

Conduct Committee

Minutes of the meeting on Thursday 17 September at 3pm via MS Teams

Present:

B. Anelay of St Johns	Vanessa Davies
L. Brown of Eaton-under-Heywood	B. Donaghy
Cindy Butts	B. Hussein-Ece
Mark Castle	L. Mance (Chair)
Andrea Coomber	

With the Clerk of the Parliaments

DELIBERATION IN PRIVATE

1. Minutes from 23 and 28 July meetings

The minutes of the meetings on 23 and 28 July were agreed.

2. Disclosure of members' earnings

The Registrar of Lords' Interests, Tom Wilson, introduced this paper. It provided the further information requested by the Committee following the report by the Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC) on Russia.

The paper considered whether members should be required to disclose the amounts of money they earn in all fields or whether such a requirement might instead be more narrowly targeted at those members working for foreign governments or companies controlled by foreign governments. It also considered whether additional guidance is needed for members providing paid services to foreign governments and highlighted matters relating to parliamentary delegations to inter-parliamentary assemblies.

The Chair declared relevant interests and indicated that he therefore proposed to abstain as far as possible from the substantive discussion on this item.

In the discussion there was not a clear consensus about whether to move to general disclosure or the quantum of all earning. Some members thought that this would in the long term be the direction of movement and one was in favour of immediate registration of all outside income. The majority considered that the Committee should for the present concentrate on a more narrowly focused approach targeted at members working for foreign governments or companies controlled by foreign governments. It was noted that members of the House are not salaried and so there was justification for differing from the Commons on this requirement.

The Committee therefore agreed that to recommend to the House that members be required to disclose earnings from work for foreign governments and for associated companies/organisations. There would be a need to work out a formula avoiding determination of contentious and political questions such as control. Whether an company/organisation could reasonably be perceived as sufficiently associated with the government was suggested. A further paper would be prepared in this connection for the next meeting.

There was discussion about the possibility of consultation on the wider question of full disclosure, but some uncertainty what this would involve. It was also agreed to discuss this possibility further.

Concerning changes to the Code, the Committee agreed to remove paragraph 35 from the Guide to the Code and replace it with a more general paragraph where oppressive and corrupt regimes were referenced as an example, but the focus would be on foreign governments in general.

It was agreed to leave the position regarding registration of membership of outside organisations, such as the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, as it is, i.e. non-registrable, because it is a UK Parliamentary activity.

3. Annual audit of members' interests

This paper was introduced by the Registrar of Lords' Interests and the Assistant Registrar, Nick Cross.

The Committee was asked to take note of the paper which provided an overview of the latest annual audit in light of recent amendments to the Code, which made it a breach for members to fail to respond within six weeks to the audit of entries in the register of interests.

The Committee agreed that members who were not able to respond to the annual audit for health reasons should not be investigated but their names would be reported to the Commissioner.

As there were six members who had failed to respond to the audit, the Committee agreed the Commissioner could launch investigations into those six members.

4. Valuing Everyone training: update

The ICGS implementation Manager, Alex Brocklehurst, introduced this paper which provided an update on members' attendance at Valuing Everyone training, given the Committee's target that 50 percent of members of the House should have attended the training by the summer recess just past. It also proposed mechanisms to ensure that all members attend in due course. The Committee were invited to decide the mechanism they would prefer to encourage all members to attend the training.

The Committee were informed that 49 percent of members had so far attended the training.

The Committee agreed to recommend to the House that it should become a breach of the Code, from 1 April 2021, for a member to not have attended the Valuing Everyone training, or to have booked such training, but exceptions would be made for new Peers and those returning from Leave of Absence who would have to complete the training but to a different time frame.

It was noted that peer's partners with Parliamentary passes should be required to undertake the training but that was a matter for the Commission and could cause training capacity issues.

5. Oral Update on Steering Group for Change

Baroness Donaghy, Chair of the Steering Group for Change, provided an oral update.

Andrea Coomber and Vanessa Davies had accompanied Baroness Donaghy to the last meeting

The Committee agreed to meet the Steering Group again with more members in attendance.

6. Data on Commissioner workload

The Standards and Registry Clerk, James Whittle, provided an update on the Commissioner's workload.

7. Any Other Business

The Committee had a brief preliminary discussion on the recruitment process for the next Lords Commissioner for Standards.

Chloe Mawson
Clerk to the Conduct Committee
x8796