

**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE  
334th MEETING HELD  
AT 09.30 ON THURSDAY 15 MAY 2025**

**MINUTES**

Present: Doug Chalmers CB DSO OBE (Chair)  
Rt Hon Lady Arden DBE  
Rt Hon Baroness Beckett GBE  
Rt Hon Ian Blackford  
Councillor Ruth Dombey OBE  
Ewen Fergusson  
John Henderson CB

Professor Mark Philp, Chair, Research Advisory Board

John Pullinger, Chair, Electoral Commission, attended for an informal discussion ahead of formal business

Lesley Bainsfair, Secretary  
Nicola Richardson, Deputy Head, Secretariat  
Peter Kelleher, Senior Policy Adviser

Maggie O'Boyle, Press Officer<sup>1</sup>

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair welcomed John Pullinger, Chair, Electoral Commission for an informal discussion.

John Pullinger updated the Committee on areas of particular interest to the Committee. The Committee discussed some of the key issues that had been raised in CSPL's 2021 Regulating Election Finance report including tightening the requirement to identify the true source of donations, reducing the potential for foreign money to influence UK elections; and extending the civil sanctions regime to include candidate finance laws (there was a current disconnect between civil sanctions for political parties and only criminal sanctions for candidates).

The Committee also discussed extending the voting age to 16 - 17 year olds and the outreach work that was planned by the Electoral Commission. The Committee discussed

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<sup>1</sup> 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; the Office for the Commissioner for Public Appointments; and the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

the vital importance of voter education, equipping people with the skills to interpret the information they are told.

Members asked whether any consideration was being given to take into account the fact that people move around, to make it easier for people to vote at a time and a place that is more convenient for them. It was noted that Wales had piloted a 'vote anywhere' policy as a move to help modernise the electoral system.

The Committee discussed the worrying levels of abuse and intimidation of candidates. It was noted that the Speaker's Conference was considering this issue and taking evidence from a wide range of people and organisations. The Defending Democracy Taskforce also sought to reduce the risk to the UK's democratic processes, institutions and society.

With regard to mis and disinformation, it was noted that Ofcom had recently created an [Online Information Advisory Committee](#), chaired by Lord Allan of Hallam, to advise Ofcom about specific areas of its work relevant to misinformation and disinformation.

In response to a question about the Electoral Commission's ability to take down false information, John Pullinger said that the Electoral Commission had had success in getting social media platforms to take down posts which had lied about the electoral process, on the grounds that it is a criminal offence to stop someone from voting. It is more difficult for action to be taken against posts which were about an individual's conduct or character, but those affected have had some moderate success in taking down highly offensive deepfakes on the basis that it is a criminal offence to lie about a candidate's conduct or character. The most difficult area was where facts and the truth were disputed. The Electoral Commission had had contact with all social media platforms during election campaigns, but some were more responsive than others. The regulation of social media companies fell under Ofcom's remit.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked John Pullinger for a valuable discussion; the Chair and John Pullinger agreed it was important that CSPL and the Electoral Commission stayed regularly in touch.

John Pullinger left the meeting.

## **1. APOLOGIES**

Professor Gillian Peele.

## **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 10 April 2025 were agreed.

### **Chair's update**

Members noted and discussed recent and forthcoming meetings.<sup>2</sup>

The Chair thanked Professor Peele and Councillor Ruth Dombey for speaking about the Committee's Early Warning Signs report to the NALC Policy Committee (April) and to the Society for Local Council Clerks/One Voice Wales ethical frameworks event (May) respectively.

It was noted that the Committee had received six FOI requests over the past month; all replies had been published on the Committee's website.

## **4. EARLY WARNING SIGNS REPORT**

### **Lessons Learnt**

Members noted and commented on a paper reviewing lessons learnt from the report.

### **Post publication engagement**

Members noted and agreed plans for engagement with stakeholders post publication of the report.

## **5. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

Members discussed and considered options for the Committee's next review. The Secretariat was asked to do further research on two options for consideration at the July meeting.

## **6. RESEARCH PAPER ON SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY AND STRONG LEADERSHIP**

Members discussed a paper by José Pedro Lopes, University of Manchester, which considered two questions: (1) how widespread is support for a strong leader who is able to circumvent parliamentary procedures and electoral processes in the United Kingdom; and (2) who is more likely to endorse such a model of governance.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair asked Professor Mark Philp to pass on his thanks to José Pedro Lopes for his interesting and insightful paper.

## **7. 30th ANNIVERSARY UPDATE**

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<sup>2</sup> Meetings are [published](#) in the Committee's register of stakeholder meetings.

Members noted updated plans to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Principles of Public Life. The next key event was a conference hosted and organised by the Institute of Government on 19 June at which Sir John Major had agreed to deliver a keynote speech.<sup>3</sup>

## **8. DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT**

Members discussed the draft annual report which would be published in July. The Secretariat would provide the final draft for consideration at the June Committee meeting.

## **9. CURRENT STANDARDS ISSUES**

Following recent local elections, standards required of councillors were discussed.

## **10. FORWARD AGENDA**

The Committee noted the forward agenda.

## **11. AOB**

### **Communications Update**

The Committee noted the monthly dashboard overview of CSPL's website for April 2025.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday 19 June 2025.

CSPL Secretariat  
May 2025

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/event/nolan-principles-30-future-standards-public-life>