

POLITICAL PARTIES, ELECTIONS AND REFERENDUMS ACT 2000



THE SPEAKER'S COMMITTEE ON THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

FIRST REPORT 2023

Work of the Committee in 2022–23

*Presented to the House of Commons pursuant to paragraph 1(1) of
Schedule 2 to Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.*

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The Speaker's Committee

The Speaker's Committee is appointed in accordance with the provisions of section 2 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 to perform the functions conferred on it by that Act.

Membership

[Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP](#), Speaker of the House of Commons (Chair)

[Mr Clive Betts MP](#), Chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee

[Felicity Buchan MP](#), Minister of State for Levelling Up Communities, and Minister for Equalities

[Rt Hon Michael Gove MP](#), Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, and Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

[Rachel Hopkins MP](#)

[Craig Mackinlay MP](#)

[Lee Rowley MP](#), Minister for Local Government and Building Safety

[Cat Smith MP](#)

[Owen Thompson MP](#)

[Mr William Wragg MP](#)

Previous Publications

First Report 2022 was published 28 April 2022 as HC 1274 of Session 2022–23

Second Report 2022 was published 10 June 2022 as HC 353 of Session 2022–23

Third Report 2022 was published 22 December as HC 967 of Session 2022–23

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Work of the Committee in 2022–23

1. The Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission (SCEC) is a statutory body established under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA). Its work relates to the Electoral Commission. It also has functions in relation to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) under the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009.

2. Under paragraph 1(1) of Schedule 2 to the PPERA, the Speaker’s Committee is required to report to the House of Commons not less than once a year on the exercise of its functions. The last annual report covered the period from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.¹ This report covers the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Membership

3. The Committee has nine members, five of whom are members of the House of Commons who are not Ministers and are appointed by the Speaker. One member—a Member of the House of Commons who is a Minister with responsibilities in relation to local government—is appointed by the Prime Minister. The *ex officio* members are currently the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities,² the Chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee,³ and the Speaker of the House of Commons, who chairs the Committee.

4. The ex-officio members of the Committee over this period were:

Speaker

- Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP

*Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities*⁴

- Rt Hon Michael Gove MP (until 6 July 2022)⁵
- Rt Hon Greg Clark MP (from 7 July until 6 September 2022)
- Rt Hon Simon Clarke MP (from 6 September until 25 October 2022)
- Rt Hon Michael Gove MP (from 25 October 2022)

1 Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission, [Work of the Committee in 2021-22, First Report 2022, HC 1274, 28 April 2022](#).

2 Pursuant to the [Transfer of Functions \(Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities\) Order 2021](#), which transferred responsibility for elections policy (and membership of the Speaker’s Committee) from the Minister for the Cabinet Office to the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 8 December 2021.

3 Following the transfer of responsibility for elections policy from the Cabinet Office to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

4 Under section 2(2)(b) of the Act, following the [Transfer of Functions \(Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities\) Order 2021, 2021 No. 1265](#).

5 Prior to the commencement on 22 August 2022 of the arrangements in section 2(2A) of PPERA as inserted by section 18 of the Elections Act 2022, the Secretary of State’s membership of the Committee was exercisable concurrently by any Minister of the Crown in the Cabinet Office with responsibilities in relation to the Constitution (see the [Transfer of Functions \(Speaker’s Committee\) Order 2021 \(S.I. 2021/310\)](#)). Until 6 July 2022, Mr Gove’s membership of the Committee was exercisable concurrently by Neil O’Brien MP.

*Chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee*⁶

- Clive Betts MP

5. The appointed members of the Committee over this period were:

Member appointed by the Prime Minister as a minister with responsibility for local government

- Kemi Badenoch MP (until 6 July 2022)
- Paul Scully MP (from 17 October 2022, until 27 October 2022)⁷
- Lee Rowley MP (from 30 November 2022)⁸

*Member appointed by the Prime Minister to exercise concurrently the functions of the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on the Committee*⁹

- Andrew Stephenson MP (from 17 October 2022 until 27 October 2022)¹⁰
- Felicity Buchan MP (from 30 November 2022)¹¹

Members appointed by Mr Speaker

- Karl McCartney MP (until 6 July 2022)
- William Wragg (from 11 October 2022)¹²
- Craig Mackinlay MP
- Christian Matheson MP (until 21 October 2022)
- Rachel Hopkins (from 1 November 2022)¹³
- Cat Smith MP
- Owen Thompson MP

6 Under sections 2(2)(a) and 2(6) of the Act, following the [Transfer of Functions \(Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities\) Order 2021, 2021 No. 1265](#).

