

Chairman:
Sir Alistair Graham

*35 Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BQ*

PRESS NOTICE

PN 185

20 June 2006

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

The Committee on Standards in Public Life is holding a public hearing in Edinburgh on 27 June 2006 to take evidence on the role of the Electoral Commission in Scotland. The hearing which is open to the public is being held on:

Tuesday 27 June at The National Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1JF, from 9.30 am to 5.15 pm.

Witnesses include representatives from the four main political parties, electoral administrators, and the Electoral Commission including the Commissioner responsible for Scotland.

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 Edinburgh public hearing:

9.30	Douglas Fraser, Glasgow Herald
10.15	Sir Neil McIntosh Commissioner and Andy O'Neill Head of Office, Electoral Commission
11.30	Allan Henry Assessor Dumfries & Galloway Council, Billy Pollock Deputy Returning Officer & Chair Association Electoral Administrators, and Jeff Hawkins SOLAR
14.00	Mark McInnes, Scottish Conservative Party
14.45	Dr Derek Barrie, Liberal Democrat Party
15.45	Lesley Quinn and Tony McElroy, Labour Party
16:30	Peter Murrell Scottish Nationalist Party

The Committee is holding public hearings in Belfast, 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.

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 0207-276-2597 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. A photocall with the Chairman and committee members will be held at 9.15a.m on Tuesday 27 June. 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, Professor Hazel Genn CBE, Dame Patricia Hodgson DBE, Baroness Maddock, The Rt Hon Baroness Shephard DL, Dr Elizabeth Vallance, Dr Brian Woods-Scawen DL.

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