

## Committee on Standards in Public Life

HORIZON SCAN EVENT AND LAUNCH OF [SETTING THE STANDARD](#), THE CSPL ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17, FORWARD PLAN 2017-18 AND STRATEGIC PLAN

HELD AT 9AM ON MONDAY 10 JULY 2017 IN 1 HORSE GUARDS ROAD, LONDON, SW1A 1HQ

### ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTED:

- Advisory Committee on Business Appointments
- Cabinet Office
- Commissioner for Public Appointments
- CSPL Research Advisory Board
- Constitution Unit, University College London
- Coventry City Council
- Electoral Commission
- Full Fact
- Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority
- Institute for Government
- Leeds City Council
- Local Government Chronicle
- New Local Government Network
- Ofgem
- Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards
- The Co-operative Group
- Transparency International
- UK Statistics Authority
- Unlock Democracy
- Westminster Parliament (representatives attended in a personal capacity)
- Wilkin Chapman LLP
- Academics in a personal capacity from Royal Holloway, University of London; University of Nottingham; Queen Mary, University of London; Newcastle University; University of Cambridge, University of Oxford, King's College London.

## **BROAD THEMES DISCUSSED**

### **The Committee's Role**

- People are aware of CSPL's work, but the Committee could potentially have a higher profile. It was suggested it was important to seek partners' aid to ensure that the Committee's work was as influential and productive as it should be.
- CSPL needs to be sensitive to what the public is thinking, whilst balancing the view that this may not necessarily be the priority issue for the Committee at any one time given the context in which the Committee works and its particular remit.
- CSPL's 'agenda' is vast. In view of this potentially infinite remit, it was suggested the Committee should concentrate on issues at the highest level as it is the major institutions that set the tone and moral climate expected in public life.
- The Committee might look at how other countries manage standards issues when considering ethical standards issues in England.
- Notwithstanding the fact that the Committee no longer has a remit to consider standards in the Devolved Administrations (following the Triennial Review of the Committee in 2013), it would be helpful and sensible to keep a light touch on what's happening elsewhere in the UK. It was noted that the Devolved Administrations has their own standards arrangements, and robust regulations on ethics.

### **MPs - public perceptions**

- The role and the impact of Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACoBA) was discussed. There was a view that codes on their own do not always work; values need to drive attitudes and behaviour.
- The perception of MPs is as important as the facts and how they behave, and perceptions of national politicians affect views of local government too. The MPs' expenses scandal had done great damage. More might be done to promote the fact that people in public life make many sacrifices to do the job.
- The difficulties of evaluating appropriate pay for an MP without a firm understanding of what the requirements of the role was discussed.
- The problems of intimidation of those in public life, both off and online.

### **Social Media**

- It was suggested it would be important to work with others on the vast and quickly evolving topic that is social media. There were big questions around how social media is regulated, if at all? For example, how groups use social media with regard to funding of party campaigns and advertising spend, potentially getting around spending rules. A theme of confluence of money, power and influence.
- The point was made that organisations needed to think about how to keep their fingers on the pulse. There was an opportunity for organisations to use social media to reach out and try to bring in the wider public perspective about their work. It was important to tap into the public's concerns.

- Communication with the public is important, and using new modes of communication can help with this. Established organisations in Government and Parliament haven't really grasped how to deal with that.

### **Local Government**

- It was suggested there was a need for a fresh look at rules of codes of conduct for councillors. A strengthening of the ethics system and declaration of interests. Local government was often the first level at which the public interact with politics.
- The issue was not just around particular standards issues such as conflict of interests, but went wider to the issue of governance of local government where it seemed there was a rather mixed system, with little/no effective scrutiny, and defects around conduct.
- The issue of the development around town centres was raised and the huge sums of money involved.

### **Referendums**

- The Committee's ongoing interest in referendums and elections was welcomed. The problems around negative campaigning was mentioned.

### **Ethical Standards for Providers of Public Services**

- Attendees welcomed the Committee's follow-up work in this area which some saw as an area of vulnerability (i.e. the provision of public services). The tragedy of Grenfell had shed light on vulnerabilities in the system and lessons might be drawn out more generally.

### **Other areas for the Committee to consider**

- Appointments to the House of Lords.
- Mapping of the plethora of standards bodies that exist - why are there so many, what do they do, are they independent? The Committee's view of whether some rationalisation was needed might be useful.
- Impact of Brexit. The potential for a large number of public appointments needing to be made in light of leaving the EU. Close liaison with the Commissioner of Public Appointments should continue.
- The conduct of elections was likely to be increasingly important.
- 'Revolving door' concerns, and not just at the very top of an organisation, but also at directorate level.
- Barriers to public understanding of politics needed to be further understood.
- Training and education and induction - the UK had an institutional landscape based on a common set of values and unspoken set of understandings, now people within those institutions should be inducted with the organisation's values.
- Fractured ministerial silos, many departments appear to be doing the same work