7 See [Votes and Proceedings: 17 October 2022](#).

8 See [Votes and Proceedings: 30 November 2022](#).

9 A position introduced by section 2(2A) of PPERA 2000, introduced by section 18 of the Elections Act 2022. This position replaced the arrangement, provided for by Article 2 of the Transfer of Functions (Speaker's Committee) Order 2021 ([S.I. 2021/310](#)), whereby the functions of the Minister for the Cabinet Office (and subsequently the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, pursuant to the Transfer of Functions Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) Order 2021 ([S.I. 2021/1265](#))) under section 2(2)(b) of PPERA 2000 were exercisable concurrently with any Minister of the Crown in the Cabinet Office (or, subsequently, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) with responsibilities in relation to the constitution.

10 See [Votes and Proceedings: 17 October 2022](#).

11 See [Votes and Proceedings: 30 November 2022](#).

12 See [Votes and Proceedings: 11 October 2022](#).

13 See [Votes and Proceedings: 1 November 2022](#).

Meetings

6. The Committee met five times during the period covered by this report. It also took some decisions by correspondence between meetings. The minutes of the Committee's meetings are reproduced in the appendix.

Parliamentary accountability

7. The Committee provides a mechanism for Members of Parliament to ask questions in the House of Commons about the work of the Electoral Commission and the LGBCE. Christian Matheson was the Committee spokesperson until 21 October, whereupon he was replaced as spokesperson by Cat Smith. Cat Smith answered five written questions on behalf of the Committee during the period covered by this report.¹⁴ Christian Matheson and Cat Smith answered 20 substantive oral questions and 25 supplementaries on behalf of the Committee.¹⁵

Code of Practice for non-party campaigners

8. Over the period covered by this report, the Committee responded to a statutory consultation on the draft Code of Practice for non-party campaigners. Louise Edwards, Director of Regulations for the Electoral Commission, wrote the Committee on 9 February to formally initiate the consultation on the draft Code, as required by section 100B of PPERA.

9. The Committee's consideration of the draft Code was informed by legal advice from Speaker's Counsel. The Committee agreed by correspondence that the Speaker should write to the Commission, requesting further information on a number of points raised by the legal advice, and with suggestions for some limited technical changes intended to clarify the provisions of the draft Code. Louise Edwards wrote to the Committee on 9 March with a detailed response to the points the Speaker raised, and with a revised Code of Practice incorporating changes accordingly.

10. At its meeting on 15 March, the Committee considered the Commission's response. The Committee concluded that the response was full, that the Commission had understood and considered the points raised by the Speaker, and that appropriate changes had been incorporated into the draft Code as a result. The Committee agreed it had nothing further to add to the consultation.

Draft Strategy and Policy Statement consultation

11. Over the period covered by this report, the Committee also responded to a statutory consultation on the draft Strategy and Policy Statement for the Electoral Commission. On 22 August, the then Minister of State for London, Local Government and Communities

¹⁴ UINs [135283](#) asked on 30 January, [152307](#) asked on 24 February, [154026](#) and [153994](#) asked on 27 February, and [176574](#) asked on 29 March.

