

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION**FORMAL MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 15 MARCH 2023
COMMITTEE ROOM 5**

Mr Speaker, in the Chair	
Clive Betts	Cat Smith
Rachel Hopkins	Owen Thompson
Craig Mackinlay	William Wragg
Lee Rowley	

*In private***1. Minutes of last meeting**

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of 20 December 2022.

2. Consultation on Code of Practice for Non-party Campaigners

The Committee noted that the Electoral Commission had sought the Committee's views on the draft Code of Practice for Non-party Campaigners, as part of the statutory consultation process required by Section 100B of PPERA.

The Committee noted the legal advice on the draft Code provided by Counsel. The Committee recalled its decision, agreed off-line by correspondence on 28 February, to provide a version of the legal advice to the Electoral Commission. The Committee noted the Electoral Commission's response to that legal advice. The Committee concluded that the Commission's response was full, that the Commission had understood and considered the points raised by the Committee, and that where appropriate changes had been incorporated into the draft Code as a result. The Committee agreed it had nothing further to add to the consultation.

3. Consideration of NAO reports and advice from the Treasury

The Committee noted that the Treasury had "noted" the Electoral Commission's Estimate, and that no further advice had been provided by the Treasury in relation to either the Electoral Commission or LGBCE's Main Estimates for 2023-24.

The Committee considered the Comptroller and Auditor General's economy, efficiency and effectiveness reports on the subject of voter engagement (in relation to the Electoral Commission), and a short guide to the LGBCE (in relation to the LGBCE), as required by Paragraph 14(4)(a) of Schedule 1 of PPERA.

4. Discussion of lines of questioning*In public***5. Local Government Boundary Commission for England: Main Estimate 2023-24**

Professor Colin Mellors OBE, Chair, Jolyon Jackson CBE, Chief Executive, and Lynn Ingram, Director of Corporate Services, Local Government Boundary Commission for England gave oral evidence on the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Main Estimate for 2023-24.

6. Electoral Commission: Main Estimate 2023-24

John Pullinger, Chair, Shaun McNally, Chief Executive, and Kieran Rix, Director of Finance, Electoral Commission gave oral evidence on the Electoral Commission's Main Estimate for 2023-24.

In private

7. Consideration of Electoral Commission's Main Estimates 2023-24

The Committee considered the Electoral Commission's Main Estimate for 2023-24.

Lee Rowley set out a proposal, of which he had given notice in correspondence to the Chair dated 13 March, that the Electoral Commission's budget for 2023-24 be increased by £1.5m for the purposes of providing additional funding for the Commission's communication campaign relating to new voter identification requirements.

The Committee considered Mr Rowley's proposal carefully, and expressed a range of views on it. The Committee had regard to Shaun McNally's view, expressed in correspondence to the Chair dated 13 March, that "the Minister's proposal represents a reasonable recommendation to the Committee to support [the Commission] to even more effectively fulfil [its] duties".

The Committee was mindful throughout its discussion of the vital importance of ensuring citizens can exercise their democratic rights. While the Committee considered that the expenditure proposed in the Commission's Estimate was likely to be successful in significantly increasing public awareness of the changes, it also considered that more needed to be done to ensure as many people as possible were informed.

For this reason, the Committee came to the view that £1.5m was not an unreasonable additional sum to provide to minimise the number of people who are unnecessarily disadvantaged by lack of awareness of the new voter ID requirements. The Committee also agreed that the Electoral Commission (rather than the Government or any other body) is best placed to achieve maximum value for money and efficacy in relation to sums spent for this purpose.

For the purposes of its duty under Paragraph 14(3)(b) of Schedule 1 of PPERA, the Committee accordingly concluded that the Electoral Commission's Main Estimate was not fully consistent with the economical, efficient and effective discharge by the Commission of its functions, on the basis that the Estimate provided insufficient funding for the Commission to meet its duty in relation to promoting public awareness of current electoral systems and connected matters in the UK (specifically, in relation to new requirements for voters to prove their identity) as required by section 13 of the Act.

The Committee therefore modified the Estimate to increase Resource DEL by £1.5m, for the purposes of rectifying the aforementioned insufficiency, and achieving the consistency required by the Act.

The Committee agreed to lay the modified Estimate before the House, and committed to examine at future meetings the value for money achieved through the Commission's spending of the additional funds provided.

The Committee was disappointed that the Commission's positive appraisal of the Government's proposal did not result in the Estimate originally submitted by the Commission including the additional funding. The Committee is mindful of the Commission's independence, and does not consider that it should be put in a position where it has to modify the Estimate to reflect a proposal which the

Commission itself is persuaded by and agrees would enable it to fulfil its duties effectively. The Committee does not expect this situation to arise again.

