**CSPL (21) 27**

**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE**

**TWO HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SIXTH MEETING**

**HELD AT 10.00 ON THURSDAY 18 MARCH 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 *(until 11.30)*

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

*10.00 - 10.45* Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, Office for Statistics Regulation

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

**DISCUSSION WITH ED HUMPHERSON, DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR REGULATION, OFFICE FOR STATISTICS REGULATION (OSR)**

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair welcomed Ed Humpherson, DG, Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR).

In March this year, the OSR published a review of the approach taken to developing statistical models designed for awarding the 2020 exam results. The review centres on lessons that can be learnt and the importance of public confidence in the use of statistical models and algorithms.

Ed explained that the OSR had undertaken the review because they saw a real threat to public confidence in the use of statistical models to support decisions, and in some ways the experience of 2020 had put great pressure on the use of statistics. The review found that organisations worked with honesty and integrity, drawing on extensive expertise in the administration and oversight of exams. The review had identified four key learning points relevant to the use of statistical models.

The first was the issue of quality assurance. It was not clear that the exams algorithm had a clearly defined element of human review. When the model resulted in outlying results, there was no clear way of looking at those outliers and forming a judgment about them.

The second was that the limitations of the model were not well communicated.

The third was around communication of the models in advance of results day, and the challenges of conveying an open explanation of the inevitable limitations versus the risk of undermining confidence in the exams process as a whole.

Finally, there was not enough work done around the difficult issue of testing public acceptability of the results produced by the model in a meaningful way. There was a lot of work done with focus groups about how the grades would be awarded but not asking how people would feel if on the day of results, the results might be very different to what they were expecting.

Members discussed with Ed the need for the public sector to be more honest up front with the public, and to be clear about potential limitations; the need to focus perhaps less on regulation and more on good practice; focusing on an end-to-end process and being clear about what you want to achieve with all regulators embedding AI in their work. There was a risk otherwise that the public would not accept AI and thereby reducing the public good that algorithms can deliver.

The Chair thanked Ed for taking the time to speak to the Committee, a discussion which all members had found relevant and valuable, with many links to the recommendations in the Committee’s AI and public standards 2020 report. The Chair and Ed 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 18 February 2021 were agreed.

**Chair’s update**

Members noted that the Chair was meeting the Minister for the Cabinet Office for an update on government work against intimidation in public life.

Members were pleased to note that recruitment for new independent members for the Committee was due to get underway this month.

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

Members noted that drafting was on schedule. The first draft of the report would go to the April meeting.

**5. STANDARDS MATTER 2**

The Committee noted progress with the review and a summary of themes from evidence received to date which included the effectiveness of the Principles, standards regulation in Parliament, and in government.

Members discussed the evidence base, all agreeing it was important to take evidence from as wide a range of diverse witnesses as possible. Members also discussed the scope of the review.

**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; it was expected in April.

The Chair was due to speak that afternoon at a panel on AI governance organised by the Public Chairs Forum.

**7. Bullying and Harassment**

The Committee noted the publication of the 18 month review of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) in Parliament. Members also noted the first report of the Independent Expert Panel in the Commons.

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

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

**10. STANDARDS CHECK**

The standards check for February/March was noted.

**11. FORWARD AGENDA**

The Committee noted the forward agenda.

**12. AOB**

**Local Government Ethical Standards Review: Follow up**

Dr Martin reported a piece in the Local Government Chronicle which stated that the Minister for Local Government had indicated the Ministry would respond to the Committee’s local government ethical standards report ‘shortly’. The Secretariat reported that nothing had been confirmed by the Ministry; there had been no response by the Ministry to regular chasing by the Secretariat.

**Communications Update**

The Committee noted the communications update for February 2021.

**Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday 15 April 2021 at 10.00 via video conference call.

CSPL Secretariat

March 2021