¹⁵ These were questions from Kevin Brennan, Deidre Brock and Justin Madders on [28 April 2022](#); Deidre Brock on [23 June 2022](#); Allan Dorans, Martyn Day, Owen Thompson, Marion Fellows and Patricia Gibson on [8 September 2022](#); Owen Thompson, Vicky Foxcroft, Kate Hollern, Deidre Brock and Kirsten Oswald on [17 November 2022](#); Alan Brown, Mr Alistair Carmichael, Nadia Whittome, Andrew Gwynne, and Alexander Stafford on [1 December 2022](#); Owen Thompson and Mr Peter Bone on [26 January 2023](#); and Jeff Smith, Munira Wilson, Kirsten Oswald and Chris Stephens on [9 March 2023](#).

wrote to the Speaker to formally launch the consultation under section 4C of PPERA. The Speaker's Committee met on 27 October and 20 December to consider its response to the draft Statement. The Committee's response, and further details about the process it followed, are contained in the Committee's third report of 2022.¹⁶

Appointment of Electoral Commissioners

12. The Electoral Commission was established by Parliament as a body independent of the Government. The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, as amended by the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009, provides for the Electoral Commission to have nine or ten Commissioners.¹⁷ Up to six are 'ordinary' Commissioners who may not be members or employees of a political party.¹⁸ These Commissioners are recruited by competition, under a procedure put in place and overseen by the Speaker's Committee. Four Commissioners are persons put forward by the registered leader of a qualifying political party¹⁹ for consideration for appointment; they are described in the statute as 'nominated' Commissioners. While there are restrictions on their political activity, they are permitted to be members of parties, and to have been active in their party within the previous five years.²⁰

13. Pursuant to Section 3 of the PPERA, the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission is responsible for determining and overseeing the procedures for selecting candidates to be put forward for appointment or re-appointment as Electoral Commissioners. The candidates for these posts are approved by the House of Commons and appointed by His Majesty the King.

14. Over the period covered by this report, the Committee oversaw part of the processes for the re-appointment of the Electoral Commissioners nominated by the Conservative Party, Labour Party and Scottish National Party. The Committee's Second Report of 2022 set out the procedure followed in respect of the re-appointment of Lord Gilbert as the Electoral Commissioner nominated by the Conservative Party, and the appointment of Roseanna Cunningham and Chris Ruane as Electoral Commissioners nominated by the Scottish National Party and Labour Party respectively.²¹ On 18 July, the House approved a motion that A Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty to re-appoint Lord Gilbert for a further four-year term, and to appoint Roseanna Cunningham and Chris Ruane as Electoral Commissioners for four-year terms ending in October 2026.

15. Over the period covered by this report, the Committee also oversaw part of the processes for an Ordinary Electoral Commissioner to replace Rob Vincent when his term ends in December 2023, and to replace Alexander Attwood as the Commissioner nominated by the smaller parties when his term ends in January 2024. At the time of publication, these appointments are still in progress; they will be discussed further in the Committee's annual report covering 2023–24.

16 Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, [Third Report 2022, Response to the Government's consultation on the draft Strategy and Policy Statement for the Electoral Commission](#)

17 PPERA s1(3) as amended by s6 of the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009.

18 PPERA s3(4).

19 PPERA s3A(2).

20 PPERA s3(4) and s3(4A).

21 Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, [Second Report 2022, Appointment and re-appointment of Electoral Commissioners](#)

Financial scrutiny

16. The Committee’s role is to examine the estimates of resources needed for both the Electoral Commission and the LGBCE. It must also consider one statutory five-year plan and one value for money study in relation to each body during the life of a Parliament. The Speaker’s Committee has the power to require further such studies and reports to be produced as and when it sees fit.

17. The Speaker’s Committee must decide whether it is satisfied that the estimates and plans are consistent with the economical, efficient and effective discharge of each body’s functions. If it determines that they are not, it must modify them to achieve this consistency. In carrying out its work, the Committee consults with the Treasury and has regard to reports received from the National Audit Office concerning each body’s use of resources.

18. In the period covered by this report the Committee considered and approved Main Estimates for 2023–24 for both the Electoral Commission and the LGBCE.

Electoral Commission Main Estimate 2023–24

19. In relation to the Electoral Commission’s Main Estimate for 2023–24, the Committee considered an initial Estimate from the Electoral Commission containing a voted Resource DEL of £27,255,000, a voted Capital DEL of £2,005,000, a voted Resource AME of £50,000, and a voted Capital AME of £100,000. In examining the Electoral Commission’s Main Estimate, the Committee took account of the latest report from the Comptroller and Auditor General. It also consulted the Treasury. The Treasury “noted” the Estimate, without further comment.

