



**The Commissioner for  
Public Appointments**

**Rt Hon Peter Riddell CBE**  
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Steve Reed MP  
Shadow Minister for Civil Society  
Via email

26 February 2018

*Dear Steve Reed,*

Many thanks for your letter about the appointment of Baroness Stowell as Chair of the Charity Commission. You raise a number of important questions, some of which I can answer now, others will take longer.

It is important to be clear on what my role is, and is not. My primary concern is to monitor whether competitions have been in line with the Governance Code on Public Appointments. It is not my role to second guess either the assessment and recommendations of advisory interview panels or the decisions taken by ministers. I therefore have no view on the appointment of Baroness Stowell as opposed to the process by which she was selected.

I took a close interest in the Charity Commission competition from the start, as I do with similar high profile roles. I received a copy of the interview panel's report well before the announcement of the selection of Baroness Stowell as the Government's preferred candidate. The panel, chaired by the DCMS Permanent Secretary, contained both a Senior Independent Panel Member (about whom I had been consulted) and an independent panel member, as well as a nominee of the Charity Commission. Six people were interviewed of whom three were assessed as clearly appointable. As is normal, and contrary to some claims made recently, the panel expressed no preference between the three appointable candidates. Also, again as normal, the identity of the unsuccessful candidates has not been revealed for reasons both of personal privacy and so as not to discourage people from applying for public appointments.

Overall, I am satisfied that the interview panel made recommendations in line with the Governance Code and the Principles of Public Appointments. Baroness Stowell disclosed her political activities and told the interview panel that, if appointed, she should give up the Conservative whip in the House of Lords and become a crossbencher.

The panel's report went to ministers in DCMS and then a recommendation was made to the Prime Minister. The decision at that stage was for ministers. I would be only consulted if they

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had disregarded the panel's advice and chosen to appoint somebody previously assessed as unappointable. That did not occur in this case. Similarly, I am consulted if ministers want to appoint someone without a fair and open competition. I was informed by DCMS about the choice of Baroness Stowell before the announcement was made.

I am not involved with pre-appointment hearings or with subsequent decisions by ministers. I am, however, always available to be consulted by select committees about the process.

So in answer to your questions:-

. I was informed about the appointment of Baroness Stowell. I did not have to be consulted as clause 3.2 of the Governance Code did not apply since ministers were not rejecting the advice of the interview advisory assessment panel and they were not seeking to appoint someone deemed unappointable.

. I will review the appointment in the light of the principles of public appointments in clause 2.1 of the Code but I have not seen any evidence yet to suggest that they have been breached.

. Your point about lack of parliamentary support affecting trust is obviously important for anyone holding a public appointment but is outside my remit and is a matter for ministers and for Parliament.

. As I mentioned above, I have already reviewed the report of the interview advisory assessment panel and, in view of the controversy over the appointment, I will now examine all the papers relating to the competition to see whether they justify carrying out a full investigation,

I would, however, stress that the key decisions in selecting Baroness Stowell from a list of appointable candidates and in appointing her despite the opposition of the DCMS Select Committee are matters for ministers, and not for me.

I will keep you informed of my review of the papers.

All best wishes  
y sincerely  
Peter Riddell

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