During the December 2019 General Election campaign, the CSPL and The JCF jointly published a 3-point pledge calling on all candidates to pledge to:

- set an appropriate tone when campaigning
- lead by example to foster democratic debate
- promote and defend the dignity of others, including opponents.

The general election pledge had significant pick-up on social media and it was endorsed by candidates from across the parties.

Parliament: Bullying and Harassment

The Committee believes that all those who work in and around Parliament – or support Parliamentarians in their constituency offices – deserve to be treated with courtesy and respect both by their colleagues and by MPs and Peers.

During this reporting year, the Committee has continued to take a close and serious interest in the response of the Parliamentary authorities to the independent assessments of what must be done to address bullying and harassment in both Houses of Parliament.

The reports by Dame Laura Cox, Gemma White QC and Naomi Ellenbogen QC had revealed systemic cultural issues and troubling accounts of bullying and harassment experienced by staff, from other staff and Members, echoing the accounts first reported by the media in autumn 2017.

While progress has been slow, which to some extent reflects the complexity of the range of employer relationships in Parliament and the very specific nature of Parliament as a workplace, there have been significant developments this year.

The Committee welcomed the move to open up [The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme](#) to those who either have complaints pre-dating June 2017 or are no longer employed in the parliamentary community. It was also encouraged by the consultation on the implementation of a fully independent process for determining complaints of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment in the Commons. The Committee was pleased to see the announcement by the House of Commons Commission on 27 April 2020 that it had approved plans to establish a new Independent Expert Panel to ensure that complaints relating to bullying and harassment in the Commons are determined entirely independent of MPs. We will watch with interest to see if the House approves this recommendation.

In the Lords, a new Conduct Committee has been appointed, with four lay members (for the first time) with full voting rights working alongside five Lords members to hear appeals and oversee the Code of Conduct. The Committee welcomed developments in the Lords early in 2020, particularly regarding Valuing Everyone Training and the Conduct Committee's decision to amend the code of conduct to empower the Lords Commissioner for Standards to restrict access to relevant services of the House by a member while under investigation for bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct.

Alongside institutional reform, cultural change is crucial to embedding the values that should be expected in any public sector workplace. The progress made here so far has been positive. However, long lasting cultural change takes time and the Committee will continue to actively monitor progress.

The Committee has continued to hold meetings with senior people in Parliament responsible for delivering change and providing visible leadership in building a culture of respect and value across both Houses.

In November 2019, the Committee published a [blog post](#) which called on the new Speaker to make addressing bullying and harassment a priority. In February 2020, the Committee contributed to the consultation on the implementation of a fully independent complaints process.

The [published minutes](#) of Committee meetings have recorded the active watching brief the Committee maintains in this area.

25th anniversary of the Committee, 1994 - 2019



On 25 October 1994, the Rt Hon Sir John Major [announced](#) the setting up of the Committee on Standards in Public Life; Lord Nolan's first [report](#) was published in May 1995.

That report and the Committee's subsequent reviews have led to fundamental change across standards in public life over the past 25 years. The Committee is not complacent though. Building and maintaining an ethical culture requires constant attention.

We continue to monitor standards and publish reviews of areas already of concern, such as [Intimidation in Public Life](#); we undertake health checks of current areas, such as [Local Government Ethical Standards](#); or we can look ahead at how standards may be affected in new ways, such as [AI and Public Standards](#).

During the period of this report, we have marked our anniversary in four ways:

