



8th meeting  
COND/22-23

## Conduct Committee

### Minutes of the meeting on Wednesday 14 June 2023 at 4pm in Residence Room I and via MS Teams

*Present:*

Lord Blair of Boughton	Vanessa Davies (via Teams)
Cindy Butts (via Teams)	Lord Garnier
Mark Castle	Baroness Mallalieu (via Teams)
Andrea Coomber (via Teams)	Baroness Manningham-Buller (Chair)

*With the Clerk Assistant*

An apology was received from Lord Scriven

### **DELIBERATION IN PRIVATE**

#### **1. Minutes of the meeting on 19 April 2023**

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

#### **2. Oral update by the Chair**

The Chair provided an oral update.

Tom Wilson (Registrar of Lords' Interests) provided an update on the annual audit of members' interests and thanked the Assistant Registrar and the Conduct Assistant for their work on the audit. This year's audit had achieved a 100% response from members within the requested timescale, which was an improvement on previous years.

Chloe Mawson (Clerk Assistant) provided an update on the ICGS Assurance Group (previously the Change Control Group), which would meet for the first time on 3 July. It was noted that the purpose of the Group had been altered from its original intended purpose of coordinating changes to the ICGS. As the Group would have no decision-making powers, relevant matters would still need to be decided by the Conduct Committee. The Chair thanked Andrea Coomber for agreeing to represent the Committee as a member of the Group.

#### **3. Commissioners' office oral update**

Michael Torrance (Standards Clerk) updated the Committee on current investigations.



#### **4. The House of Lords Commissioners for Standards Annual Report 2022–23** (COND/22–23/26)

The Chair welcomed the Commissioners to the meeting and thanked them for their annual report and their work during the last year.

The Commissioners presented the 2022-23 Annual Report and emphasised the main themes, including the decrease in the number of complaints received, the increase in complaints concerning social media and the first use of the agreed resolution process. The Commissioners noted that, when appointed, they had been asked to focus on speed of investigations and simplifying reports. They felt significant progress had been made in those regards, and they intended to continue improving these areas going forward.

The Committee discussed potential reasons for the decrease in complaints and possible improvements to the complaints process. The Committee welcomed the Commissioners' suggestion for a short document to be produced drawing members' attention to common breaches of the Code to encourage compliance. The Committee also welcomed the use of the agreed resolution provision.

The Committee discussed social media including the guidance that had been produced by the Steering Group for Change. The Committee *agreed* to return to this matter at a future meeting.

*The Commissioners left the meeting.*

#### **5. Consultation on parliamentary advice and services**

Note by the Registrar of Lords' Interests (COND/22–23/27)

Tom Wilson (Registrar of Lords' Interests) presented the paper, which considered the responses from members to the Committee's consultation on parliamentary advice and services.

The Committee agreed to consider the position of members holding public sector roles at the next meeting, following which a report would be published with final proposals.

#### **6. Consultation on precautionary exclusion of members charged with serious criminal offences**

Note by the Clerk (COND/22–23/28)

Chris Johnson (Clerk of the Journals) presented the note on the Commission's consultation on precautionary exclusion of members charged with serious criminal offences. The Committee noted that following the consideration of the proposals by the two Commissions, the preferred approaches in the two Houses had diverged. The Committee considered how to respond. Some felt that the two Houses should be more aligned with one another in their approach to the issue.

Others felt that the emphasis should be on the risk posed to individuals on the parliamentary estate. Concern was expressed about how “serious” crime would be defined. Others felt that the risk of reputational damage to the House should also be considered, not just the risk posed to individuals. The Committee *agreed* that the Chair should respond to the consultation on its behalf.

*Andrea Coomber left the meeting.*

## **7. Proposed minor changes to the Code and Guide**

Note by the Standards Clerk (COND/22–23/29)

Michael Torrance (Standards Clerk) presented the note. Following Baroness Cox’s personal statement of apology to the House, it had been noted that the House had agreed in 2017 to remove an explicit statement in the Guide that the Commissioner could propose personal statements as remedial action, but without explicitly ruling out the option. As a result, the position required clarification. The Committee *agreed* that the Commissioner should continue to have the option of proposing a personal statement of apology as remedial action. This did not require any further action from the House.

The Committee *agreed* the miscellaneous minor amendments to the Code and Guide proposed in the note’s annex.

## **8. Draft report on changes to the Code and Guide**

Draft report (COND/22–23/30)

The Committee noted it had already agreed to the amendments in the draft report. The Committee discussed whether to increase the shareholding threshold from £50,000 to £70,000 to align with the House of Commons, or whether to increase it to the previously agreed figure of £100,000. Some members felt that the different context of the two Houses meant that the Lords’ threshold did not need to be as low as the Commons. Noting that the threshold had not be updated since 2010, the Committee affirmed the previous figure of £100,000. The Committee further agreed that the Clerk should explain to the Commons Standards Committee clerk why the Committee had chosen to maintain its suggested threshold of £100,000.

## **9. The Conduct of Lord Ranger**

Commissioner’s Report (COND/22–23/31), Note by the Commissioner for Standards (COND/22–23/32)

The Committee took note of the report on the conduct of Lord Ranger and a note from the Commissioner. The Committee discussed its themes of social media and confidentiality, as well as the attempt at securing an agreed resolution between the parties, which the Committee



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welcomed in principle. Some members felt that the dissemination of social media guidance to members would help avoid future cases of this nature.

The Committee discussed the issue of confidentiality, and whether action should or could be taken against those who breached the provision. Some members felt that it was essential that complainants are not deterred from complaining because they think they may be accused of leaking information. Other members emphasised the importance of the relationship with the complainant requiring trust and understanding. It was suggested that preventative measures should be introduced. The Committee *agreed* to consider this matter further.

## **10. Any Other Business**

The Conduct Committee would next meet on Wednesday 12 July at 4pm.

*The Committee adjourned.*

Christopher Johnson  
Clerk to the Conduct Committee  
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