

Chairman:
Sir Alistair Graham

*35 Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BQ*

PRESS NOTICE

PN 193

1 September 2006

COMMITTEE'S PUBLIC HEARING IN LONDON ON THURSDAY 7th SEPTEMBER: ELEVENTH INQUIRY INTO THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

The Committee on Standards in Public Life is holding its ninth public hearing, in London on Thursday 7th September 2006, to take evidence as part of its Review of The Electoral Commission. The hearing which is open to the public is being held on:

Thursday 7 September from 9:30am to 12.15pm and 1.30pm to approximately 3.45pm in The Commonwealth Club, 25 Northumberland Avenue, London, WC2N 5AP.

The Committee's Inquiry is looking at key themes critical to public trust in our democratic system through a review of the mandate, governance and accountability of the Electoral Commission. Key issues already raised in evidence to the Committee (<http://www.public-standards.gov.uk/11thinquiry/evidence.asp>) include:

- *the integrity and application of the current political party funding arrangements, and implications of any changes;*
- *electoral propriety including voter registration, electoral administration and electoral fraud; and*
- *the contribution these issues make to voter engagement with the political process.*

The following witnesses are to give evidence at the public hearing:

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|---------------------|--|
| 9.30 - 10.15 | Mr Peter Viggers MP, Speaker's Committee and Dr Christopher Ward (Clerk) |
| 10.15- 11.00 | Rt Hon Gavin Strang MP |
| 11.15- 12.15 | Lord Holme, Chair of the Council, and Clare Ettinghausen, Chief Executive, Hansard Society |
| 13.30- 14.45 | Mr Ged Fitzgerald, Chief Executive of Sunderland City Council and Mr Paul Rogerson, Chief Executive of Leeds City Council |
| 14.45- 15.45 | Mr Kelvin Hopkins MP |

The Committee has already held eight public hearings in Belfast, Cardiff, Edinburgh and will hold three more in London throughout September. The Committee will then

consider all the evidence and intends to publish conclusions and recommendations towards the end of this year. Witnesses have been invited to help the Committee examine the current responsibilities of The Electoral Commission, set up five years ago following the Fifth Report of the Committee in 1998. The Commission is an independent body set up by Parliament to promote integrity, effectiveness and participation in the democratic process. The Inquiry takes place against a background of public concerns about arrangements for postal voting following some high-profile legal cases, safeguards for voter registration, and allegedly circumventory loans to political parties.

OPERATIONAL NOTE: NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Media Enquiries

For all media enquiries and interview requests on any matters relating to the Committee and its chairman, Sir Alistair Graham, media should contact:

Mark Pearson, Press Officer on 07841-021468 (including out of hours)

Or, if unavailable:

Dr Richard Jarvis, Secretary to the Committee on 020 7276-2597 or 07818-075-284 (mobile).

Media wishing to attend/film any public hearings are requested to contact Mark Pearson in advance on the number above. There will be no advance accreditation of media, but journalists will need to produce formal ID, preferably a photographic pass, when they arrive. Journalists should sign in on arrival, as this will ensure that they receive any follow-up material. Stills photography will not be permitted during the course of the hearings. Broadcasters may pick up a sound feed of the hearings by prior arrangement with the venues (please contact Jan.ashton@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk at the Committee secretariat, 020 7276 2594, for more information).

Transcripts

The Committee has appointed WordWave, 190 Fleet Street, London EC4A 2AG (tel: 0207 421 9269, fax: 0207 404 1424; email: drew.macaulay@Merrillcorp.com) to produce official transcripts of the proceedings. These will be available within five working days of each day's hearing, and on the Committee's website. Corrected transcripts will be published as a second volume to the report.

Witnesses

No approach should be made to witnesses in the hearing room.

Witnesses have been told that they are not giving evidence to a court or tribunal, so their statements will not be privileged from action for defamation. Witnesses should take care that any remarks made by them which are critical of another person or organisation or which place such persons or organisations in an unfavourable light are statements: which are based on facts which can be substantiated; in which they have an honest belief; and made solely for the purpose of assisting the Committee in its work.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The Committee published an Issues and Questions paper, inviting written evidence, on 16 February 2006. The Issues and Questions Paper and written evidence received can be found on the Committee's website www.public-standards.gov.uk.
2. The Electoral Commission was established as an independent statutory authority on 30 November 2000. This followed the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life's Fifth Report, The Funding of Political Parties in the United Kingdom and the subsequent commencement of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.
3. The Committee's standing terms of reference are: "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".

4. On 12 November 1997 additional terms of reference for the study on the funding of political parties were announced by the Prime Minister as: "To review issues in relation to the funding of political parties, and to make recommendations as to arrangements". The Committee's 11th Inquiry is located within these two combined terms of reference. The Committee's terms of reference specifically preclude it from investigating individual cases or specific allegations of misconduct. Nor has the Committee any powers to require others to do so. But the Committee may take account of information on material cases in formulating its recommendations.
5. The full membership of the Committee is: Sir Alistair Graham (Chairman), Lloyd Clarke QPM, Rita Donaghy CBE, Dame Professor Hazel Genn DBE, Dame Patricia Hodgson DBE, Baroness Maddock, The Rt Hon Baroness Shephard DL, Dr Elizabeth Vallance, Dr Brian Woods-Scawen DL.

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