

HOUSE OF LORDS APPOINTMENTS COMMISSION

MINUTES OF THE 38TH MEETING HELD ON 4TH APRIL 2006

Present: Lord Stevenson (Chairman)
Lord Hurd
Baroness Dean
Lord Dholakia
Mrs Felicity Huston

Mr Jim Barron – Secretariat
Ms Geraldine Alexander – Secretariat
Mrs Paula Adshead – Secretariat
Ms Louise Blundell – Secretariat
[REDACTED] – Treasury Solicitors
Ms Maggie O'Boyle – Press Officer

Apologies

1. There were apologies from Ms Angela Sarkis.

Minutes

2. It was agreed that Members would let the Secretariat have comments on the draft minutes by Monday 11 April.

Chairman's update

3. The Metropolitan Police had met with the Secretary to the Commission. The Detective Superintendent had explained the process of the investigation and had subsequently written to request specific information held by the Commission on the scrutiny of party-political peers. The Commission would comply with the request, although it may reserve the confidence of any legal advice.
4. The Chairman and Lord Hurd were due to give evidence to the Public Administration Select Committee on 16 May. A full briefing would be provided before the session, which would be circulated to all Members.
5. The Commission confirmed that they had no comment to make about the propriety of [REDACTED], who was being nominated as one of the Prime Minister's exceptions. There was some concern, however, that his nomination was extending the original concept of the exceptions.
6. It was noted that Number 10 planned to announce its list of party-political peers in the near future. It was agreed that the Commission's own list would not be announced until after the Easter break. The Secretariat would contact the seven individuals to ensure that the Commission had been informed about all donations or loans to a political party by the nominees.

Loans

7. The Commission considered the matter of loans by nominees to political parties. There were two main issues; the commerciality of a loan and what information was provided to the Commission. Regarding the first point, it was noted that the Commission's view was also that of the Electoral Commission: that any loan that was not made on commercial terms should be declared. As the Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to ensure compliance with the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, in the first instance it would be for it to take the lead on this matter. The Commission would continue to discuss the matter with the Electoral Commission and to this end the Chairman would arrange to meet with the Chairman of the Electoral Commission.
8. The question of whether, in the past, party-political nominees and/or parties had declined to inform the Commission of relevant loans was discussed. As this was clearly a matter that the police investigation would cover, the Commission agreed it would consider it further in due course.

Extension to Members' appointments

9. Lord Stevenson and Mrs Huston confirmed that they would both be willing to have their appointments extended to the end of the year. The Chairman would check that Ms Sarkis was also content before confirming with the Cabinet Secretary.
10. The party-political members had not been approached about extending their appointments. This would be a matter for the respective party leaders and it was agreed that No 10 should be reminded to pursue this issue.
11. It was noted that the Commission was still one member short of its full compliment. The Secretariat would investigate whether it was possible to co-opt an additional member.

Future work

12. The Commission would be looking to continue its assessment and recommendation of non-party-political nominees. It would also begin drafting its annual report which would cover two years (2004/05 and 2005/06).
13. The Secretariat was invited to draw up suggestions for improvements to the vetting system, based upon the lessons learnt from the last list; once these were agreed the Commission would write to the Prime Minister.

Commission Secretariat
April 2006