

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

Second Delegated Legislation Committee

INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY
STANDARDS AUTHORITY

Monday 25 April 2016

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Friday 29 April 2016

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: MIKE GAPES

† Barwell, Gavin (*Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household*)
 † Chalk, Alex (*Cheltenham*) (Con)
 † Coffey, Dr Thérèse (*Deputy Leader of the House of Commons*)
 † Costa, Alberto (*South Leicestershire*) (Con)
 † Coyle, Neil (*Bermondsey and Old Southwark*) (Lab)
 Fello, Robert (*Stoke-on-Trent South*) (Lab)
 † Freer, Mike (*Finchley and Golders Green*) (Con)
 † Grady, Patrick (*Glasgow North*) (SNP)
 Knight, Sir Greg (*East Yorkshire*) (Con)

Leslie, Chris (*Nottingham East*) (Lab/Co-op)
 † Lilley, Mr Peter (*Hitchin and Harpenden*) (Con)
 † Mann, Scott (*North Cornwall*) (Con)
 † Morris, Grahame M. (*Easington*) (Lab)
 † Onn, Melanie (*Great Grimsby*) (Lab)
 † Prentis, Victoria (*Banbury*) (Con)
 † Reynolds, Emma (*Wolverhampton North East*) (Lab)
 † Soames, Sir Nicholas (*Mid Sussex*) (Con)

Gavin O'Leary, *Committee Clerk*

† **attended the Committee**

Second Delegated Legislation Committee

Monday 25 April 2016

[MIKE GAPES *in the Chair*]

Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority

4.30 pm

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): I beg to move,

That the Committee has considered the motion, That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that Her Majesty will appoint Ruth Evans to the office of Chair of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority for a period of 5 years with effect from 1 June 2016.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. The appointment has arisen due to the term of the current chair, Sir Ian Kennedy, coming to an end and I wish to thank Sir Ian, who has chaired the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority since its creation in 2009. The Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has produced a report—its first of 2016—in relation to this motion. The report was circulated to members of this Committee last week. The chair of IPSA is appointed under the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009. Under that Act, the Speaker is responsible for overseeing the selection of candidates for appointment to the board of IPSA, and any such nominated candidate must be approved by the Speaker's Committee, known as SCIPSA.

Although this is not a ministerial appointment, the Speaker has had regard to the code of practice for ministerial appointments to public bodies of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. He appointed a panel to conduct the shortlisting and interviewing of candidates, which was chaired by Dame Denise Platt, a former member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The other members of the panel were Ken Batty and Professor Chatterji, lay members of SCIPSA; Enid Rowlands, chair of the Solicitors Regulation Authority; and Laura Sandys, former Member for South Thanet.

The panel's role was to identify which candidates met the requirements for the role and were therefore appointable to the position of chair of IPSA. Mr Speaker would then meet all appointable candidates and put forward one candidate to SCIPSA for approval. On this occasion, the Committee identified only one appointable candidate—Ruth Evans. Mr Speaker met Ms Evans on 10 March and decided to recommend her appointment to SCIPSA. The Committee met Ms Evans on 15 March and gave its approval to her nomination, as required by the 2009 Act.

Ruth Evans has held a number of senior non-executive positions in both the public and private sectors. She was the first chair of the Bar Standards Board. She has also been chair of the Authority for Television on Demand, non-executive director of the National Audit Office and a senior non-executive director at CPP Group plc. Currently, she is a non-executive director at the Serious

Fraud Office, chair of the Payments Strategy Forum and a non-executive commissioner at the Independent Police Complaints Commission.

If the appointment is made, Ruth Evans will serve as chair of IPSA for five years until 31 May 2021. I hope that this Committee, and ultimately the House, will support her appointment. I wish Ms Evans well, in the expectation that she takes up her new post.

4.32 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to Sir Ian Kennedy, who has been chair of IPSA since its creation in 2009, following the public outcry about the misuse of MPs' expenses. He took on that role knowing that there would be intense public scrutiny of the decisions he made and—remarkably, I think—stayed in the post for seven years. He has played a key role in beginning to re-establish the public's trust in the standards and protocols of this place, as well as in Members of Parliament themselves.

I congratulate Ruth Evans on her appointment as the new chair of IPSA and on her great many talents and abilities, which have been shared with this Committee. At the risk of repeating the comments made by the Deputy Leader of the House, I note that among many other achievements, Ms Evans was the first chair of the Bar Standards Board, has been a non-executive director of the National Audit Office and was deputy chair of the Ofcom Consumer Panel. She is currently a non-executive director at the Serious Fraud Office, chair of the Payments Strategy Forum and a non-executive commissioner at the Independent Police Complaints Commission. She is clearly a highly capable and impressive appointee.

The post has been advertised widely through national newspapers, online outlets and the use of professional consultants. However, given the low regard in which MPs collectively are held, the Government will no doubt have considered potential concerns that the post, which seeks to regulate MPs' use of public funds, is ultimately appointed through parliamentary systems.

The Deputy Leader of the House might be able to advise me on the process, but it seems that the Speaker appoints an independent panel to oversee the advertising, the search and the shortlisting of candidates and that the panel then refers the shortlisted candidates back to the Speaker, although in practice the current Speaker opts to collaborate closely with the Speaker's Committee prior to the appointment. On this occasion, the Committee also chose to meet directly with the successfully appointed candidate before making its recommendation to the House. Will the Deputy Leader of the House confirm whether she believes the current process is sufficiently robust and that it will continue to be perceived as independent, so as to stand up to future scrutiny of IPSA, the new Chair and the procedures of this place?

4.35 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. My hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart), who served on the Speaker's Committee, has assured me that Ms Evans is a well-qualified candidate; we are very happy to add our support. It is important that such appointments are made in a fair and transparent manner and are open to scrutiny, and today's Committee

sitting is an important part of that process. It is important, too, that the members and chairs of such public boards are refreshed on a regular basis so that fresh perspectives can be brought to their operations. That is particularly important as IPSA continues to review its own procedures while carrying out its important task of restoring confidence in Parliament. We are happy to support the appointment today.

4.36 pm

Dr Coffey: The hon. Member for Great Grimsby asked whether I felt the process was sufficiently robust. I think there are sufficient safeguards, because the initial

interview is conducted by a panel of people who are not Members of Parliament. I understand that 20 to 25 people applied, four people were interviewed and then the panel put forward a recommendation. SCIPSA also has lay members, so the appointment is not simply rubber-stamped by MPs; there is still a further challenge. Consequently, it matters that people have confidence in the process, and I think that has been well established.

Question put and agreed to.

4.37 pm

Committee rose.