20. During the Committee’s consideration of the Estimate, 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 £1,500,000 for the purposes of providing additional funding for the Commission’s communication campaign relating to new voter identification requirements.²²

21. 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 also 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”.²³

22. 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 initial 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.

²² [Correspondence from Minister Lee Rowley to the Chair, regarding voter ID awareness campaign and proposal to modify the Commission’s Estimate, dated 13.03.23](#)

²³ [Correspondence from Shaun McNally to the Chair, regarding Minister Lee Rowley’s proposal to modify the Commission’s Estimate, dated 13.03.23](#)

23. For this reason, the Committee came to the view that £1,500,000 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.

24. 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 initial 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 PPERA.

25. The Committee therefore modified the Estimate to increase Resource DEL by £1,500,000, for the purposes of rectifying the aforementioned insufficiency, and achieving the consistency required by PPERA. The modified Estimate therefore contained a voted Resource DEL of £28,755,000, a voted Capital DEL of £2,005,000, a voted Resource AME of £50,000, and a voted Capital AME of £100,000.

26. 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.

27. 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 was mindful of the Commission's independence, and did 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 concluded that it does not expect this situation to arise again.

28. The Committee also noted that this was 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.

Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Main Estimate 2023–24

29. In relation to the LGBCE's Main Estimate, the Committee agreed a voted Resource DEL for 2023–24 of £2,633,000, a voted Capital DEL of £50,000, and a voted Resource AME of £10,000 as consistent with the economical, efficient and effective discharge of its functions in that year.

30. In examining the LGBCE's Main Estimate, the Committee had regard to the most recent report made to it by the Comptroller and Auditor General under paragraph 13 of

Appendix: Minutes of the Speaker's Committee

Formal Minutes of the meeting on 27 April 2022 in the Speaker's Study

Mr Speaker, in the Chair

Clive Betts
Craig Mackinlay
Christian Matheson

Cat Smith
Owen Thompson

(Private)

1. Minutes of last meeting

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of 9 March 2022.

2. Publication of correspondence

The Committee agreed to publish the following correspondence:

- Letter from Colin Mellors to the Speaker, regarding follow-up from the March evidence session (dated 30.03.22).
- Letter from Bob Posner to the Speaker, regarding follow-up from the March evidence session, dated (31.03.22).

3. Consideration of annual report

The Committee agreed its first report for 2022, The Work of the Committee in 2021–22.

4. Appointment of Electoral Commissioners nominated by the Labour Party, Scottish National Party and Conservative Party

The Committee considered the report of the recruitment panel appointed to assess candidates nominated by the Labour and Scottish National Party to replace Joan Walley and Alasdair Morgan, respectively.

The Committee agreed to appoint Roseanna Cunningham and Chris Ruane as Electoral Commissioners, and agreed to put their names forward for statutory consultation with party leaders.

The Committee was updated on progress on the re-appointment of Lord Gilbert of Panteg as the Electoral Commissioner nominated by the Conservative Party.

5. Strategy and Policy Statement: Briefing

The Committee was brief on the Strategy and Policy Statement provisions of the Elections Bill, by Daniel Greenberg, Speaker’s Counsel for Domestic Legislation, and the Secretary to the Committee.

6. Strategy and Policy Statement: Consideration of approach

The Committee agreed its approach to exercising its anticipated statutory powers regarding the Strategy and Policy Statement and oversight of the Electoral Commission.

7. Any other business

There was no other business.

