

*Standards in
Public Life*



**COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS
IN PUBLIC LIFE –
National Oversight of
UK Public Sector: The Impact
of the Committee**

**CHARLES RAMSDEN
SECRETARY**

Standards in Public Life



TERMS OF REFERENCE

(1994)

‘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.’

(1997)

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

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Origins

- Set up in 1994 (as “Nolan Committee” after first Chairman)
- Government response to concerns about conduct of some MPs (“*cash for questions*”), appointed office holders and selection processes for public appointments
- A “standing”, non-statutory committee (v. unusual)
- Advisory body only – an independent public body linked to the Cabinet Office
- Terms of reference specify scope is general policy issues not individual cases

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- **Eleven Reports since 1995**
- **Key reports have covered**
 - MPs, Civil Servants, Public Appointments (1st Report)
 - Public Bodies (2nd Report)
 - Local Government (3rd Report)
 - Political party funding (5th report)
 - House of Lords (7th Report)
 - Ministers, Special Advisers and the Civil Service (9th Report)
 - The Electoral Commission (11th Report)



Committee Membership

- Independent Chair and 6 members appointed by the Prime Minister following merit-based, open competition Chair – 5 year term, not renewable; members - 3 year term with the option of one renewal.
- Three senior members nominated by Leaders of the main political parties (currently 2 MPs and a peer)
- Advised and supported by Secretariat of permanent officials on secondment from the Cabinet Office or other Government Departments



Committee Chairmen since 1994

- 1994 – 97: The Rt Hon The Lord Nolan
- 1997 – 2001: Lord Neill of Bladen QC
- 2001 – 2004: Sir Nigel Wicks
- 2004 – 2007: Sir Alistair Graham
- 2007 (interim): Rita Donaghy CBE
- 2008 – 2012 : Sir Christopher Kelly

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The Seven Principles of Public Life (I)

The Committee has set out ‘Seven Principles of Public Life’ which it believes should apply to all in the public service. These are:

Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

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The Seven Principles of Public Life (II)

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.



Working methods

- **Analysis of current public concerns – monthly analysis and horizon scanning**
- **Selection of inquiry subject after consultation with Head of UK Civil Service OR government ask CSPL to inquire into a specific subject**
- **Issues and Questions paper published inviting views**
- **Written evidence submitted and published**
- **Independent research commissioned**
- **Public hearings throughout the UK**
- **Drafting -Consideration of evidence**
- **Publication of conclusions and recommendations**
- **Government replies formally and Parliament debates**



Working methods – developments

- More consultation responses, press releases, public commentary
- Shorter documents – eg statement of principles governing Parliamentary allowances (April 2008)
- Seminars/Conferences on standards issues

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IMPACT OF COMMITTEE - NEW INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL GOVERNANCE (I)

Parliament

- Creation of Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards (reporting to Standards & Privileges Committee)
- improved registration of private financial interests
- ban on paid advocacy, i.e. being paid to speak in debates and ask questions on behalf of clients
- Codes of Conduct for MPs and Lords



IMPACT OF COMMITTEE - NEW INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL GOVERNANCE (II)

Central Government

- **Civil Service Act setting out roles of civil servants and political advisers**
- **Appointment of “Independent Adviser on Ministerial interests”**
- **Civil Service Commission to become statutory body: selection on merit to have legal force**
- **Many changes / improvements to codes of conduct for Ministers, Civil Servants, political advisers**

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IMPACT OF COMMITTEE - NEW INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL GOVERNANCE (III)

Public Bodies

- Office of Commissioner of Public Appointments established (1995) to regulate Ministerial Public Appointments.
- Codes of conduct based on Principles of Public Life for Boards of public bodies

Local Government

- Local Government Act 2000, incorporated Codes of Conduct for councillors and employees. Standards Board (regulator) set up.

Political Parties

- Disclosure of donations. Electoral Commission established to regulate party funding and oversee elections and referenda.