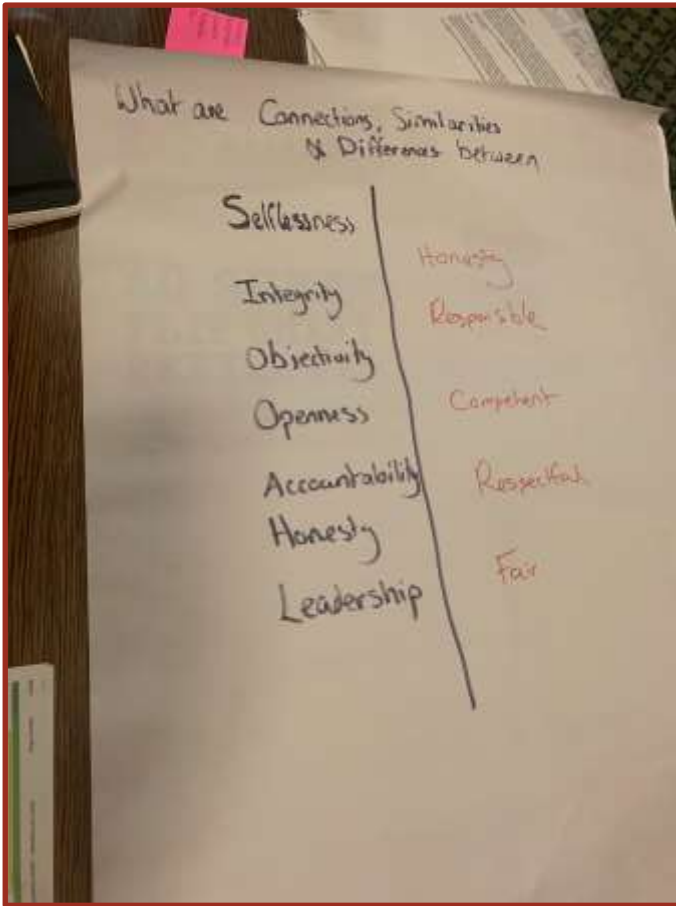
1. We held two workshops with sixth form students to talk about the Principles
2. We produced videos explaining the Principles and the role of the Committee in Standards in Public Life
3. We held an 'In Conversation with the Chair' event at the Institute for Government
4. We commissioned Rebecca Dobson Phillips, Doctoral Researcher and Tutor at the Centre for the Study of Corruption, University of Sussex to map the UK's complex standards landscape.

Sixth form workshops

We held two workshops with students on 12 November 2019 in Westminster Hall. We are grateful to the [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association](#) and the [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#) for hosting these workshops.



The students were aged 16-18 and from schools across the UK – Oxfordshire, Northern Ireland, Yorkshire, Somerset, Newcastle, Enfield and Ealing. We wanted to re-test the Principles of Public Life with young people 25 years on from the Principles' first articulation. We wanted to see what



young people make of the principles and whether they think they are the standards to which we should be holding those who serve in public office to account.

It was a valuable and productive day and we are very grateful to the students for helping us so generously with this work. The students were without exception thoughtful, committed and fully engaged with the subject and it was a delight to work with them and hear their views directly.

The students understood and supported the Principles, whilst sometimes approaching them from different perspectives and bringing in other concepts.

Accountability, Leadership and Selflessness were consistently seen as important.

There was some debate around 'fairness' and 'respect', whether these ideas needed to be explicitly referenced in the Principles of Public Life. The students did not feel that 'fairness' needed to be added explicitly, as they believed but that this concept was sufficiently covered within the

current Seven Principles.

A combination of Openness and Honesty was thought strong enough to ensure that those in public life such as police officers and teachers who interacted with potentially vulnerable individuals, were respectful.

Students also debated Leadership – they thought that competence and expertise were key parts of this principle.



The report of the workshops can be found on our website.

Videos explaining the Principles and the Committee's role

We produced some short [videos](#) with our Committee members explaining what the Principles mean in practice and the Committee's role. We shared them with government departments and our stakeholders and hope they will be useful as a starting point for staff discussion and for induction and training for organisations and individuals across the public sector, as well as for companies and charities delivering services to the public.



Accountability

Selflessness

Integrity

Objectivity

Openness

Honesty

Leadership

In Conversation with the Chair

On 25 February 2020, the [Institute for Government](#) (IfG) very kindly hosted a discussion - 'In Conversation with the Chair'. We are indebted to the Deputy Director of the IfG, Dr Hannah White for chairing this public event.

We welcomed current members of the Committee, past members and Chairs of the Committee, key players in the standards world as well as members of the public interested in our work, to discuss the role of the Committee then and now. It was an excellent opportunity to reflect on the Committee's work over the past 25 years and to look ahead to its future.

Mapping of the standards landscape

We commissioned Rebecca Dobson Phillips, Doctoral Researcher and Tutor at the Centre for the Study of Corruption at the University of Sussex to map the UK's complex standards landscape. Rebecca's excellent narrative sets out clearly the role, functions, status, powers and history of each individual body responsible for the upholding of standards across public life in England. Her [report](#) can be found on our website.

