

Political Parties, Elections and  
Referendums Act 2000



The Speaker

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**The Speaker's Committee on  
the Electoral Commission**

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**Second Report 2024**

Work of the Committee in 2023–24

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# The Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission

The Speaker's Committee is a statutory body whose role is defined by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, as amended by the Elections Act 2022, and the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. The work of the Committee relates to the Electoral Commission and the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE). The Committee reviews the annual estimates of the resources the Electoral Commission and LGBCE, in order to ensure they are consistent with the efficient and cost-effective discharge of their functions. It also considers the two organisations' five-year plans.

The Speaker's Committee oversees the recruitment processes for the Chair of the Electoral Commission, Electoral Commissioners and the Chair of the LGBCE. The candidates for these posts are then approved by the House of Commons and appointed by the Queen.

The Speaker's Committee also has the power to examine the performance by the Electoral Commission of the Commission's duty to have regard to a Strategy and Policy Statement. The Committee is one of the three bodies the Government is statutorily required to consult before the Secretary of State can lay a Strategy and Policy Statement for Parliament's approval.

## Current membership

[Rt Hon. Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP](#) (Speaker; Chorley) (Chair)

[Rushanara Ali MP](#) (Labour; Bethnal Green and Stepney)

[Florence Eshalomi MP](#) (Labour; Vauxhall and Camberwell Green)

[Stephen Gethins MP](#) (Scottish National Party; Arbroath and Broughty Ferry)

[Simon Hoare MP](#) (Conservative; North Dorset)

[Rachel Hopkins MP](#) (Labour; Luton South and South Bedfordshire)

[Jim McMahon MP](#) (Labour; Oldham West, Chadderton and Royton)

[Rt Hon. Angela Rayner MP](#) (Labour; Ashton-under-Lyne)

[Lisa Smart MP](#) (Liberal Democrat; Hazel Grove)

[Rt Hon. Sir Jeremy Wright KC MP](#) (Conservative; Kenilworth and Southam)

## Powers

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

## Publication

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Committee reports are published on the Committee's [website](#) and in print by Order of the House.

## Contacts

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# Work of the Committee in 2023–24

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 PERA, 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 2022 to 31 March 2023. This report covers the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

## 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 were the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Chair of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee<sup>1</sup>, and the Speaker of the House of Commons, who chairs the Committee. In addition, Section 2A of PERA allows the functions of the Secretary of State to be exercised concurrently by a Minister appointed by the Prime Minister.
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*

- Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP

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<sup>1</sup> Following the transfer of responsibility for elections policy from the Cabinet Office to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

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

- 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*

- Lee Rowley MP (until 16 January 2024)
- Simon Hoare MP (from 16 January 2024)

*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*

- Felicity Buchan MP

*Members appointed by Mr Speaker*

- Kirsty Blackman MP (from 12 September 2023)
- Rachel Hopkins MP
- Craig Mackinlay MP
- Cat Smith MP
- Owen Thompson MP (until 12 September 2023)
- William Wragg MP (until 4 March 2024)

## Meetings

**6.** The Committee met five times during the period covered by this report. The minutes of the Committee's meetings are reproduced in Appendix A.

## 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. Cat Smith was the Committee's spokesperson during this period. She answered four written parliamentary questions, 15 oral questions and 17 supplementary questions on behalf of the Committee during the period covered by this report.

## Strategy and Policy Statement

8. Over the period covered by this report, the Committee continued its consideration of the Government's plans to designate a statutory Strategy and Policy Statement for the Electoral Commission. In the previous year the Committee published a report providing its response to the Government's consultation on the draft Strategy and Policy Statement.
9. Following the consultation, the Government made changes to the draft Statement in light of the responses to their consultation and laid a revised version of the draft Statement, along with a report outlining their response to the consultation, before both Houses on 8 June 2023.
10. The Speaker's Committee met on 12 June and 4 September 2023 to consider its response to the revised draft Statement. The Committee's consideration was informed by legal advice from the Office of Speaker's Counsel. The Committee published its response to the revised Statement in its Third Report of 2023<sup>2</sup>. In summary, the Committee concluded that it did support the revised draft Statement, setting out its reasoning in full in its report.
11. On 6 February 2024, Parliament approved the Strategy and Policy Statement, via a resolution of each House, and it was designated by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 29 February 2024<sup>3</sup>.

