

PRESS NOTICE

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STANDARDS COMMITTEE CALLS FOR ITS RECOMMENDATIONS ON RESTORING INTEGRITY TO THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM TO BE IMPLEMENTED FOLLOWING THE JUDGEMENT OF THE ELECTORAL PETITION RELATING TO THE LOCAL ELECTIONS HELD IN SLOUGH ON 3 MAY 2007

Following the judgement by Election Commissioner Richard Mawrey QC handed down on 18 March in the matters of Local Government elections for the Slough Central Ward of the Slough Borough Council held on 3 May 2007, Sir Christopher Kelly, Chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life commented

“This latest example of electoral fraud in Slough at last year’s local government elections highlights the need for fundamental changes to our electoral system as recommended by my Committee in its Eleventh Report on the Electoral Commission.

Electoral fraud is not a trivial matter. It is an affront to the democratic principle of one-person one vote. Left unchecked it will eventually undermine trust and confidence in the democratic process and by implication the electorate’s consent to the outcome of elections.

This case has shown that the safeguards introduced by the Government to combat electoral fraud particularly in relation to postal voting are easily bypassed because of the fundamental weaknesses in the current system of electoral registration. The current system of household registration has no robust safeguards to stop bogus names being registered and then to be used as fraudulent postal votes.

In the Eleventh Report my Committee called for the Government and the other main political parties to reach agreement so as to introduce a system of individual registration similar to that already in place in Northern Ireland immediately following the next General Election.

The benefits of individual registration include:

- Individuals taking personal responsibility for registering just as they have to apply personally for other public and private services;
- The register reflecting more accurately those individuals who are entitled to be registered;

- Greater accuracy that will help to restore integrity to the registration process; and
- If combined with other measures such as an objective personal identifier will help minimise electoral fraud.

The Committee on Standards in Public Life wants to see an electoral system that is free, fair and secure and will continue to press the Government for an indication of an early commitment to put in place the changes that are required to secure this objective. The recommendations the Committee has made on the integrity of the electoral system in its Eleventh Report will, I believe, if implemented, restore integrity and confidence in the democratic health of our country.”

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The Committee published its eleventh report ‘Review of the Electoral Commission’ on the 18th January 2007. The Report set out a package of inter-related recommendations radically to refocus and reform the Commission to ensure that in future there is effective regulation of the electoral process and of political party funding. The Committee also recommended measures to ensure elections are free fair and secure, including the introduction of individual voter registration (a list of recommendations is attached at Annex A).

2. The Committee on Standards in Public Life is an Advisory Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) sponsored by the Cabinet Office. The Chair and Members are appointed by the Prime Minister. The Committee was established in October 1994 with the following terms of reference:

“To examine current concerns about standards of conduct of all holders of public office, including arrangements relating to financial and commercial activities, and make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements which might be required to ensure the highest standards of propriety in public life”.

3. Additional terms of reference were announced on 12 November 1997:

“To review issues in relation to the funding of political parties, and to make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements.”

Issued by:

The Committee on Standards in Further information from:

Public Life
35 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BQ
Internet site:

www.public-standards.gov.uk

e-mail:

public@standards.x.gsi.gov.uk

Peter Hawthorne
Assistant Secretary to the Committee
Tel: 020 7276 2598
Mobile: 07718031477