

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

Fourth Delegated Legislation Committee

ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Tuesday 17 November 2020

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not later than

Saturday 21 November 2020

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: Ms ANGELA EAGLE

† Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	McKinnell, Catherine (<i>Newcastle upon Tyne North</i>) (Lab)
† Baker, Duncan (<i>North Norfolk</i>) (Con)	Mayhew, Jerome (<i>Broadland</i>) (Con)
Buchan, Felicity (<i>Kensington</i>) (Con)	† Morden, Jessica (<i>Newport East</i>) (Lab)
† Everitt, Ben (<i>Milton Keynes North</i>) (Con)	† Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob (<i>Leader of the House of Commons</i>)
† Fell, Simon (<i>Barrow and Furness</i>) (Con)	† Sambrook, Gary (<i>Birmingham, Northfield</i>) (Con)
† Freer, Mike (<i>Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household</i>)	Tami, Mark (<i>Alyn and Deeside</i>) (Lab)
Grady, Patrick (<i>Glasgow North</i>) (SNP)	Vaz, Valerie (<i>Walsall South</i>) (Lab)
† Hammond, Stephen (<i>Wimbledon</i>) (Con)	Bradley Albrow, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
Hendrick, Sir Mark (<i>Preston</i>) (Lab/Co-op)	† attended the Committee
Keeley, Barbara (<i>Worsley and Eccles South</i>) (Lab)	

Fourth Delegated Legislation Committee

Tuesday 17 November 2020

[Ms ANGELA EAGLE *in the Chair*]

Electoral Commission

2.30 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg):
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 re-appoint Dame Susan Bruce DBE as an Electoral Commissioner with effect from 1 January 2021 for the period ending on 31 December 2023; and Dame Elan Closs Stephens DBE as an Electoral Commissioner with effect from 13 March 2021 for the period ending on 12 March 2025.

May I say what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Eagle? It is the first time I have ever had the privilege.

The Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission has produced a report, its fourth of 2020, in relation to this 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 2000 Act, the Speaker's committee has a responsibility to oversee the selection of candidates for appointment to the Electoral Commission, including the re-appointment of commissioners.

Dame Susan Bruce's four-year term as the electoral commissioner with special responsibility for Scotland comes to an end on 31 December. Dame Elan Closs Stephens' four-year term as commissioner with special responsibility for Wales comes to an end on 12 March 2021. Sir John Holmes, the chairman of the Electoral Commission, wrote to Mr Speaker in February asking the Speaker's committee to consider whether to re-appoint Dame Susan Bruce for a further term of three years and Dame Elan Closs Stephens for a further term of four years.

Sir John provided the Speaker's committee with appraisals of the commissioners' performance. He described Dame Susan as

"an effective and valuable Commissioner, bringing a lot of experience of electoral processes through her previous roles in local government in Scotland, and a lot of knowledge of the political scene in Scotland".

He also referred to Dame Susan's role chairing the commission's audit committee. Sir John said that Dame Elan had been

"a hard-working and committed Commissioner over the last three years, and has contributed a great deal at a time of great electoral change in Wales".

He also noted Dame Elan's service as a member of the commission's audit committee. The Speaker's committee consulted the Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament about Dame Susan's re-appointment and the Presiding Officer of the Welsh Assembly about that of Dame Elan. Having considered this feedback and Sir John's appraisal, it agreed to recommend the two commissioners for re-appointment.

Once the Speaker's committee has reached a decision, statute requires that the proposed appointment or re-appointment be the subject of consultation with the registered leader of each registered party to which two or more Members of the House of Commons then belong. The statutory consultation provides an opportunity for the party leaders to comment, but they are not required to do so. No objections to these candidates were received in response to the consultation. If the re-appointments are made, Dame Susan will continue to serve as an electoral commissioner until the end of 2023 and Dame Elan until March 2025. I hope the re-appointments will have the support of the Committee and ultimately the House.

2.33 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): May I, too, say what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Eagle?

I thank the Leader of the House for today's motion on the re-appointment of the electoral commissioners for Scotland and Wales, Dame Susan Bruce and Dame Elan Closs Stephens. Mr Speaker has consulted with the Leader of the Opposition about these re-appointments and no objections were received, so we are happy to support them today. As the Leader of the House said, both candidates were recommended for re-appointment by the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission.

Dame Susan Bruce has a long record of service in local government. She is currently the electoral commissioner with responsibility for Scotland and her current term ends on 31 December. We, too, note that Sir John Holmes, chair of the Electoral Commission, told the committee that Dame Susan had been

"an effective and valuable Commissioner, bringing a lot of experience of electoral processes through her previous roles in local government in Scotland",

and noted her

"knowledge of the political scene in Scotland".

Turning to Dame Elan Closs Stephens, I declare an interest, as I was on the interview panel when we unanimously recommended her appointment as electoral commissioner for Wales back in 2017. As a representative of a Welsh constituency, I can say that she is very well known and respected, and has held a number of positions in Wales and has a speciality in cultural and broadcasting policy. She has been the electoral commissioner for Wales since March 2017, and her term ends on 12 March 2021. We, too, note that Sir John Holmes, chair of the Electoral Commission, wrote to Mr Speaker saying that she had been

"a hard-working and committed Commissioner over the last three years, and has contributed a great deal at a time of great electoral change in Wales".

Her Majesty's Opposition therefore have great pleasure in supporting Dame Susan Bruce as electoral commissioner for Scotland with effect from 1 January 2021 and Dame Elan Closs Stephens as electoral commissioner for Wales until 12 March 2025.

Question put and agreed to.

2.36 pm

Committee rose.