

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT

Third Delegated Legislation Committee

INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS
AUTHORITY

Tuesday 1 December 2015

PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON – THE STATIONERY OFFICE LIMITED

£3.00

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not later than

Saturday 5 December 2015

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT WILL GREATLY
FACILITATE THE PROMPT PUBLICATION OF
THE BOUND VOLUMES OF PROCEEDINGS
IN GENERAL COMMITTEES

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chair: MR ADRIAN BAILEY

† Barwell, Gavin (*Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household*)

Brake, Tom (*Carshalton and Wallington*) (LD)

Chalk, Alex (*Cheltenham*) (Con)

† Cleverly, James (*Braintree*) (Con)

† Coffey, Dr Thérèse (*Deputy Leader of the House of Commons*)

† Djanogly, Mr Jonathan (*Huntingdon*) (Con)

† Freer, Mike (*Finchley and Golders Green*) (Con)

Fuller, Richard (*Bedford*) (Con)

† Howlett, Ben (*Bath*) (Con)

† Lefroy, Jeremy (*Stafford*) (Con)

† McGovern, Alison (*Wirral South*) (Lab)

† Morden, Jessica (*Newport East*) (Lab)

† Onn, Melanie (*Great Grimsby*) (Lab)

† Rees, Christina (*Neath*) (Lab)

† Stuart, Ms Gisela (*Birmingham, Edgbaston*) (Lab)

† Stuart, Graham (*Beverley and Holderness*) (Con)

† Timms, Stephen (*East Ham*) (Lab)

Ben Williams, *Committee Clerk*

† **attended the Committee**

Third Delegated Legislation Committee

Tuesday 1 December 2015

[MR ADRIAN BAILEY *in the Chair*]

Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority

[Relevant document: the First Report 2015 from the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, Appointment of IPSA Board Members, HC 619.]

2.30 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 Sir Robert Owen and John Thurso to the office of ordinary member of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority with effect from 1 January 2016 for the period ending on 31 December 2020.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. The appointments referred to in the motion have arisen due to the terms of Sir Neil Butterfield and Professor Tony Wright coming to an end. The Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has produced a report, its first of 2015, in relation to this motion and it was sent to members of this Committee in advance.

It may help if I set out the key points regarding IPSA board members. They are appointed under the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009, under which the Speaker is responsible for overseeing the selection of candidates for appointment, and the names of any candidates to be member of IPSA must be approved by the Speaker's Committee for IPSA. The 2009 Act states that at least

“one of the members of the IPSA must be a person who has held (but no longer holds) high judicial office”,

that at

“least one of the members of the IPSA must be a person who is qualified under Schedule 3 to the National Audit Act 1983...to be an auditor for the National Audit Office”,

and that one

“of the members of the IPSA...must be a person who has been (but is no longer) a member of the House of Commons.”

On this occasion the vacancies were for the parliamentary member, the role being filled by John Thurso, and the former holder of a high judicial office, the role being fulfilled by Sir Robert Owen.

The Speaker is not regulated by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments in making these appointments, but he chooses to follow OCPA-recommended best practice in his supervision of the process. As is normal, Mr Speaker appointed a panel that conducted the shortlisting and interviewing of candidates that was chaired by Dame Denise Platt, former chair of the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

The other members were Sir Ian Kennedy, chair of IPSA, Professor Chatterji, lay member of the Speaker's Committee for IPSA, Sir David Latham, a former High Court judge, and Laura Sandys, former MP for South Thanet.

The candidates recommended by the appointment board are Sir Robert Owen and John Thurso. Sir Robert is a former High Court judge. From 2005 to 2008, he served as the presiding judge for the western circuit and he has been a member of the Judicial College board since 2011. John Thurso is the former Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross. He was elected to the House in 2001 and served on a number of high profile Committees, including the Treasury Committee and the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards. He was also the Chair of the Finance and Services Committee in the last Parliament, a member of the House of Commons Commission and a member of the House's Audit Committee.

As required under the 2009 Act, the appointments were approved by the Speaker's committee at its meeting on 18 November. If the appointments are made, both Sir Robert and John Thurso will serve on IPSA for five years. I hope that the Committee, and ultimately the House, will support the appointments, will wish these individuals well as they take up their new posts and will extend its thanks to the members who are coming to the end of their terms.

2.33 pm

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bailey. I have learned my lesson from previous occasions and have prepared a few words.

Briefly, it is important to recognise that the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has an important role to play in ensuring that Members of the House adhere to the rules on expenses and other matters. We should not disregard the importance of that role. It is certainly not easy to be part of the independent arbiter at a time when levels of media scrutiny are so high and criticisms of the organisation and MPs are swift and harshly meted out. That is why it is critical that the right people, with the requisite skills and experience as laid out in appendix A of the Speaker's committee's report, are appointed to the posts.

In addition to extensive advertising both online and in print media, for additional transparency the Speaker also opted to have regard to the commissioner for public appointments' code of practice for ministerial appointments to public bodies. Subsequently, an independent panel was appointed to assist in identifying possible candidates and was instrumental in drawing up the text of the advert. There can be no doubt as to the thoroughness of the search nor the validity of the eventual appointments of John Thurso, former Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross, and Sir Robert Owen, former High Court judge and member of the Judicial College board.

In line with the proper procedure, the Speaker's committee agreed both appointments on 18 November, as the Deputy Leader of the House mentioned, and the

Opposition agree with them. I wish them both the best of luck in their new roles, in which I am sure they will serve with the greatest of judgment and clarity of perspective. I also thank those who served diligently up until now—Professor Tony Wright and Sir Neil Butterfield—and echo the sentiments of the Deputy Leader of the House.

The Chair: Minister, do you wish to respond?

2.35 pm

Dr Coffey: I am not sure that there was actually a question, but I will just echo that it is right that we have proper people, and I believe that the panel has made good choices.

Question put and agreed to.

2.35 pm

Committee rose.