The Committee also noted that this is the first occasion on which it has modified an Electoral Commission Estimate. The Committee agreed that the circumstances resulting in this outcome are unique, and that it should in no way be regarded as setting a precedent for, or increasing the likelihood of, modifying Estimates on future occasions.

8. Consideration of LGBCE's Main Estimates 2023-24

The Committee agreed that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Main Estimate for 2023-24 was consistent with the economical, efficient and effective discharge by the Commission of its functions, and agreed to lay it before the House.

The Committee agreed, in accordance with past practice, that minor and insubstantial adjustments as might be required for technical reasons may be made to the Electoral Commission and LGBCE's Estimates, subject to the agreement of the Secretary.

9. Any other business

There was no other business.

[The Committee adjourned

SCEC FM 02 (2023)

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

FORMAL MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 12 JUNE 2023

SPEAKER'S STUDY

Mr Speaker, in the Chair	
Clive Betts	Craig Mackinlay
Felicity Buchan	Owen Thompson
Rachel Hopkins	William Wragg

In private

1. Consideration of annual report

The Committee agreed its first report for 2023, *The Work of the Committee in 2022-23*.

2. Appointment of an Electoral Commissioner nominated by the Smaller Parties

The Committee considered the report of the recruitment panel appointed to assess candidates to replace Alex Attwood as the Commissioner nominated by the Smaller Parties.

The Committee agreed to appoint Sheila Ritchie as an Electoral Commissioner for a three-year term, and agreed to put her name forward for statutory consultation with party leaders.

3. Appointment of an Ordinary Electoral Commissioner (Local Government)

The Committee considered the report of the recruitment panel appointed to assess candidates to replace Rob Vincent as an Ordinary Commissioner.

The Committee agreed to appoint Carole Mills as an Ordinary Commissioner for a four-year term, and agreed to put her name forward for statutory consultation with party leaders.

4. Draft Strategy and Policy Statement

The Committee considered the draft Strategy and Policy Statement laid before Parliament by the Government, as well as legal advice from the Office of Speaker's Counsel.

The Committee was briefed on the draft Strategy and Policy Statement by Rupert Grist (Deputy Counsel, Office of Speaker's Counsel).

The Committee agreed to hold another meeting before the expiration of the draft Statement's 60-day laying period, to agree a report on the draft Statement.

5. Any other business

There was no other business.

[The Committee adjourned

SCEC FM 03 (2023)

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

FORMAL MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 4 SEPTEMBER 2023 SPEAKER'S STUDY

Mr Speaker, in the Chair	
Rachel Hopkins	Owen Thompson
Craig Mackinlay	William Wragg
Cat Smith	

In private

1. Minutes of last meeting

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of 12 June 2023.

2. Draft Strategy and Policy Statement

The Committee considered the draft Strategy and Policy Statement for the Electoral Commission.

The Committee agreed its response to the draft Statement.

The Committee agreed to publish its response as its Third Report 2023, *Response to the draft Strategy and Policy Statement for the Electoral Commission* (HC 1809).

3. Any other business

Mr Speaker updated the Committee on recent developments relating to the cyber-attack against the Electoral Commission. The Committee discussed this matter and agreed to discuss this further with the Electoral Commission at its meeting on 22 November.

[The Committee adjourned

SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION
FORMAL MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 22 November 2023
SPEAKER'S STUDY

Mr Speaker, in the Chair	
Kirsty Blackman	Cat Smith
Felicity Buchan	William Wragg
Rachel Hopkins	

In private

1. Declaration of interests

Kirsty Blackman declared her interests as in the Register of the Member's Financial Interests.

2. Minutes of last meeting

The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting of 4 September 2023.

3. Designation of Electoral Commission posts

The Committee agreed to designate the Electoral Commission staff posts requiring extended political activity exclusions in accordance with Schedule 1, paragraph 11B(1) of PPERA as proposed in the letter from Shaun McNally of 7 November 2023.

4. Designation of interim Electoral Commission Accounting Office.

The Committee agreed the designation of David Moran as interim Accounting Officer as proposed in the letter from John Pullinger of 6 November 2023.

The Committee noted its thanks to Shaun McNally for his service at the Electoral Commission.

5. Briefing and discussion of lines of questioning for session on Electoral Commission: Autumn update

The Committee considered this matter.

6. Informal briefing on cyber-attack and cyber security at the Electoral Commission

The Committee considered this matter.

7. Electoral Commission: Autumn update

The Committee took evidence in private from John Pullinger, Chair, Louise Edwards, Director of Regulation, and Craig Westwood, Director of Communications, Policy and Research, Electoral Commission, on the Commission's Autumn update.

8. Any other business

No items were raised.

[The Committee adjourned

Designation of Local Government Boundary Commission England's Accounting Office.

The Committee agreed by correspondence to designate Ailsa Irvine as the LGBCE's new accounting officer from 2024 following the retirement of Jolyon Jackson CBE.