## 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<sup>4</sup>. Up to six are 'ordinary' Commissioners who may not be members or employees of a political party<sup>5</sup>. 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 party<sup>6</sup> for consideration for appointment; they are described in the statute as 'nominated'

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2 Third Report of 2023, *Response to the draft Strategy and Policy Statement for the Electoral Commission*, HC1809

3 Letter from Simon Hoare MP, Minister for Local Government, to Mr Speaker, regarding the designation of Strategy Policy Statement for the Electoral Commission, dated 20 February 2024

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

5 PPERA s3(4)

6 PPERA s3A(2)

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<sup>7</sup>.

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 process to replace Alexander Attwood as the Commissioner nominated by the smaller parties when his term ended in January 2024. The Committee's Second Report of 2023 set out the procedure followed by the Speaker's Committee during the selection of the candidate to fill this position. As such, at its meeting on 12 June 2023, the Committee agreed to recommend that Mrs Sheila Ritchie be appointed as an Electoral Commissioner, for a three-year term, having been nominated by the smaller parties.
15. Similarly, the Committee oversaw processes to replace Rob Vincent CBE as an Ordinary Commissioner and to consider the reappointment of Dame Susan Bruce DBE as an Ordinary Commissioner with special responsibility for Scotland. The procedures for these appointments were also set out in the Committee's Second Report of 2023. The Committee agreed that Ms Caroline Mills be put forward for appointment as a Commissioner for a four-year term and that Dame Susan be reappointed for a further three-year term.
16. On 11 September 2023 the House approved a motion that a Humble Address be presented to His Majesty to appoint Sheila Ritchie with effect from 1 February 2024, Carole Mills from 1 January 2024 and to re-appoint Dame Susan Bruce from 1 January 2024.

## Financial scrutiny

17. The Committee's role is to examine the estimates of resources needed for both the Electoral Commission and the LGBCE. It must also consider a 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.
18. 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

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7 PPERA s3(4) and s3(4A)



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.

- 19.** In the period covered by this report the Committee considered a Supplementary Estimate for 2023/24 for the Electoral Commission and Main Estimates for 2024/25 for both the Electoral Commission and the LG BCE.

## Electoral Commission Supplementary Estimate 2023/24

- 20.** In relation to the Electoral Commission's Supplementary Estimate for 2023/24, Rt Hon. Laura Trott MBE MP, the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, wrote to the Committee stating that if the Commission had been subject to the Estimates process applied to Government departments, then two of its requests would not have been supported. Namely a request for funding to cover the Electoral Commission's pay settlement and a request for a budget exchange, which is a mechanism that allows a forecasted underspend to transfer from one year to the next.
- 21.** In the discharge of the Speaker's Committee's scrutiny function, if the Committee does not follow any advice provided by the Treasury, it is required to include a statement in its annual report to the House under paragraph 1 of Schedule 2 of the 2000 Act. As such, given the decision to approve the Supplementary Estimate in full, we summarise the previous Committee's decision below. We note that the Committee also set out its reasoning in a report in February 2024 at the time the Supplementary Estimate was laid before the House for approval.
- 22.** Despite the previous Committee's dissatisfaction over the Electoral Commission's handling of its 2023/24 staff pay settlement, on balance it decided, having considered the Treasury's advice and the Commission's position, to approve the Supplementary Estimate without modification. It did so, at that time, observing that the regulated period leading up to the General Election would be commencing shortly and the Committee did not wish to apply any pressure on the Commission that might have a detrimental impact on the delivery of its core services during that key period around the Election.
- 23.** The second matter relating to a request for budget exchange had been a misunderstanding. Subsequently, Treasury officials accepted that the Electoral Commission had made an error when describing the transaction on the documentation supporting the Estimate.

