

Chairman:
Sir Alistair Graham

*35 Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BQ*

PRESS NOTICE

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14 June 2006

COMMITTEE TO HOLD PUBLIC HEARING IN BELFAST FOR ITS ELEVENTH INQUIRY INTO THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

The Committee on Standards in Public Life is holding a public hearing in Belfast on 21 June 2006 to take evidence on the role of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland and the lessons to be learned from the changes to electoral registration and voting arrangements in Northern Ireland. The hearing which is open to the public is being held on:

Wednesday 21 June at The Radisson SAS Hotel, The Gasworks, 3 Cromac Place, Omeau Road, Belfast, BT7 2JB from 9.30am to 5.00 pm.

Witnesses include representatives from the five main political parties, the Electoral Commission, the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Parliamentary Boundary Commission. The Committee under the Chairman, Sir Alistair Graham, will be seeking evidence on the role and performance of the Electoral Commission in Northern Ireland and on the major changes to electoral registration and voting that are unique to Northern Ireland. The Committee will also be looking at the current lack of openness and transparency in relation to the funding of Northern Ireland political parties.

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 written 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 Belfast public hearing:

**09.30- 09.35
09.35- 10.00**

**Opening Statement, Sir Alistair Graham
Mark Devenport, Political Editor,
BBC Northern Ireland**

10.00- 10.45

**Karamjit Singh and Seamus Magee, Electoral
Commission**

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| 10.45- 11.15 | Douglas Bain, Chief Electoral Officer, June Butler, Assistant Chief Electoral Officer |
| 11.30- 12.00 | Denis Stanley |
| 12.00- 12.30 | John Fisher, Secretary to the NI Parliamentary Boundary Commission |
| 14.00- 14.30 | SDLP |
| 14.30- 15.00 | UUP |
| 15.00- 15.30 | DUP |
| 15.45- 16.15 | Alliance |
| 16.15- 16.45 | Sinn Fein |

The Committee is holding public hearings in Edinburgh, Cardiff and London. 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.

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, Professor Hazel Genn CBE, Dame Patricia Hodgson DBE, Baroness Maddock, The Rt Hon Baroness Shephard DL, Dr Elizabeth Vallance, Dr Brian Woods-Scawen DL.

Issued by:

Further information from:

The Committee on Standards in Public Life

Mark Pearson, Press Officer on 07841-021-468

35 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BQ
Internet site: www.public-standards.gov.uk
e-mail: standards.evidence@gtnet.gov.uk

(including out of hours)

Or if unavailable
Richard Jarvis
Secretary to the Committee
Tel: 020 7276 2597
Fax: 020 7276 2585 Mobile: 07818 075284