**CSPL (21) 19**

**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE**

**TWO HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-FIFTH MEETING**

**HELD AT 10.00 ON THURSDAY 18 FEBRUARY 2021**

**BY VIDEO CALL**

**MINUTES**

Present: Lord Evans KCB DL, Chair

Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP

Dr Jane Martin CBE

Dame Shirley Pearce DBE

Monisha Shah

Rt Hon Lord Stunell OBE

Rt Hon Jeremy Wright QC MP

Professor Mark Philp, Chair, Research Advisory Board

Lesley Bainsfair, Secretary

Amy Austin, Senior Policy Adviser

Aaron Simons, Senior Policy Adviser

Lesley Glanz, Executive Assistant

Maggie O’Boyle, Press Officer

Sir Stephen Irwin, Chair of the Independent Expert Panel (IEP) for the Commons and Emily Baldock, Secretary to the IEP joined the meeting ahead of formal business.

The meeting was held by video call in view of COVID-19.

**IEP DISCUSSION**

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair welcomed Sir Stephen Irwin and Emily Baldock.

In June 2020, MPs voted to establish an IEP to determine serious complaints of bullying and harassment or sexual misconduct under the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS). Sir Stephen is the first Chair of the IEP, appointed in November 2020 with 7 panel members.

Sir Stephen explained to the Committee work on guidance and processes that had taken place since the appointment of the panel, as well as key themes that were emerging around sanctions, appeals, timeliness of consideration of the IEP’s verdicts and confidentiality and transparency. The IEP had set out key principles by which they would approach their role - these were, natural justice, fairness, transparency and proportionality. The principles with regard to sanctions should, where possible, reflect the impact of the conduct, the nature of the misconduct and, where possible, incorporate positive steps to improve culture. Grounds for appeal had also been formulated.

The Chair thanked Sir Stephen for taking the time to speak to the Committee, a discussion which all members had found relevant and valuable. The Chair and Sir Stephen agreed that it would be sensible to stay in touch.

**1. APOLOGIES**

No apologies were received.

**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 21 January 2021 were agreed.

**Chair’s update**

The Chair thanked Monisha Shah for agreeing to extend her appointment by another 4 months. The Committee expressed strong concern at the delays by the Cabinet Office in getting the recruitment process underway to fill the vacant independent posts on the Committee.

Members noted that the Chair had led an interesting discussion at the Westminster Abbey Institute on 28 January.

The Committee noted that 2 new blogs had been published on local government standards and the forthcoming May elections, with a call for robust debate and not intimidation.

**4. REVIEW OF REGULATION OF ELECTION FINANCE**

Lord Stunell drew the Committee’s attention to the Liberal Democrat’s reply to the Minister for the Cabinet Office about the government's proposals on changes intended to clarify the law on notional expenditure and on reviewing spending limits.

**5. STANDARDS MATTER 2**

The Committee discussed the current state of play with the review. The Secretariat took comments on board concerning: the desire to ensure the public evidence was as diverse and representative as possible; the importance of senior government officials, and ideally Ministers, contributing to the review; and clarity around the review’s scope.

**6. AI AND PUBLIC STANDARDS: FOLLOW UP**

The Committee noted that the government’s response to the AI and public standards report was still awaited. Notwithstanding the position the government was facing with Covid and understanding government’s priorities, Committee members noted with concern the continued lack of government response to this report and to the Committee’s 2019 report on local government ethical standards. It was agreed to look for opportunities to draw attention to the reports in other ways e.g. meetings, blogs, speeches.

**7. INTIMIDATION IN PUBLIC LIFE: FOLLOW UP**

The Committee was pleased to note that Labour had now committed their support for the joint statement on conduct for political parties. This meant that the statement now had the support of Labour, the SNP, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru and the Green Party.

**9. COVID-19: WATCHING BRIEF**

The Committee noted its continued watching brief on risks to the Principles by Covid.

**10. STANDARDS CHECK**

The standards check for January/February was noted.

**11. FORWARD AGENDA**

The Committee noted the forward agenda.

**12. AOB**

**Communications Update**

The Committee noted the communications update for January 2021.

**Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday 18 March 2021 at 10.00 via video conference call.

CSPL Secretariat

February 2021