**CSPL (23) 6**

**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE**

**319th MEETING HELD**

**AT 10.00 ON THURSDAY 18 JANUARY 2024**

**MINUTES**

Present: Doug Chalmers CB DSO OBE (Chair)

Rt Hon Lady Arden DBE

Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett GBE MP

Rt Hon Ian Blackford MP

Ewen Fergusson

Baroness Finn

Professor Gillian Peele

Professor Mark Philp, Chair, Research Advisory Board

Lesley Bainsfair, Secretary

Nicola Richardson, Senior Policy Adviser

Amy Austin, Policy Adviser

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

Su Moore, CEO, and Hannah Phillips, Research and Policy Manager, The Jo Cox Foundation, joined the meeting ahead of formal business.

**The Jo Cox Foundation Civility Commission**

The Chair welcomed Su Moore, CEO, and Hannah Phillips, Research and Policy Manager, The Jo Cox Foundation, who joined the meeting for an informal discussion about the work of The Jo Cox Foundation’s Civility Commission, ahead of formal business.

Su and Hannah introduced the work of the Civility Commission which had been launched in February 2023 and had been engaging with stakeholders to develop practical solutions to address intimidation[[2]](#footnote-1). The Commission’s report would be launched on 24 January. A key worrying message was that abuse had worsened in recent years and had become normalised, people now expected that that was something that they had to deal with. Abuse was not purely online, but also in person. Abuse affected individuals and democracy by putting people off from standing from public roles.

The 28 recommendations of the report had been grouped into 8 themes: co-ordination and behaviour; political literacy; social media; police and security; parliament; local government; elections; and political parties. The Commission, a small independent body, had been engaging with key stakeholders in drafting the recommendations in order to increase collaboration.

Members thanked Su and Hannah for all the work they were doing, it was very important to reflect and think about how to do things better. They discussed the worrying trends of normalisation of abuse, and were interested in the political literacy theme and the government coordination role that had been identified. It was agreed that there was a need for all political leaders to take responsibility. Social and mainstream media was discussed. It was noted that other countries had increased regulation of social media and it would be interesting to see whether that had made a difference. Su and Hannah said that the Commission had had positive conversations with police forces who were keen that all cases of abuse were reported to them to help build up a more complete database. It was a huge piece of work, but working with police forces and a government co-ordinating role was key.

On behalf of the members, the Chair thanked Su and Hannah again for their time and their important work and looked forward to seeing the Commission’s report.

**1. APOLOGIES**

None.

**2. REGISTERS**

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

**3. MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 December 2023 were agreed.

**Chair’s update**

**Introductory meetings**

The Chair reported that he had continued with his schedule of introductory meetings.

Since the last Committee meeting, the Chair had met with:

Peter Riddell, former Commissioner for Public Appointments

Darren Tierney, DG, Propriety & Constitution Group, Cabinet Office

Daniel Greenberg, Commons Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Sir Laurie Magnus, Independent Adviser on Ministers’ Interests.

**Chair’s approach**

The Chair thanked all members for their engagement with his paper setting out his

approach to chairing the Committee which would serve as a helpful touchstone and would remain an iterative piece of work.

**Commons Committee on Standards in query into the Commons Standards Landscape**

The Chair reminded members that he had been invited to give evidence to the Commons Standards Committee’s inquiry into the House of Commons Standards Landscape. This would take place on 23 January. Professor Gillian Peele would accompany the Chair.

**House of Lords debate on standards in public life**

Members noted that there had been a debate in the House of Lords on 11 January on standards in public life.[[3]](#footnote-2) Baroness Finn had spoken in the debate in which speakers had expressed a range of views.

**4. AI AND PUBLIC STANDARDS: UPDATE**

Members discussed how best to proceed with the AI and Public Standards follow up work. It was agreed it made sense to wait for the government response to our request for an update to recommendations made in our 2020 AI and Public Standards report, before publishing the follow up report.

It was also agreed to hold a seminar with key players in the AI world to identify if there was any area in which a new CSPL review would be welcome and add value. The Secretariat would start planning work.

**5. CURRENT STANDARDS ISSUES**

Members discussed the Post Office/Horizon scandal.[[4]](#footnote-3)

Members discussed ideas for a future review. The secretariat was asked to draft a paper for consideration.

**6. FORWARD AGENDA**

The Committee noted the forward agenda.

**7. AOB**

**Communications Update**

The Committee noted the communications updates for December 2023.

**Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday 22 February 2024 at 10.00.

CSPL Secretariat

January 2024

1. Maggie O’Boyle provides part-time press support to the Civil Service Commission, the House of Lords Appointments Commission, the Advisory Committee for Business Appointments, and the Office for the Commissioner for Public Appointments and the Committee on Standards in Public Life. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. https://www.jocoxfoundation.org/our-work/respectful-politics/commission/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2023/december-2023/parliamentary-democracy-and-standards-in-public-life-on-agenda-in-lords-debate/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. https://corporate.postoffice.co.uk/en/horizon-scandal-pages/horizon-it-public-inquiry#:~:text=An%20independent%20public%20inquiry%20into,The%20Inquiry%20is%20entirely%20independent. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)