[The Committee adjourned]

Appendix: Extract from Members’ register of financial interests

Gove, Michael (Surry Heath) (as at 29 November 2021)

2. (a) Support linked to an MP but received by a local party organisation or indirectly via a central party organisation

Name of donor: Information Edge

Address of donor: Token House, 11–12 Tokenhouse Yard, London EC2R 7AS

Amount of donation, or nature and value if donation in kind: £6,000 in monthly payments of £500 between January and December 2020

Donor status: company, registration 05337528

(Registered 08 January 2020)

Name of donor: Copeland Blue Ltd

Address of donor: Seebeck House, 1 Seebeck Place, Knowhill, Milton Keynes MK5 8FR

Amount of donation or nature and value if donation in kind: £2,500 for the year 2020, in monthly payments of £250, from January to October 2020

Donor status: company, registration 06764638

(Registered 20 March 2020; updated 06 January 2021)

Name of donor: The Dental Centre

Address of donor: 19 Station Road, Addlestone, Surrey KT15 2AL

Amount of donation or nature and value if donation in kind: £3,000 paid in monthly instalments of £250 a month from October 2020 to September 2021

Donor status: company, registration 05971338

(Registered 13 November 2020)

Name of donor: Strangers Gallery Dining Club

Address of donor: Curzon House, Church Road, Windlesham GU20 6BH

Amount of donation or nature and value if donation in kind: £5,000

Donor status: members' association (unincorporated)

(Registered 20 November 2020)

Name of donor: Magna Carta Club

Address of donor: Curzon House, Church Road, Windlesham GU20 6BH

Amount of donation or nature and value if donation in kind: £7,500

Donor status: unincorporated association

(Registered 15 January 2021)

Name of donor: Information Edge

Address of donor: Token House, 11–12 Tokenhouse Yard, London EC2R 7AS

Amount of donation, or nature and value if donation in kind: £6,000 in monthly payments of £500 between January and December 2021

Donor status: company, registration 05337528

(Registered 15 January 2021)

Name of donor: Peter Lumley

Address of donor: private

Amount of donation, or nature and value if donation in kind: £5,000

Donor status: individual

(Registered 10 February 2021)

Name of donor: Magna Carta Club

Address of donor: Curzon House, Church Road, Windlesham GU20 6BH

Amount of donation or nature and value if donation in kind: £2,500

Donor status: unincorporated association

(Registered 29 April 2021)

Name of donor: Strangers Gallery Dining Club

Address of donor: Curzon House, Church Road, Windlesham GU20 6BH

Amount of donation or nature and value if donation in kind: £9,000

Donor status: members' association (unincorporated)

(Registered 21 June 2021)

Name of donor: The Dental Centre

Address of donor: 19 Station Road, Addlestone, Surrey KT15 2AL

Amount of donation or nature and value if donation in kind: £3,000 paid in monthly instalments of £250 a month from October 2021

Donor status: company, registration 05971338

(Registered 10 November 2021)

Name of donor: Magna Carta Club

Address of donor: Curzon House, Church Road, Windlesham GU20 6BH

Amount of donation or nature and value if donation in kind: £3,000

Donor status: unincorporated association

(Registered 10 November 2021)

2. (b) Any other support not included in Category 2(a)

Name of donor: Lord Philip Harris of Peckham

Address of donor: private

Amount of donation or nature and value if donation in kind: £10,000

Date received: 11 February 2021

Date accepted: 11 February 2021

Donor status: individual

(Registered 17 February 2021)

Name of donor: Alan Massie

Address of donor: private

Amount of donation, or nature and value if donation in kind: £20,000

Date received: 24 May 2021

Date accepted: 26 May 2021

Donor status: individual

(Registered 01 June 2021)

Name of donor: Zachariasz Gertler

Address of donor: private

Amount of donation or nature and value if donation in kind: £50,000

Date received: 5 August 2021

Date accepted: 6 August 2021

Donor status: individual

(Registered 26 August 2021)

Name of donor: Zachariasz Gertler

Address of donor: private

Amount of donation or nature and value if donation in kind: £50,000

Date received: 6 August 2021

Date accepted: 6 August 2021

Donor status: individual

(Registered 26 August 2021)

3. Gifts, benefits and hospitality from UK sources

I have accepted Honorary Membership for life of the Carlton Club. (Registered 19 December 2014)

Name of donor: The Arts Club Ltd

Address of donor: 40 Dover Street, London W1S 4NP

Amount of donation, or nature and value if donation in kind: Honorary Membership of Club for myself and my wife, total value £4,000 (for each of us, £2,000 annual subscription).

