**CSPL (23) 13**

**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE**

**309th MEETING HELD IN 1 HORSE GUARDS ROAD, LONDON**

**AT 10.00 ON THURSDAY 9 FEBRUARY 2023**

**MINUTES**

Present: Lord Evans of Weardale KCB DL, Chair

Ewen Fergusson

Professor Dame Shirley Pearce DBE

Professor Gillian Peele

Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP

Lady Mary Arden DBE (Independent member designate)

Professor Mark Philp (Chair, Research Advisory Board)

Lesley Bainsfair, Secretary

Nicola Richardson, Senior Policy Adviser (remote)

Elliot Ammar, Senior Policy Adviser

Amy Austin, Policy Adviser (remote)

Lesley Glanz, Executive Assistant

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

*Michael Jary, Government lead Non Executive Director, joined the meeting ahead of the start of formal business.*

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair welcomed Michael Jary, Government lead Non Executive Director (NED) and member of the Cabinet Office Board, to the Committee meeting.

Michael gave an overview of his role. He coordinated the network of government NEDs who served on departmental Boards and equivalent bodies which formed the overall governing body of each department - this structure had been devised by Lord Maude to mirror corporate boards. Most of the NEDs had a corporate background; in practice, a big part of their role was to work with officials on particular programmes and projects. NEDs could play a role in building the culture of a department, although they did not have the same authority as corporate NEDs.

Michael’s view was that it was generally an effective arrangement noting that their effectiveness was dependent on a relationship of trust with ministers. Whilst accepting the differences between the corporate and public sector and difficulty of setting long term strategies in government, and the demands on ministers, he thought that the current model worked well. It was important that the Secretary of State chaired the board; when they were not present, the board was less effective.

Michael commented on the unusual nature of the bilateral leadership in government departments - senior leadership by permanent secretaries and ministers, with NEDs also having a role. It did have the potential for leadership to be incoherent and inconsistent. Michael’s experience from the corporate sector was that leadership had to come from the top - ethics could only be owned by the CEO ultimately, so civil servants would look to the permanent secretary, the secretary of state and the Cabinet Secretary. What was lacking was evidence to the civil service as a whole that ethics and standards were being taken seriously as conversations often happened in closed rooms.

Members discussed whether in terms of performance assessment, weight was given to ethical standards of behaviour. Michael said that he understood that civil servants were assessed on the ‘how as well as the ‘what’. NEDs appraised permanent secretaries’ performance which was then fed into the system of appraisal led by the Cabinet Secretary.

Discussing the Principles and ethical leadership, Michael felt that civil servants understood that their role was to serve the government, they dealt with their ethical concerns personally, and understood that contract, notwithstanding the difficult context or circumstances which they faced. Given the short lifetime of a government, there was always a tension between investing in skills - including ethics - and delivering priorities.

Michael welcomed the Leading in Practice report which provoked useful self-reflection about creating an organisation with ethics at its heart. He thought that Boards should play a role in asking the questions posed in the report. He invited the Chair to speak to NEDs.

The Chair thanked Michael Jary for a very helpful conversation.

*(Michael Jary left the meeting.)*

The Chair formally welcomed Lady Mary Arden to the Committee. Lady Arden had been appointed as the new independent member from 13 February 2023 for a five year term.

**1. APOLOGIES**

Baroness Finn

**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 19 January 2023 were agreed.

**Chair’s update**

The Committee noted:

* A successful launch of Leading in Practice on 24 January. There had been wide and positive media coverage and strong feedback from stakeholders. A number of wide ranging speaking events to encourage discussion of the report’s themes were planned for the next 2 months.
* The Chair had met Sir Laurie Magnus, the newly appointed Independent Adviser on Ministers’ Interests, for an introductory meeting.
* The Chair had spoken at a Society for Local Council Clerks (SLCC) virtual event on 25 January. The event was held to launch SLCC’s research report on the Future of Local Councils. The Chair spoke about standards - intimidation in public life, local government ethical standards and the Leading in Practice report.
* William Shawcross, Commissioner for Public Appointments (CPA) had recused himself from the investigation into the process of appointment of Richard Sharp, BBC Chair. Adam Heppinstall KC had been appointed to lead the investigation.

**4. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee discussed its future work programme.

**5. NOLAN’S EDUCATION THREAD**

The Committee discussed Nolan’s ‘common thread’ of education. When the first report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life was published in 1995, the Committee set out not only the Seven Principles of Public Life, but also three elements - ‘common threads’ - which Nolan and the first Committee saw as integral to promoting high standards.

Codes of Conduct;

Independent Scrutiny; and

Guidance and Education.

The Committee considered whether there was more they could do in the future to encourage a ‘pull’ from the public on the importance of education around ethics in the public sector. Were there things, for example, that CSPL could be doing with schools, universities, student groups that would raise the profile of the Seven Principles? The Secretariat would consider further and explore ideas with the Chair of the Research Advisory Board.

**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 January 2023 and the comms brief provided by the Press Officer.

**Dame Shirley Pearce - end of appointment**

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked Dame Shirley Pearce for her outstanding work on behalf of the Committee, in particular co-leading on the 2020 *AI and Public Standards* and the 2021 *Regulating Election Finance* reports. The Committee was grateful for all that Shirley had done, both as a member of the Committee and as a colleague.

**Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday 16 March 2023 at 10.00.

CSPL Secretariat

February 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)