

Committee on Standards in Public Life Committee's way of working

Background

1. The Committee is an independent body, independent of government and Parliament. It is sponsored by the Propriety and Constitution Group in the Cabinet Office which also provides the Committee's budget.
2. In order to undertake its work the Committee is supported by a Secretariat, the size of which is determined by the budget available to the Committee. The Secretariat staff are civil servants employed by the Cabinet Office.

Research Advisory Board

3. The Committee also has a Research Advisory Board to provide academic expertise and support. The chair of the Advisory Board (Professor Mark Philp) has a standing invitation to attend meetings of the Committee. In practice, the Advisory Board rarely meets as a body but provides the Committee with access to a network of academic expertise. From time to time the Committee will commission specific pieces of academic work to support particular enquiries, including occasional opinion polling.

Media relations

4. The Committee is supported by a part time contracted media relations adviser whose role is to provide appropriate visibility of the Committee's work (for instance via the website, the Committee's Blog and the Committee's Twitter and Linked In accounts) and to manage relations with the press and media. This role is filled by Maggie O'Boyle (D F Press Ltd). Members of the Committee are asked to consult Maggie, through the Secretariat, if they intend to speak publicly in their capacity as members of the Committee. Maggie will consult the Chair as required. The Committee does not comment on specific cases as this would be outside its terms of reference.

Annual Report

5. The Committee publishes an annual report of the year's activities. The Committee's role is to advise the Prime Minister on Standards issues in public life. The Committee neither regulates the standards regime nor adjudicates or investigates individual cases and as a non-statutory body, is not accountable to Parliament.

Reports on specific matters

6. The Committee researches and publishes reports on specific standards-related issues, typically one or two reports a year. Usually, these reports are commissioned by the Committee itself although the Prime Minister can ask the Committee to undertake a particular piece of work.
7. Any member of the Committee is encouraged to suggest areas of work, and any proposal for a particular report will be discussed and agreed by the Committee. Each report is normally led by the Chair and an independent member who has volunteered to do so.

8. Members who are not leading on a report are nevertheless encouraged to play an active role in the process leading to the production of the report, to attend meetings, round tables etc, and to express their views on any issues arising, including publicly by agreement. Each report will also be supported by one or more members of the Secretariat who draft the report for members' approval.
9. Recommendations in reports are the responsibility of the Committee as a whole and the Committee seeks to build a consensus around any recommendations. Reports are published and submitted to the Prime Minister, sometimes in the form of a Command Paper. The government will normally consider any recommendations and issue a formal response in due course.

Watching briefs

10. In addition to its work on current projects, the Committee also seeks to follow up previous recommendations to encourage their adoption, and also maintains an active "watching brief" on specific issues relating to standards which the Committee has judged are a priority and where the Committee is likely to have an influential voice.
11. One or more Committee members may take the lead on a watching brief though, as with reports, other members are encouraged to involve themselves in support of the Committee's work. Each watching brief is normally supported by a member of the Secretariat. As with reports, we seek to ensure that the outcomes that the Committee seeks in respect of particular watching briefs are those of the Committee as a whole, and based on principles or research that the Committee supports.

Relations with other bodies

12. The Committee, principally through the Chair, maintains contact with a number of other standards bodies in Parliament and elsewhere. The Chair also periodically hosts an informal meeting of the 'Chairs of Independent Offices' (the Electoral Commission, the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOPA), the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority (IPSA), the UK Statistics Authority, First Civil Service Commissioner, Commissioners for Standards in both Houses, House of Lords Appointments Commission (HOLAC), the Prime Minister's Independent Advisor on Ministers' Interests, and the Commissioner for Public Appointments).

Meetings of the Committee

13. The Committee meets monthly except in August, normally on a Thursday morning. Meetings take place in person in London, but can be hybrid for remote attendees. The aim of the meetings is to direct the work of the Committee and to consider issues on which the Committee may wish to take a view. From time to time an external speaker is invited to attend the Committee ahead of formal business in order to inform the Committee on standards issues (sometimes but not always in connection with a current report) or to reinforce institutional relationships. The meeting minutes are published on Committee pages of the gov.uk website.