

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

Ninth Delegated Legislation Committee

ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Tuesday 7 March 2017

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Saturday 11 March 2017

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: GERAINT DAVIES

Bryant, Chris (*Rhondda*) (Lab)

† Campbell, Mr Alan (*Tynemouth*) (Lab)

† Duddridge, James (*Rochford and Southend East*) (Con)

† Ellis, Michael (*Deputy Leader of the House of Commons*)

Flynn, Paul (*Newport West*) (Lab)

† Graham, Richard (*Gloucester*) (Con)

† Hall, Luke (*Thornbury and Yate*) (Con)

† Heapey, James (*Wells*) (Con)

† Hollinrake, Kevin (*Thirsk and Malton*) (Con)

† Huddleston, Nigel (*Mid Worcestershire*) (Con)

Lucas, Ian C. (*Wrexham*) (Lab)

McFadden, Mr Pat (*Wolverhampton South East*) (Lab)

† Paterson, Mr Owen (*North Shropshire*) (Con)

† Smith, Cat (*Lancaster and Fleetwood*) (Lab)

† Smith, Julian (*Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household*)

† Tredinnick, David (*Bosworth*) (Con)

Ben Williams, *Committee Clerk*

† **attended the Committee**

Ninth Delegated Legislation Committee

Tuesday 7 March 2017

[GERAIN T DAVIES *in the Chair*]

Electoral Commission

8.55 am

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Michael Ellis): I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the motion, That the Motion in the name of Mr David Lidington relating to the appointment of Professor Elan Closs Stephens as an Electoral Commissioner shall be treated as if it related to an instrument subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Delegated Legislation Committees) in respect of which notice of a motion has been given that the instrument be approved.

The motion proposes that a Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that Her Majesty will appoint Professor Elan Closs Stephens as a member of the Electoral Commission for a period of four years, from 13 March 2017 to 12 March 2021. Professor Stephens will serve on the commission as electoral commissioner with special responsibility for Wales. The Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission has produced a report in relation to the appointment, its first report of 2017.

The vacancy has arisen because the term of office of Gareth Halliwell, the current commissioner with special responsibility for Wales, will come to an end on 12 March 2017, in a few days' time. Appointments to the Electoral Commission are made under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. Under the Act, the Speaker's Committee has a responsibility to oversee the selection of candidates for appointment to the Electoral Commission. Commissioners are appointed for a fixed term and may be reappointed up to a maximum term length of 10 years.

As is normal for such appointments, the Speaker's Committee established a recruitment panel to oversee the shortlisting and interviewing of candidates. It asked the Commissioner for Public Appointments to appoint a public appointment assessor to chair the recruitment panel; the commissioner nominated Mark Addison, a former civil service commissioner. The committee also agreed that the Presiding Officer of the Welsh Assembly should be invited to nominate a member of the panel, in recognition of the fact that under the Wales Act 2017, the commission is increasingly responsible to the Assembly

for its work in Wales; the Presiding Officer nominated Suzy Davies, Assembly Member for South West Wales. The other members of the panel were Sir John Holmes, chair of the Electoral Commission, and the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden), who is a member of the Speaker's Committee.

I am pleased to say that the unanimous view of the panel was that Professor Elan Closs Stephens should be appointed as electoral commissioner with special responsibility for Wales. It may interest this Committee to know that Professor Stephens is currently a member of the BBC Trust, serving as the national trustee for Wales and chair of the BBC's audience council for Wales. She is also currently the senior independent director on the civil service board of the Welsh Government. Her career in academia culminated in her appointment as professor of communications and creative industries at Aberystwyth University, where she is still an emeritus professor.

The Speaker's Committee received the board's report in January and agreed to the nomination. Professor Stephens's name was then put forward for the consultation with the leaders of the political parties represented at Westminster, as is required by statute. The statutory consultation provides an opportunity for the party leaders to comment, but they are not required to do so. The responses received to the consultation are published in the Speaker's Committee report.

If the motion is approved, Professor Stephens will serve on the Electoral Commission until March 2021. I hope that this Committee, and ultimately the House, will support her appointment and wish her well as she takes on these new responsibilities.

8.58 am

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I thank the Minister for introducing the motion about this important appointment. We believe that Professor Stephens appears to be a very good and proper choice for the role, and we are happy to support the motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Committee has considered the motion, That the Motion in the name of Mr David Lidington relating to the appointment of Professor Elan Closs Stephens as an Electoral Commissioner shall be treated as if it related to an instrument subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Delegated Legislation Committees) in respect of which notice of a motion has been given that the instrument be approved.

8.59 am

Committee rose.