- 24.** While the Committee approved the Estimate in full, it did so on the basis of an undertaking that the Commission would be taking all necessary steps to strengthen its finance systems and address the shortfalls already identified by the National Audit Office in its financial function. The Supplementary Estimate increased the Electoral Commission’s Resource DEL by £1,910,000 and reduced the Capital DEL by £550,000, so that in 2023/24 the total Resource DEL was £30,890,000 and the total Capital DEL was £1,450,000.<sup>8</sup>

## Electoral Commission Main Estimate 2024/25

- 25.** In relation to the Electoral Commission’s Main Estimate for 2024/25, the Committee agreed an Estimate from the Electoral Commission containing a voted Resource DEL of £45,706,000, a voted Capital DEL of £2,211,000, a voted Resource AME of £50,000, and a voted Capital AME of £100,000 as consistent with the economical, efficient and effective discharge of its functions in that year.
- 26.** In examining the Electoral Commission’s Main Estimate, the Committee had regard to the Comptroller and Auditor General’s economy, efficiency and effectiveness latest report relating to the Commission on the subject of voter engagement, as required under Paragraph 14(4)(a) of Schedule 1 of PPERA. The Committee also consulted the Treasury, which did not raise any concerns<sup>9</sup>. The Committee agreed to lay the Estimate before the House unmodified.

## Local Government Boundary Commission for England’s Main Estimate 2024/25

- 27.** In relation to the LGBCE’s Main Estimate, the Committee agreed a voted Resource DEL for 2024/25 of £2,769,000, 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.
- 28.** 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 Schedule 1 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. The Committee also consulted the Treasury, which did not raise any concerns regarding the Estimate<sup>10</sup>. The Committee agreed to lay the Estimate before the House unmodified.

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8 Electoral Commission, Supplementary Estimate 2023/24: Estimates Memorandum.

9 Letter from Rt Hon. Laura Trott MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, dated 5 March 2024

10 Letter from Rt Hon. Laura Trott MP, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, dated 1 March 2024

## Designation of Accounting Officers

- 29.** Under Schedule 1, paragraph 19(1) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, it is for the Speaker's Committee to designate an employee of the Commission as its Accounting Officer. Following the resignation of Shaun McNally as Chief Executive of the Commission in November 2023, the Committee agreed at its meeting on 22 November 2023 to designate David Moran as interim Accounting Officer from 1 December 2023. And then on 6 March 2024 the Committee approved the designation of Vijay Rangarajan as Accounting Officer, following his appointment as the new Chief Executive of the Commission on 4 March 2024.
- 30.** Similarly, under Schedule 1, paragraph 16(1) of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009, it is for the Speaker's Committee to designate an employee of the LGBCE as its Accounting Officer. Accordingly, the Committee agreed by correspondence to designate Ailsa Irvine as the LGBCE's new accounting officer from 1 January 2024 as the incoming Chief Executive following the retirement of Jolyon Jackson CBE in December 2023.

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# Appendix: Formal minutes of the Speaker's Committee

## 12 June 2023, Speaker's Study

### Members present

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

## 4 September 2023, Speaker's Study

### Members present

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

## 22 November 2023, Speaker's Study

### Members present

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 Officer.

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.**

On the 8 December 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.



# 9 January 2024, Speaker's Study

## Members present

Mr Speaker, in the Chair

Clive Betts

Rachel Hopkins

Kristy Blackman

Cat Smith

Felicity Buchan

William Wragg

## In Private

### 1. Minutes of last meeting

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of 22 November 2023. The Committee noted its best wishes to Craig Mackinlay and for his recovery.

### 2. Consideration of NAO reports and advice from Treasury

The Committee considered (i) the latest value for money report from the National Audit Office and (ii) the Treasury's advice on the Electoral Commission Supplementary Estimate for 2023/24.

### 3. Briefing and discussion of lines of questioning for session on the supplementary estimate

The Committee considered this matter.

### 4. Electoral Commission: supplementary estimate 2023/24

John Pullinger, Chair, Rob Vincent, interim Chief Executive Officer, and David Moran, Director of Finance, Electoral Commission, gave oral evidence on the Electoral Commission's supplementary estimate for 2023/24.

## 5. **Consideration of Electoral Commission supplementary Estimate 2023/24**

The Committee considered the Electoral Commission's supplementary estimate for 2023/24.

