

Minutes: British Council APPG AGM

1 March 2022, 16:00-17:00

Attendees: John Baron MP, Virendra Sharma MP, Karen Bradley MP, Flick Drummond MP, Richard Holden MP, Baroness Smith, Baroness Bonham-Carter, Baroness Hodgson, Lord Watson, Lord Wigley, Ben Yates, Kate Ewart-Biggs (British Council), David Thompson (British Council) Rhiannon Melliart-Smith (British Council), Ruth Loeffler (British Council)

Apologies: Deidre Brock MP, Lord Campbell, Sir Roger Gale MP, Kim Johnson MP, Lord McNally, Lord Tebbit, Baroness Thornton, David Warburton MP, Nigel Evans MP, Baroness Suttie, Mark Logan MP, Stephen Kinnock MP

1. Welcome

1.1 APPG Chair John Baron welcomed attendees and outlined the purpose of the meeting.

1.2 John Baron gave a brief overview on how the recovery from the pandemic has meant we are now in a better place to look ahead to a time without restrictions, planning more physical events and continuing to familiarise parliamentarians with the work of the British Council.

2. Election of Officers

2.1 The following officers were elected

Role	Name	Party
Chair and Registered Contact	John Baron MP	Conservative
Treasurer	Stephen Kinnock MP	Labour
Vice Chair (East Asia)	Mark Logan MP	Conservative
Vice Chair (South Asia)	Virendra Sharma MP	Labour
Vice Chair (MENA)	Flick Drummond MP	Conservative
Vice Chair (MENA)	Lord Brennan	<i>Conservative</i>
Vice Chair (Americas)	Karen Bradley MP	Conservative
Vice Chair (Latin America)	Baroness Bonham-Carter	Liberal Democrat
Vice Chair (SSA)	Roger Gale MP	Conservative
Vice Chair (SSA)	Baroness Northover	Liberal Democrat
Vice Chair (Europe)	Baroness Smith (of Newnham)	Liberal Democrat
Vice Chair (Wider Europe)	Baroness Suttie	Liberal Democrat
Vice Chair (Australia % New Zealand)	Lord Watson	Labour
Vice Chair (Social Enterprise)	Baroness Thornton	Labour

3. Income and expenditure

3.1 APPG members agreed the previous year's accounts.

4. Update from British Council Deputy Chief Executive, Kate Ewart Biggs

- 4.1 APPG Chair John Baron introduced Kate Ewart Biggs for an update on the current situation on funding for the British Council and employees in Afghanistan and Ukraine.
- 4.2 Kate Ewart Biggs first thanked all members of the APPG for their support over the years, through the pandemic and through the recent challenges in Afghanistan and Ukraine. She gave an update on the Comprehensive Spending Review.
- 4.3 Kate Ewart Biggs mentioned the recent change of FCDO Minister with responsibility for British Council from James Cleverley to Amanda Milling.
- 4.4 Kate Ewart Biggs provided an update on employees in Afghanistan, with nearly all staff relocated under the ARAP scheme and some contractors relocated. She outlined that there are still contractors who remain in Afghanistan and who are currently being processed.
- 4.5 Kate Ewart Biggs then outlined the current situation in Ukraine, where all UK staff have been withdrawn. The office has closed and all activity has been suspended. British Council is looking to support staff wherever possible. Kate spoke briefly on the British Council operation in Russia where activity has also been suspended.
- 4.6 Kate Ewart Biggs outlined the importance of the work British Council does in the region, and past work in the Baltic states.
- 4.7 APPG Chair John Baron finished the update with a summary of changes made within the organisation over the course of the pandemic.

5. Q&A on updates above with British Council Deputy Chief Executive, Kate Ewart Biggs

- 5.1 APPG Chair John Baron opened up questions, asking for an update on CSR. Kate Ewart Biggs responded that she would keep APPG members informed.
- 5.2 Vice Chair Flick Drummond asked about the level of British Council's interaction and presence in countries surrounding Ukraine. Kate Ewart Biggs responded outlining British Council's current and historic work in the Baltic area, particularly with English language.

6. Future work of the British Council and upcoming APPG report

- 6.1 APPG Chair, John Baron, introduced David Thompson (British Council Head of Political Engagement) to give an update on future work and APPG report.
- 6.2 David Thompson gave an overview of previous two reports published last year looking first at internationalism, and secondly at global opportunities for Global Britain.
- 6.3 This year, David Thompson outlined that there will be a launch of a new report investigating the links between English language, democracy and the rights of women and girls and connecting this with trends around the world.

6.4 David Thompson also outlined plans for more physical meetings and events, as well as opportunities for overseas delegations.

6.5 The APPG agreed to proceed with the APPG report.

6.6 Q&A on future work

6.7 John Baron opened questions by highlighting the need to engage with parliamentarians who had not yet had the opportunity to do so because of the pandemic and restrictions. Vice Chairs Lord Wigley, Baroness Bonham-Carter, Richard Holden and Virendra Sharma expressed their support on focusing on engagement.

6.8 Vice Chair Lord Watson raised a question about the impact of funding on British Council's global reach and asked for an update on activities in Russia. Kate Ewart Biggs gave an update on plans for transformation of the organisation and outlined that activity had been suspended in Russia.

7. Close

7.1 The meeting was closed with APPG Chair thanking Kate Ewart Biggs for her contribution and updates, and members thanking John Baron for his work as APPG Chair.

7.2 Any members wishing further information or briefings were advised to contact David Thompson or others in the British Council External Relations team.