

HOUSE OF LORDS APPOINTMENTS COMMISSION
MINUTES
5 December 2023
Archbishop's Room, Millbank House

Attendees: Baroness Deech, Baroness Noakes, Baroness Taylor, Baroness Parminter (via video conference), Secretariat and Press Officer

Apologies

Dame Fionnuala Jay-O'Boyle, Lord Chartres - both of whom provided views in advance.

Vetting of political appointments

1. As the new Chair of HOLAC, Baroness Deech reiterated what she had said during her interview and pre-appointment hearing regarding the Commission's role and the need to ensure appointments to the House do not further damage the public credibility of the House and the Commission.
2. Members raised concerns that the Commission should guard against any suggestion of "rubber-stamping" ministerial appointments without sufficient scrutiny following the recent reshuffle appointment of Baron (David) Cameron of Chipping Norton.
3. The letter¹ from Lord Bew to the Party leaders in October 2022 was raised, highlighting that the Commission had previously put forward their concerns around the political parties' consideration of the issue of suitability of nominees. Members considered potential ways the Commission could make its own processes more robust and play a part in improving public confidence in appointments to the Lords.
4. It was agreed that, unlike the non-Party-political crossbench process, the decision on who to put forward on political lists is a political one, and that it is not the Commission's role to influence or advise on this. Instead, the focus should be on adding steps to make sure that the nominating Party confirms that it has itself considered the suitability and propriety of any individuals put forward.
5. The Commission agreed that the forms that are sent to the nominee and Party chair should be updated to include greater assurance that they have considered whether a proposed nominee is suitable, having regard to the Principles of Public Life ("Nolan Principles"). The Secretariat will update the relevant forms and circulate them to members of the Commission.
6. Members agreed that the transparency of the process would also be improved by publishing the nominee citations provided by No.10 and other political parties setting out why a nominee has been put forward. They agreed that publication would help public understanding of why they were suitable for appointment and that

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the Commission may wish to publish these documents itself if the parties do not wish to do so.

7. The Commission agreed that it would like to do more to outline the Commission's position on issues that may have been misunderstood by the public, as well as to promote the positive work done around crossbench appointments.

Guidance document for political nominees

8. A draft guidance document for political nominees was discussed. A revised version would be circulated for further comments alongside the revised standard forms. The expectation was that the templates of these documents would be published on the website to aid transparency.
9. The Secretariat confirmed that work was being carried out to improve navigation of the website.

Timings for vetting

10. The Commission discussed the very short deadlines that had been provided for vetting in the case of some ministerial peerages, and considered whether it would be appropriate to set some minimum timeframes. It was agreed that this was not practical as, depending on the complexity of the request and information discovered during the vetting process, there was no way of determining how long the vetting may take. It was accepted that there were sometimes good reasons why a ministerial appointment might need to be made at speed and those cases would be taken on an individual basis: the Commission would make best endeavours when necessary and without compromising its vetting responsibilities.
11. In cases where vetting was expected to be carried out in less than a week, the Government should provide a clear business case as to why the accelerated timeline was necessary.

Crossbench allocations

12. The Commission was updated regarding the Prime Minister's allocation for the Commission to make recommendations to the crossbenches. The Commission also asked the Secretariat to seek clarification on their previous request for a separate allocation of legal experts to be recommended to ensure the House maintains sufficient up to date legal expertise.

Baroness Deech meeting with the Prime Minister

13. The Commission was informed that the proposed introductory meeting between Baroness Deech and the Prime Minister was now unlikely to take place until the New Year.
14. The members re-affirmed the key points to raise in this meeting, including the terms of reference for the Commission, the impact of reduced numbers of crossbench appointments and the consideration of suitability in the vetting of political nominees.

Press update

15. The Press Officer updated members on recent press and TV reports relating to HOLAC work, some of which had already been covered in the meeting. This included the pre-appointment scrutiny of Baroness Deech and comments in the media following the appointment of Baron(David) Cameron.

**House of Lords Appointments Commission Secretariat
December 2023**