Annexes

Annex A – About the Committee

Annex B – Membership of the Committee

Annex C – Data Protection

Annex D – Reports Published

Annex E – The Research Advisory Board

Annex F – Speeches, presentations, visitors, consultations

In the period July 2019 - February 2020¹, the Chair, independent members and members of the Secretariat have spoken at a number of events on standards issues, promoting the work of the Committee and the importance of the Seven Principles of Public Life, including:

- 10 July 2019: Dr Jane Martin spoke at a Standards Conference for Monitoring Officers (local government).
- 31 August 2019: Lord Evans spoke at a panel on intimidation in public life at the Big Tent Festival of Ideas.
- 18 September 2019: CSPL Secretariat attended the Centre for Information Policy Leadership's roundtable on the ICO's AI auditing framework.
- 18 September 2019: CSPL Secretariat attended the Ipsos MORI launch of 'Trust: The Truth'.
- 5 November 2019: Lord Evans gave the keynote address at the launch of the Centre for Leadership, Ethics and Professional Practice at Bath Spa University.
- 12 November 2019: CSPL held 2 workshops on the Principles of Public Life with sixth form students.
- 3 December 2019: Dr Jane Martin spoke at the Centre for Public Scrutiny conference.
- 11 December 2019: Lord Evans was guest speaker at an event organised by Democracy Volunteers.
- 16 December 2019: Dr Jane Martin spoke at the Local Government Association launch of its Civility in Public Life programme.
- 17 December 2019: Lord Evans spoke at induction event for new MPs about how the Seven Principles of Public Life should guide how MPs conduct themselves.
- 6 February 2020: Lord Evans received a political finance study group delegation from Albania. This was organised by the British Embassy in Tirana and the National Democratic Institute. Delegates included members of the Albanian parliamentary committee on electoral reform, representatives of political parties, civil society activists and investigative journalists.

The Committee has also promoted the Seven Principles of Public Life through responses to consultations, including:

- January 2020 - IPSA Consultation on changes to the Scheme of MPs' Business Costs and Expenses for 2020-21
- February 2020 - Implementation of a fully independent process for determining complaints of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment
- May 2020 – Procedure Select Committee Inquiry into evaluating the temporary changes to the Commons procedure (in light of COVID-19).

¹ From March 2020, the Committee worked remotely due to COVID-19 and in accordance with government guidelines.

Professor Cees Van der Eijk and Dr Jonathan Rose presented their [research](#) on perceived fairness of the EU Referendum to the July 2019 Committee meeting.

Rebecca Dobson Phillips, Centre for the Study of Corruption and the Politics Department at the University of Sussex, joined the November 2019 Committee meeting to discuss her commissioned paper on mapping the standards landscape.

Philippa Foster Back, former Director of the Institute of Business Ethics, joined the January 2020 Committee meeting. The Committee was very interested to hear about the Institute's work and to discuss common areas of interest.

Julie Harding, Independent Director of Cultural Transformation, House of Commons also spoke to the Committee in January 2020, following her visit to the Committee in April 2019 to update members on Parliament's response to Dame Laura Cox's recommendations to deliver cultural change in Parliament.

Annex G – Financial Information

Independent members of the Committee on Standards in Public Life may claim £240 for each day they work on Committee business and for expenses necessarily incurred. The Chair is paid a remuneration of £36k per annum with the expectation that he commits an average of 5-6 days a month although this can increase significantly during periods of Committee reviews.

The 3 political members of the Committee do not receive any fees or expenses.

As an advisory non-departmental public body, the Committee on Standards in Public Life receives a delegated budget from the Cabinet Office. Day-to-day responsibility for financial controls and budgetary mechanisms are delegated to the Secretary of the Committee. Creation of new posts are subject to the Cabinet Office Approvals process.

Members of the Secretariat are permanent civil servants employed by the Cabinet Office. There are 5 full-time members of the Secretariat. The Committee is assisted by a contracted Press Officer.

For the financial year 2019/20, the Committee's budget was £348,424 with a final outturn of £470,864. There was a £2k variation in the non-pay budget. The variation in the pay budget was due to higher salaries paid than budgeted for, and for maternity cover and pay.

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Published by the Committee on Standards in Public Life

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