The Committee noted the Chief Secretary to the Treasury's view that the specific item requesting for funding to cover the cost of a pay rise above what the Commission had expected at the start of the financial year would not have been supported if it had been a request made through Government.

The Committee expressed concern over the Electoral Commission's decision to commit money for its staff pay settlement prior to seeking the approval of the Committee. It was noted that the Commission accepted that this was a mistake. The Commission had set out the steps it was taking to strengthen its internal financial function and processes to prevent such a recurrence and make its budgeting capability more effective.

On balance, having considered the Treasury's advice and the Commission's position, the Committee agreed to approve the Commission's supplementary estimate request without modification. The Committee did so noting the regulated period for next general period was commencing shortly and that a reduction at this point could have a detrimental impact on the Commission's core services.

The Committee agreed to publish comments on the Electoral Commission's supplementary estimate on its website.

## 6. **Any other business**

No items were raised.

[The Committee adjourned

## **Electoral Commission's Supplementary Supply Estimate 2023/24", HC593**

The Committee agreed by correspondence its First Report of 2024 entitled "Comments on the Electoral Commission's Supplementary Supply Estimate 2023/24", HC593.

# 6 March 2024, Committee Room 15

## Members present

Mr Speaker, in the Chair

Clive Betts

Rachel Hopkins

Simon Hoare

## In private

### 1. **Declarations of interests**

Simon Hoare was introduced as a new member of the Committee. Mr Hoare did not declare any interests in addition to those listed in the current Register of Members' Financial Interests.

### 2. **Minutes of last meeting**

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of 9 January 2024.

The Committee agreed to write to Mr William Wragg to thank him for his service to the Committee.

### 3. **Designation of Electoral Commission Accounting Officer**

The Committee agreed to approve the designation of Vijay Rangarajan as Accounting Officer of the Electoral Commission, following his appointment as Chief Executive.

### 4. **Electoral Commission Strategy and Policy Statement**

The Committee noted a letter from Simon Hoare, the Minister for Local Government, of 20 February 2024, on the designation of the Electoral Commission Strategy and Policy Statement.

## 5. **Consideration of Treasury advice on LGBCE and Electoral Commission Main Estimates 2024/25**

The Committee noted the Comptroller and Auditor General's economy, efficiency and effectiveness report on the subject of voter engagement, as required by Paragraph 14(4)(a) of Schedule 1 of PPERA. The Committee also noted the latest NAO report on the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

The Committee considered letters from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, dated 1st and 5th March 2024, on the Main Estimates for 2024/25 for the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and the Electoral Commission respectively. The Committee agreed to publish both letters.

## 6. **Publication of correspondence and explanatory memoranda**

The Committee agreed to publish:

- A letter from Professor Colin Mellors, Chair, LGBCE, regarding the Main Supply Estimate 2024/25 and corporate plan, dated 14 February 2024;
- LGBCE's Main Supply Estimate 2024/25 memorandum;
- A letter from Rob Vincent, interim Chief Executive, Electoral Commission, regarding the Main Supply Estimates 2024/25, dated 14 February 2024; and
- Electoral Commission's Main Supply Estimate 2024/25 memorandum.

## **In public**

## 7. **Local Government Boundary Commission for England Main Estimate 2024/25 and Corporate Plan**

Professor Colin Mellors OBE, Chair, Ailsa Irvine, Chief Executive, and Kathryn Towers, acting Director of Corporate Services, Local Government Boundary Commission for England gave oral evidence.

## 8. **Electoral Commission Main Estimate 2024/25 and Corporate Plan**

John Pullinger, Chair, Rob Vincent CBE, interim Chief Executive, Vijay Rangarajan CMG, Chief Executive, and David Moran, interim Director of Finance, Electoral Commission, gave oral evidence.

## **In private**

### **9. Consideration of Main Estimates 2024/25**

The Committee agreed to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's Main Estimate for 2024/25, and agreed to lay it before the House unmodified.

The Committee agreed to the Electoral Commission's Main Estimate for 2024/25, and agreed to lay it before the House modified.

### **10. Any other business**

There was no other business.

[The Committee adjourned