Date received: 4 February 2020 to 3 February 2021

Date accepted: 4 February 2020

Donor status: company, registration 00047802

(Registered 04 February 2020)

Name of donor: The Arts Club Ltd

Address of donor: 40 Dover Street, London W1S 4NP

Amount of donation, or nature and value if donation in kind: Honorary Membership of Club

for myself and my wife, total value £5,000 (for each of us, £2,500 annual subscription).

Date received: 4 March 2021 to 3 March 2022

Date accepted: 4 March 2021

Donor status: company, registration 00047802

(Registered 09 March 2021)

Name of donor: Cliveden LitFest

Address of donor: Cliveden House Hotel, Taplow Berks SL6 0JF

Amount of donation or nature and value if donation in kind: hotel accommodation for one night £885 (incl breakfast); dinner £70; drinks reception £50; total value £1,005

Date received: 23–24 October 2021

Date accepted: 23 October 2021

Donor status: other (not-for-profit organisation)

(Registered 10 November 2021)

5. Gifts and benefits from sources outside the UK

Name of donor: Banco Santander SA

Address of donor: Paseo Pereda, 9 – 12, 39004 Santander (Cantabria), Spain

Amount of donation or nature and value if donation in kind: Two tickets, including hospitality, to a football match (UEFA Champions League Final 2021) at the Estádio do Dragão, Porto, Portugal, total value £2,500

Date received: 29 May 2021

Date accepted: 29 May 2021

Donor status: company, registration ESA39000013

(Registered 25 June 2021)

Appendix: Extract from Members' register of financial interests

Betts, Clive (Sheffield South East) (as at 29 November 2021)

1. Employment and earnings

6 September 2021, payment of £275 from Ipsos MORI, 3 Thomas More Square, London E1W 1YW, for a survey. Hours: 50 mins. Fee paid direct to my constituency party.

(Registered 04 November 2021)

Payments from Savanta ComRes, 3 Melville St, Edinburgh EH3 7PE, for surveys. All fees paid direct to my constituency party.

22 July 2021, payment of £75. Hours: 20 mins. (Registered 08 November 2021)

3 September 2021, payment of £130. Hours: 30 mins. (Registered 08 November 2021)

7 September 2021, payment of £75. Hours: 20 mins. (Registered 08 November 2021)

1 November 2021, payment of £75. Hours: 20 mins. (Registered 08 November 2021)

9. Family members employed and paid from parliamentary expenses

I employ my partner, James Thomas, as Senior Parliamentary Assistant.

Appendix: Extract from Members' register of financial interests

O'Brien, Neil (Harborough) (as at 29 November 2021)

1. Employment and earnings

28 January 2021, received £310.68 from Guardian News & Media, Kings Place, 90 York Way,

London N1 9GU, for an article for the Observer. Hours: 1 hr. (Registered 09 February 2021)

25 March 2021, received £375 from Guardian News & Media, Kings Place, 90 York Way,

London N1 9GU, for syndication of previous article for the Observer. Hours: no additional hours.

(Registered 29 March 2021)

8. Miscellaneous

From 25 April 2018, a member of the advisory board of Onward, a think tank which aims to produce modernising ideas to address some of the biggest challenges facing the UK. This is an unpaid role. (Registered 16 June 2020)

From 25 April 2020 until 16 September 2021, Secretary and sole Director of China Research Group Ltd (CRG), a company limited by guarantee which considers the longer term challenges associated with the rise of China and its industrial and diplomatic policies. This was an unpaid role. (Registered 16 June 2020; updated 07 October 2021)

Formal Minutes of the meeting on 9 June 2022 in the Speaker’s Study

Mr Speaker, in the Chair

Clive Betts
Andrew Stephenson

Owen Thompson
William Wragg

(Private)

1. Introductions and declarations of interest

Andrew Stephenson was introduced as a new member of the Committee, having been appointed by the former Prime Minister to exercise concurrently the functions of the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on the Committee. Andrew Stephenson did not declare any interests which are not already included in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

William Wragg was introduced as a new member of the Committee, appointed by the Speaker. William Wragg did not declare any interests which are not already included in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

2. Minutes of last meeting

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of 27 April 2022.