COMMITTEE'S OTHER PRODUCTS

- Press releases commenting on current issues [tread carefully !]
- Responses to Government consultations
- Annual Reports of what Committee has been doing and thinking over last 12 months – introduced at annual Open Meeting
- Biennial Surveys of Public Attitudes to Conduct in UK public life [next one due October 2008]



Committee's Public Survey Work

- Began in 2001 with creation of Research Advisory Board
- Exploratory research via focus groups
- National “*survey of public attitudes*” - 1,097 adults in Great Britain - carried out in 2003-04
- Repeat survey conducted on a UK-wide basis and published in September 2006
- Third survey currently running – will publish in October 2008



IMPACT OF COMMITTEE - NEW INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL GOVERNANCE

“Standing Committee” status means Committee stays in place.

Revisits earlier inquiries, checks on progress – recommends improvements eg

- 10th Report (2005) recommended improvements to local government standards structure put in place by statute following 3rd Report (1997)
- 11th Report (2007) recommended stronger powers for Electoral Commission set up by statute following 5th Report (1998)



IMPACT OF COMMITTEE - NEW INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL GOVERNANCE

Weaknesses of “Standing” approach

- Over time, all Committee and Secretariat members change – Committee changes focus and interests, but is assumed by Government etc to be the same body all along
- Committee can get “lumbered” with needing to stand by many small recommendations from earlier Reports.

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Unfinished business

- Civil Service Act - still just draft legislation
- Move from household to individual registration for voting
- proper independent system for dealing with breaches in Ministerial Code

And new business

- properly controlled systems for Parliamentary allowances
- London government structure and elected mayors
- standards in “partnership” public-private organisations

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**COMMITTEE STILL MAKING
HEADLINES....**

Source: Daily Mail (Main)
Date: 20 June 2008
Circulation: 2334687

**• Watchdog orders
MPs to clean up
their expenses**

By James Martin
THE WATCHDOG
FOR HOLDING OUR PARLIAMENTS
TO ACCOUNT HAS ORDERED
MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT
TO STOP SPENDING MONEY
ON UNNECESSARY TRAVEL
AND OTHER EXPENSES
WHICH ARE NOT
NECESSARY TO DO THEIR
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Source: Evening Standard (Main)
Date: 10 June 2008
Circulation: 272448

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**• Sleaze watchdog
to probe City Hall
after cash scandal**

WHOMAS DEE
Chief Political Correspondent



London's chief sleaze watchdog today announced it will probe the City Hall cash scandal in the wake of the Leamington cash scandal. The watchdog, the Commission for Standards in Public Life, will investigate the handling of the scandal by the City Hall.

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UK PRESS – 10/11 JUNE 2008



COMMITTEE WORK PLAN – 2008 (I)

- **Assess Parliamentary reports on pay and allowances (June/July) – decide level of further Committee work eg**
 - no further work
 - issue response and press notice. Campaign on specific issues
 - announce inquiry



COMMITTEE WORK PLAN – 2008 (II)

- **Paper for Committee on London governance and elected mayors. Committee to decide:**
 - no further action
 - commission research
 - presentation from experts at monthly meeting
 - hold seminar on issue (see next slide)
 - announce inquiry if no inquiry into MPs' allowances



COMMITTEE WORK PLAN – 2008 (III)

Hold Series of “Standards Seminars” in autumn / early winter. Possible issues include:

- **Impact of Freedom of Information Act on government standards**
- **New accountability structures – London and Elected Mayors**
- **Role of Media in UK standards and public trust**



COMMITTEE WORK PLAN – 2008 (IV)

Publish 3rd biennial Survey of Public Attitudes to Conduct in UK Public Life (October).

Options:

- Press Conference / Event Launch
- Assess findings as seed-bed for further inquiry
- Gather further public views on specific emerging issues through web-site survey / comments

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**More information (and all Committee Reports
and Survey results) are available from
our website**

www.public-standards.gov.uk

[Committee on Standards in Public Life](#)

Thank you