



9th meeting
COND/22-23

Conduct Committee

Minutes of the meeting on Wednesday 12 July 2023 at 4pm in 2-03 Millbank House and via MS Teams

Present:

Lord Blair of Boughton
Cindy Butts (via Teams)
Mark Castle (via Teams)
Andrea Coomber

Vanessa Davies (via Teams)
Lord Garnier
Baroness Mallalieu
Baroness Manningham-Buller (Chair)

With the Clerk Assistant

An apology was received from Lord Scriven.

DELIBERATION IN PRIVATE

1. Minutes of the meeting on 14 June 2023

The minutes of the last meeting were approved.

2. Oral update by the Chair

The Chair provided an oral update. She paid tribute to Lord Brown of Eaton-under-Heywood, a former member of the Conduct Committee, who had passed away.

The Chair noted that three members of the House had been named in a report by the House of Commons Privileges Committee about interference in the investigation into former Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and the House of Commons had subsequently sent a message to the Lords to consider this matter further. The Committee agreed that the message did not engage the Code of Conduct and was a matter for the Procedure and Privileges Committee.

The Chair reported that the Clerk of the Journals and Registrar of Lords' Interests had met with the Crossbenchers on 12 July. It was felt that they had been well received.

The Chair noted that some members of the Committee had been invited to meet with the Leader of the House to discuss possible changes to the leave of absence scheme.

3. Commissioners' office oral update

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



4. ICGS update

- ICGS Assurance Group meeting
- Update from the ICGS Director and the ICGS Lords Lead
- ICGS update paper (June 2023) from the ICGS Director

Thea Walton (ICGS Director) presented the paper. It was noted that the ICGS was receiving a lot of attention, due to recent public criticism. The paper highlighted that most cases were progressing on time and that there was confidence in the new quality assurance measures that had been introduced. The ICGS was running a significant outreach programme to engage staff about the processes and support available. The Assurance Group meeting took place in early July, and the next meeting would take place in September.

The Committee asked Thea Walton to elaborate on some points in the paper, including on the independence of investigations, timeliness, and stakeholder engagement.

Alex Smith (ICGS Lords Lead) provided an update. The Behaviour Code seminars were continuing to receive positive feedback. A Behaviour Code awareness programme was being developed with culture change staff, and other ways to engage members were also being explored. The ICGS team had analysed its data on confidentiality breaches. It was noted that most cases experienced no breaches, and many of the disclosures that did occur took place prior to the complaint being formally submitted. The ICGS team were considering options to mitigate further breaches, including revising its communications, developing IT systems to identify breaches, and identifying risk factors for future breaches.

5. Public sector roles

Note by the Registrar of Lords' Interests (COND/22–23/33)

Tom Wilson (Registrar of Lords' Interests) presented the paper.

The Committee discussed the definition of public sector roles and the implications of the suggested changes.

The Committee *agreed* the suggested changes, which would be added to the forthcoming report on parliamentary advice and services.

6. Consultation on parliamentary advice and services – Draft Report

Note by the Registrar of Lords' Interests (COND/22–23/34)

The draft report was *agreed*.

7. Social media

Note by the Clerk (COND/22-23/35)

The Committee discussed the social media guidance produced by the Steering Group for Change. Chloe Mawson (Clerk Assistant) briefed the Committee on the Commission's recent discussion of the guidance. The Commission had also discussed the possibility of introducing a disrepute clause, on which it wanted to seek the view of the Conduct Committee. The Committee noted that it had previously discussed introducing a disrepute clause.

Some members felt that the social media guidance should place more emphasis on the potential impact on the reputation of the House, and that members should be reminded to treat social media in the same way as other forms of publication. The Committee discussed which online platforms should be classified as social media in the guidance. Some members felt that the guidance should also advise members on how to deal with, and respond to, online provocation, and some felt that the guidance should be provided to new members as part of their introduction to the House.

The Committee discussed the concept of a disrepute clause. Some members felt strongly that a disrepute clause should be introduced. Other members felt that it was important to consider the parameters of a such a clause, including whether it should extend to the private lives of members.

The Committee agreed to reiterate its suggestion that the Commission should publish the social media guidance.

The Chair requested a paper on the disrepute clause for the Committee to discuss at its next meeting.

8. Any Other Business

The Conduct Committee would next meet on Wednesday 13 September at 4pm.

The Committee adjourned.

Christopher Johnson
Clerk to the Conduct Committee
x3828