3. Appointment of Committee spokesperson

The Committee noted Cat Smith’s appointment as spokesperson for the Committee, replacing Chris Matheson.

4. Consideration of draft Strategy and Policy Statement

The Committee was briefed on the draft Strategy and Policy Statement for the Electoral Commission by Daniel Greenberg, Speaker’s Counsel for Domestic Legislation.

The Committee considered the draft Statement, and agreed to reconvene to further consider the draft Statement once the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee has published its response to the consultation on the draft Statement.

5. Any other business

There was no other business.

[The Committee adjourned

Formal Minutes of the meeting on 2 November 2022 in the Speaker's Study

Mr Speaker, in the Chair

Clive Betts
Cat Smith
Craig Mackinlay

Rachel Hopkins
Owen Thompson

(Private)

1. Introductions and declarations of interest

Rachel Hopkins was introduced as a new member of the Committee, appointed by the Speaker. In addition to those included in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, Rachel Hopkins declared that she worked for the Electoral Commission and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, over 20 years ago.

2. Minutes of last meeting

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of 27 October 2022.

3. Publication of correspondence

The Committee agreed to publish the following correspondence:

- Letter from Shaun McNally regarding implementation of the Elections Act update (dated 21.10.22)
- Letter from Shaun McNally regarding an update on the Political Finance Online Project (dated 24.10.22)

4. Appointment of Electoral Commissioners

The Committee agreed to re-appoint Dame Sue Bruce as the Electoral Commissioner with responsibility in relation to Scotland, for a further three-year term, commencing on 1 January 2024 and ending on 31 December 2026.

The Committee agreed to commence the process to replace Rob Vincent as the Electoral Commissioner with responsibility in relation to Local Government, when his current term expires on 31 December 2023. The Committee agreed to appoint a panel to conduct the recruitment and to provide to the Speaker and the Committee with a ranked list of appointable candidates. The Committee agreed that Philippa Helme should chair the panel, and that John Pullinger, Chair, Electoral Commission, and William Wragg and Cat Smith, Members, Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, should be members of the panel.

The Committee also agreed that the Speaker will write to the leaders of the qualifying parties in relation to the approaching end of term of Alexander Attwood as the Electoral Commissioner nominated by the smaller parties, to ask them to unanimously put Alexander Attwood forward for re-appointment, or to put forward the names of candidates for consideration. The Committee agreed that, if the leaders of the qualifying parties nominate candidates to replace Alexander Attwood, the panel referenced above should conduct the assessment of the candidates.

5. Briefing and discussion of lines of questioning

The Committee was briefed by Louise McNair (Scrutiny Unit), and then discussed lines of questioning for the private evidence taking with Electoral Commission witnesses.

6. Electoral Commission: Autumn update

The Committee took evidence in private from John Pullinger, Chair, Sean McNally, Chief Executive, and Louise Edwards, Director of Regulation, Electoral Commission.

7. Any other business

There was no other business.

[The Committee adjourned

Formal Minutes of the meeting on 20 December 2022 in the Speaker’s Study

Mr Speaker, in the Chair

Clive Betts

Rachel Hopkins

Cat Smith

Owen Thompson

(Private)

1. Minutes of last meeting

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of 2 November 2022.

2. Strategy and Policy Statement consultation

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

The Committee agreed its response to the consultation.

The Committee agreed to publish its response as its Third Report 2022, Response to the Government’s consultation on the draft Strategy and Policy Statement for the Electoral Commission (HC 967).

3. Any other business

There was no other business.

[The Committee adjourned

Formal Minutes of the meeting on 15 March 2023 in the Speaker's Study

Mr Speaker, in the Chair

Clive Betts
Cat Smith

Rachel Hopkins
Owen Thompson

(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

(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.

(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