**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE**

**310th MEETING TO BE HELD ONLINE**

**AT 10.00 ON THURSDAY 16 MARCH 2023**

**Professor Alan Renwick, Professor of Democratic Politics and Deputy Director of the Constitution Unit, Department of Political Science, UCL, will join the Committee for a discussion ahead of formal business, 10.00 - 10.45.**

**AGENDA**

| **No** | **Agenda item** | **Details** | **Papers** | **Indicative timings** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Apologies | None received | No paper | 10.45 |
| 2 | Registers | The Committee will be asked for any changes to the register of interests which is published on the Committee’s website. | No paper | 10.50 |
| 3 | Minutes and Matters Arising | The Committee will be asked to approve the minutes of the meetings held on 9 February 2023; and note any matters arising:   1. Update from the Chair. | CSPL (23) 13  CSPL (23) 14 | 10.55 |
| 4 | Leading in Practice | The Committee will be invited to consider lessons learnt from the Leading in Practice review. | CSPL (23) 15 | 11.15 |
| 5 | Future work programme | The Committee will be invited to consider its future work programme. | CSPL (23) 16 | 11.25 |
| 6 | Standards Check | The Committee will be invited to note media coverage of recent standards issues which have been previously circulated. | No paper | 11.50 |
| 7 | Forward Agenda | The Committee will be invited to note the forward agenda. | CSPL (23) 17 | 11.55 |
| 8 | AOB | The Committee will be invited to note:   1. Comms brief and updates for the past month; 2. date of the next meeting: Thursday 20 April 2023. | CSPL (23) 18 | 12.00 |

**CSPL (23) 19**

**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE**

**310th MEETING HELD ONLINE**

**AT 10.00 ON THURSDAY 16 MARCH 2023**

**MINUTES**

Present: Lord Evans of Weardale KCB DL, Chair

Lady Mary Arden DBE

Ewen Fergusson

Professor Gillian Peele

Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett DBE MP

Baroness Finn

Professor Mark Philp (Chair, Research Advisory Board)

Lesley Bainsfair, Secretary

Nicola Richardson, Senior Policy Adviser

Elliot Ammar, Senior Policy Adviser

Amy Austin, Policy Adviser

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

*Professor Alan Renwick, Constitution Unit, UCL joined the meeting ahead of the start of formal business.*

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair welcomed Professor Alan Renwick, Deputy Director of University College London’s Constitution Unit and Professor of Democratic Politics, to the meeting to discuss the Constitution Unit report on public attitudes to the UK’s democratic system (published 7 March 2023).[[2]](#footnote-1)

Professor Renwick gave an overview of the report. Whilst it was clear from the surveys that issues such as cost of living and the NHS were of most concern for the public, the health of the democracy was high up the list. There was support for stronger mechanisms for upholding integrity and stronger checks and balances.

There was a low view of the ethical standards of politicians. People thought that politicians speaking more honestly was the thing that would make the most difference. Survey respondents were pushed on the point that straight talking is quite difficult, but respondents still thought that most politicians did not tell the truth; they felt that the public should be able to trust elected representatives to behave honestly and selflessly. Whilst it was acknowledged that there were mechanisms in place to address dishonesty in Parliament, it was felt that they were too slow and not effective.

In discussion, members raised the challenges around influencing the attitudes of the general public and queried whether the public would notice any strengthening of ethical institutions notwithstanding their desire for them to be strengthened. Any reform would lead to incremental shifts in public perceptions.

Whilst it was true that the views expressed in the report were not new attitudes - the public had always been concerned about standards in public life - it was the case that trust has been tending to decline over the decades. And, the impact of social media meant that these views had a stronger impact on politics so should be treated as significant.

Members asked whether any views had been expressed on the Principles. Professor Renwick confirmed that this report had not specifically addressed public views on the Principles of Public Life, but work with Citizens Assemblies had done so. Professor Renwick offered to report back.

The Chair thanked Professor Renwick for a very helpful and thoughtful conversation.

*(Professor Renwick left the meeting.)*

**1. APOLOGIES**

None received.

**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 9 February 2023 were agreed.

**Chair’s update**

The Committee noted:

**Ethical regulation in government**

Members noted Professor Robert Hazell’s work on ethical regulation in government.

**Recruitment for independent member and appointment of political member**

Members noted an update on the independent member and political member vacancies.

**Meeting with Will Tanner, Deputy Chief of Staff, No 10**

Members noted that the Chair met with Will Tanner, Deputy Chief of Staff, No 10 on 23 February to discuss the Committee’s work.

**Meeting with Daniel Greenberg CB, Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards**

Members noted that the Chair had an introductory meeting with Daniel Greenberg, Commons Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards on 1 March.

**Meeting with Debbie Abrahams MP**

Members noted that the Chair had met with Debbie Abrahams MP on 14 March, at Debbie Abrahams’ request, to discuss the recommendations from our 2021 *Upholding Standards in Public Life* report.

**Conference on Code of Ethics of the Public Service of Catalonia**

Members noted that the Chair had accepted an invitation to speak (remotely) about the role and work of CSPL at a Conference to be held on 23 March in Barcelona. The conference is organised by the General Directorate of Good Governance, Democratic Innovation and Quality, a unit of the Ministry of the Presidency of the Government of Catalonia (Generalitat de Catalunya).

**Meeting with Chairs of Independent Offices**

Members noted that a meeting with the Chairs of Independent Offices had been arranged for 28 March. This was one of the regular, informal catch ups with stakeholders in the standards world.

**Local Government**

Members noted that the Chair had received a letter from Lee Rowley MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Local Government and Building Safety, about the government’s response to our Local Government Ethical Standards report. This was in response to the Chair’s letter of 4 October 2022.

**4. LEADING IN PRACTICE**

The Committee noted the paper setting out lessons learnt from the Leading in Practice review. The Chair reported that he and Ewen Fergusson had received a large number of invitations from a wide range of organisations, and there had been strong support for the report, which was very encouraging.

* Chair spoke at the Wellcome Trust Ethics staff forum (13 February)
* Chair attended meeting of Civil Service Commissioners (13 February)
* Ewen Fergusson spoke at Home Office Ethics Steering Group (20 February)
* Chair spoke at Permanent Secretaries meeting (23 February)
* Chair responded to the Westminster Abbey Institute Director’s Lecture: ‘The Seven Principles of Public Life: Words, Words, Words?’ (6 March)
* Chair and Ewen Fergusson joined Defra all-staff event on ‘Leading with Integrity’- in conversation with Permanent Secretary Tamara Finkelstein (7 March)
* Chair attended Government Lead NED Conference (8 March)
* Chair attended HR Function Board meeting - HR Directors from the 16 Whitehall Departments (9 March).
* Chair spoke at NHS Annual Freedom to Speak Up Conference (9 March).

**5. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee discussed its future work programme. The Secretariat would provide a scoping note for the April meeting.

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

**Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday 20 April 2023 at 10.00.

CSPL Secretariat

March 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. https://constitution-unit.com/2023/03/07/integrity-and-accountability-new-report-on-public-attitudes-to-democracy-in-the-uk/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)