**CSPL (23) 7**

**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE**

**308th MEETING HELD IN 1 HORSE GUARDS ROAD, LONDON**

**AT 10.00 ON THURSDAY 19 JANUARY 2023**

**MINUTES**

Present: Lord Evans of Weardale KCB DL, Chair

Ewen Fergusson

Baroness Finn

Professor Dame Shirley Pearce DBE

Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP

Professor Mark Philp (Chair, Research Advisory Board) (remote)

Lesley Bainsfair, Secretary

Nicola Richardson, Senior Policy Adviser

Amy Austin, Policy Adviser

Lesley Glanz, Executive Assistant

Maggie O’Boyle, Press Officer[[1]](#footnote-0)

Elliot Ammar, Senior Policy Adviser designate, observing

Sir Robert Chote, Chair UK Statistics Authority, joined the meeting ahead of the start of formal business.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair welcomed Sir Robert Chote, Chair UK Statistics Authority, and Ross Tivey, PS to the Chair, to the Committee meeting.

Sir Robert Chote gave an overview of the role and work of the Authority. The Authority spanned three components: the Office for National Statistics (ONS); the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR); and professional oversight of the Government Statistical Service (GSS).

The OSR aimed to be transparent about requests on issues and responses to them. In responding to casework relating to the use of statistics by public figures, it aimed to take an explanatory approach about queries to ensure the public is well informed, and to engage with departments in order to build relationships, to encourage the proper use and presentation of statistics. There are often complex situations, involving multiple sets of statistics which are not easy to comprehend, but the work was always underpinned by the code of standards for official statistics which was the yardstick against which the Authority judged statistics.

Across the Devolved Administrations, there was diversity in how the statistical service operated. Northern Ireland has its own statutory agency; in Scotland, the work was embedded in government departments and not a separate agency; in Wales, official statistics falls under the remit of the Welsh Government.

The Authority interacted usefully with the Royal Statistical Society which was a membership organisation with many specialist interests.

The Authority monitored the level of public trust in national statistics by way of a biennial, independent survey. The latest survey showed 82% of people able to express an opinion agreed that official statistics are generally accurate. Awareness of the system tended to rise and fall depending on external factors. Awareness was currently high due to Covid and the census. The credibility and high profile of the role of the National Statistician (Head of the Government Statistical Service) was key as a representative of the system.

In terms of increasing public confidence and understanding, there was a responsibility on institutions not to overclaim and to present data honestly; explaining that it was only possible to be sure about certain data, tended to increase rather than reduce public confidence.

The Authority’s ethical advisory Committee advised on ethics around the use of data, managing surveys and collection of information.

There had been improvement in GSS staff in departments being more responsive to policy demands - better able to meet surge demands as well as business as usual.

The Chair thanked Sir Robert for a very helpful conversation which had been very informative for the Committee.

*(Sir Robert Chote and Ross Tivey left the meeting.)*

**1. APOLOGIES**

Professor Gillian Peele

**2. REGISTERS**

Members were asked to let the Secretariat know of any changes to their register of interests which had been circulated.

**3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2022 were agreed.

**Chair’s update**

The Committee noted:

* A meeting had been arranged between the Chair and Sir Laurie Magnus, the newly appointed Independent Adviser on Ministers’ Interests.
* There was no further news on the appointment of an independent member and a political member to the Committee. The Committee expressed their serious concern about the delays to these appointments. This was made more worrying by the fact that Dame Shirley Pearce’s term of appointment ended in March and the Chair’s in October this year.
* The Chair had spoken at a seminar organised by Lord Norton of Louth (University of Hull) on Restoring Public Trust in Parliament on 19 December, in the House of Lords. Other panel members were Mark D’Arcy, BBC Parliament; Dr Hannah White, Director, Institute for Government; and Andrew Griffin, a consultant in crisis management.
* William Shawcross, Commissioner for Public Appointments (CPA) had replied to the Chair’s letter, following the discussion with the CPA at the November Committee meeting. The correspondence would be published on the CSPL website.
* A guest blog by Paul Hoey, on local government standards, had been published on the CSPL website.[[2]](#footnote-1) The Chair had provided a video for the annual local government standards conference (held in November 2022) organised by Hoey Ainscough.

**4. LEADING IN PRACTICE**

The Committee noted the launch plans for the review which would be published on 24 January.

The Chair had written personally to all Permanent Secretaries enclosing a summary of the report and the questions for leaders. The open letter would also be published on our website. A number of immediate media interviews had been planned, as well as speaking events at a range of organisations in the forthcoming weeks.

**5. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee discussed an option for its next review.

**6. STANDARDS CHECK**

The Committee noted the media coverage of standards issues which are circulated daily to members.

**7. FORWARD AGENDA**

The Committee noted the forward agenda.

**8. AOB**

**Communications Update**

The Committee noted the communications updates for December 2022 and welcomed the new comms brief provided by the Press Officer.

**Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday 9 February 2023 at 10.00.

CSPL Secretariat

January 2023

1. Maggie O’Boyle provides part-time press support to the Civil Service Commission, the House of Lords Appointments Commission, the Office for the Commissioner for Public Appointments and the Committee on Standards in Public Life. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Paul is co-founder of Hoey Ainscough, a company which has worked with local authorities on code of conduct related issues, through provision of training, investigative support and wider governance advice. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)