

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

Seventh Delegated Legislation Committee

ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Tuesday 27 March 2018

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not later than

Saturday 31 March 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: GRAHAM STRINGER

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| † Brereton, Jack (<i>Stoke-on-Trent South</i>) (Con) | † Prentis, Victoria (<i>Banbury</i>) (Con) |
| † Campbell, Mr Alan (<i>Tynemouth</i>) (Lab) | Rashid, Faisal (<i>Warrington South</i>) (Lab) |
| † Davies, Glyn (<i>Montgomeryshire</i>) (Con) | Reeves, Ellie (<i>Lewisham West and Penge</i>) (Lab) |
| Docherty-Hughes, Martin (<i>West Dunbartonshire</i>) (SNP) | † Slaughter, Andy (<i>Hammersmith</i>) (Lab) |
| Flint, Caroline (<i>Don Valley</i>) (Lab) | † Spelman, Dame Caroline (<i>Meriden</i>) (Con) |
| † Knight, Julian (<i>Solihull</i>) (Con) | † Thomas, Derek (<i>St Ives</i>) (Con) |
| † Leadsom, Andrea (<i>Leader of the House of Commons</i>) | † Twigg, Derek (<i>Halton</i>) (Lab) |
| † Maynard, Paul (<i>Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury</i>) | † Vaz, Valerie (<i>Walsall South</i>) (Lab) |
| † Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con) | Robin James, <i>Committee Clerk</i> |
| | † attended the Committee |

Seventh Delegated Legislation Committee

Tuesday 27 March 2018

[GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

Electoral Commission

[*Relevant document: the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, First Report 2018, Appointment of an Electoral Commissioner, HC901, 14 March 2018.*]

2.30 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): 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 Sarah Chambers as an Electoral Commissioner with effect from 31 March 2018 for the period ending 30 March 2022.

The Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission has produced its first report of 2018 in relation to the motion. It may help if I set out the key points for the record. Electoral commissioners are appointed under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, as amended by the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009. 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, but the committee may recommend their reappointment where appropriate. The Speaker's Committee is not regulated by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, but it has chosen to follow OCPA-recommended best practice in its supervision of appointments. The OCPA code of practice for appointments to public bodies, which was published in April 2012, provides that no reappointment may be made

"without a satisfactory performance appraisal".

The Speaker's Committee was required to recruit a new electoral commissioner to replace the outgoing electoral commissioner, Toby Hobman, whose term of office expired on 31 December 2017. Mr Hobman had been a commissioner since 2010, serving two terms. As is normal for such appointments, Mr Speaker appointed a panel, which conducted the shortlisting and interviewing of candidates. The panel was chaired by Joanna Place, chief operating officer at the Bank of England. The other panel members were Sir John Holmes, chair of the Electoral Commission, and the hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South (Bridget Phillipson), a member of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission.

The independent panel initially recommended the appointment of Professor Sir Ian Kennedy to the position. That was endorsed by the Speaker's Committee. However, the House declined to appoint Sir Ian as an electoral commissioner in January. In view of the House's decision, the Speaker's Committee therefore decided to recommend that Sarah Chambers be appointed as an electoral commissioner. Ms Chambers was the independent panel's second-place candidate. She met all the essential criteria for the position, and was found to be very close in calibre to the initially recommended candidate.

Sarah Chambers currently serves on the board of the Competition and Markets Authority. She has a broad understanding of a wide range of complex organisations, political issues and regulatory frameworks, developed over many years working as an economic regulator and Government policy maker, and more recently as a board and committee member of a number of public organisations, including the Bar Standards Board. She was formerly a civil servant.

When the Speaker's Committee reaches a decision on an appointment, statute requires that the Speaker consult the leaders of political parties represented at Westminster on the proposal. The statutory consultation provides an opportunity for the party leaders to comment, but they are not required to do so. No concerns or objections were received to Sarah Chambers' proposed appointment as an electoral commissioner. If the appointment is made, Ms Chambers will serve as an electoral commissioner for four years.

I hope that the Committee, and ultimately the House, will support the appointment, and will wish the individual well as she takes up her new post.

2.33 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve with you in the Chair, Mr Stringer. I support what the Leader of the House has said, and I thank the outgoing commissioner, Toby Hobman, for his contribution to the Electoral Commission over the two terms that he served since 2010. His term of office, as the Leader of the House said, expired on 31 December 2017.

On 23 January 2018, the motion to appoint Sir Ian Kennedy as an electoral commissioner was negated on a Division. I thank the members of the independent panel—the chair, Joanna Place, Sir John Holmes, and my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Sunderland South—for their work in identifying a candidate. The Speaker's Committee has been independent, transparent and diligent in its work.

The usual process in such a situation is to look to the next person, if they are appointable. The recruitment panel's second-place candidate, Sarah Chambers, was therefore recommended for appointment as an electoral commissioner. Ms Chambers served on the board at the Competition and Markets Authority, and she is experienced as an economic regulator, Government policy maker and board and committee member of a number of public authorities.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I am listening with rapt attention to my hon. Friend's speech. I draw her attention to the fact that Sarah Chambers is also the chair of the Shepherd's Bush Families Project and Children's Centre, which is a fantastic organisation in my constituency that has been helping poor families for 30 years. That alone would recommend her to the board.

Valerie Vaz: I thank my hon. Friend for his assiduous work as a fantastic constituency MP, and he is clearly aware of Ms Chambers' good work. In the light of that, the Opposition endorse her appointment as an electoral commissioner.

Question put and agreed to.

2.36 pm

Committee rose.