**THE BETTER GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE**

**Executive Committee**

**Minutes of the Meeting held at the Institute for Government on 16th December 2014**

**Present:** Richard Mottram (Chair)

Robin Butler

Paul Britton

Roger Dawe

Christopher Foster

Tom Legg

Leigh Lewis

Peter Owen

Aaron Ritchie

Adam Sharples

Martin Stanley

Phillip Ward

**Apologies:** Geoffrey Chipperfield

**Minutes of the Meeting on 18th November 2014**

The minutes were agreed.

**Updates**

The meeting between Robin Butler, Leigh Lewis and Richard Mottram from BGI and John Manzoni had taken place on the previous day. Their overall impression of him had been favourable, though many of the reforms he was pursuing were not new and it appeared that his role was very much focused on specific operational matters. It was recognised that in filling key positions advertisement and competition should be the residual, not the norm. The report on the SCS had been well received and it should be published on the website early in the New Year. Peter Owen will carry out some minor redrafting to bring the recommendations nearer the beginning of the paper and Leigh Lewis will explore the possibility of publication in Personnel Today.

The timing allowed for preparation for the January event was tight. It was agreed that if the list of speakers could not be finalised by the end of the week we should cancel the present slots and aim for a date in March (the publication of the “Next Government” paper should not however be further delayed). Richard Mottram will contact potential speakers from the political parties and Robin Butler will speak to Peter Hennessy. The format should be revised, with Robin Butler in the chair and a single introductory statement by Richard Mottram.

**Collective decision-taking**

Paul Britton said that the note largely consisted of extracts from a previous BGI document on Cabinet Government and was intended as an *aide mémoire* to allow the group to reconsider the strength of the arguments.

In discussion the following main points were made.

* The arguments were cogent, and we should be prepared to support them.
* It might be desirable to explore further the strains imposed on the doctrine of collective responsibility by coalition government and the additional negotiating mechanisms, such as the “Quad”, needed to reach agreement.
* It would be helpful to be able to cite examples, such as the Suez invasion, where decisions taken without collective consideration had had disastrous results.

In conclusion it was agreed that we should not fall into the trap of appearing to recommend that all decisions should be taken by the Cabinet.

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**Revised evidence to the PCRC on constitutional issues**

It was agreed that the evidence should now be submitted.

**Request for evidence from the Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee of the Scottish Parliament**

Peter Owen said that the proposal seemed to be similar to the Wright Committee recommendation on election of Committee Chairs in the United Kingdom Parliament. We had supported that proposal in “Good Government: Reforming Parliament and the Executive” (it had subsequently been accepted and appeared to be working satisfactorily). There was no obvious reason why we should not take the same line in relation to the current request.

After a brief discussion it was agreed that John Elvidge should be invited to prepare a submission on these lines.

**The cost of Scottish Devolution.**

It was agreed that the draft was a remarkably clear account of the financial complexities that would arise from the undertakings given during the referendum debate.

In discussion the following main points were made.

* The Treasury might well consider that “muddling through” might be preferable to facing up to some of the issues described in the paper, but this was no longer an option.
* The SNP would gain political capital if, as seemed likely, some of the undertakings proved to be unworkable.
* A key difficulty was that decisions by Scotland on taxation etc. would have effects on the pound.

In conclusion it was agreed that the paper was dealing with a topical issue and should be published quickly. We should also aim to get coverage on the LSE website. Copies should also be sent directly to the Chairs and Clerks of the PASC and the Treasury Committee, to Peter Hennessy and to the CEO of the Local Government Association.

**Other business**

It was agreed that Peter Owen should invite Alun Evans to join the group.

The Lord Chancellor had been criticised by the Lords Constitutional Committee for an inadequate response on the question of his responsibility for upholding the rule of law within government.

There was a possibility that a Lords Select Committee on the civil service would be established after the election.

The current series of pre-arranged meeting slots had now been exhausted. No further meeting was required before the January event. It was agreed that we should seek to resume the current pattern of monthly meetings beginning on 20th January. Members will be notified once the forward dates are firm.

18th December 2014