**THE BETTER GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE**

**Executive Committee**

**Minutes of the Meeting held at 61 Petty France on 10th March 2015**

**Present:** Richard Mottram (Chair)

Robin Butler

Paul Britton

Christopher Foster

Tom Legg

Leigh Lewis

Peter Owen

Aaron Ritchie

Adam Sharples

Martin Stanley

Phillip Ward

**Apologies:** Penny Boys

Geoffrey Chipperfield

Roger Dawe

**Minutes of the Meeting on 20th January 2015**

The minutes were agreed.

**Updates**

**GovernUp conference**. Richard Mottram said that the quality of the materials produced and the attendance at the event was high, but the organisation had been poor: too much had been crammed into too little time. The main themes had covered the civil service, lessons to be learned from other countries (a poor presentation by consultants), “re-purposing Whitehall”, digital futures, and localism.

The section on the civil service had degenerated into a rant by special advisers which took no account of GovernUp’s own analysis and had subsequently been contradicted in a blog by Julian McCrae, Deputy Director of the IfG.

The section on repurposing Whitehall essentially advocated the approach proposed by John Birt of combining the Treasury and Cabinet Office into an Office of Management and the Budget and the setting up of autonomous delivery agencies reporting directly to Parliament (very similar to Peter Kemp’s original concept but with the Chief Executives appointed by Ministers). Lucy Powell’s contribution as Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office had been thoughtful and measured.

Specific proposals included a new more limited role for the Civil Service Commission as the guardian of civil service values (under a First Commissioner who would be neither a politician nor a civil servant) and the establishment of expanded departmental ministerial offices led by a chief of staff who did not report to the permanent secretary. David Normington had written a letter commenting on these proposals.

Participants had been invited to submit comments by 11th March. Martin Stanley was contemplating a response. Richard Mottram would consider whether to write as BGI chair in support of David Normington. It was not clear what future action was proposed by the organisers of the event. It was noticeable that no senior ministers or shadow ministers had attended.

**Acceptances for the spring event**. Peter Owen said that the response from non-BGI members had been disappointing; despite the quality of the speakers and a second round of invitations it seemed likely that fewer than 30 would attend.

In discussion the following main points were made.

* The current focus of attention among the political class was not on the running of governments but on how the new government would be constituted.
* We might stimulate interest in our views by adopting a more controversial tone - for example by explaining through an influential radio programme how the developing pressure for extended ministerial offices without accountability to accounting officers could reflect an attempt by unelected ideologues, some perhaps with a commercial interest, to gain direct control of the machinery and resources of the state.
* A further concern was that the arrangement was inward-looking with no opportunity for wider advice on the desirability or feasibility of proposals.
* The experience of the conflict between the Treasury under Gordon Brown and No. 10 under Tony Blair had amply demonstrated some of the deficiencies of the EMO concept.

In conclusion Richard Mottram undertook to email those who had not responded to the invitation and to explore the possibility of appearing on the Week in Westminster.

**Arrangements for the spring event**

Peter Owen said that the format remained as previously discussed: a brief introduction by Robin Butler, a rehearsal of the proposals in “The Next Government” by Richard Mottram and comments by the guest speakers on the likelihood of their being adopted followed by questions from the floor. Copies of “The Next Government” and the invitation (which briefly explained the running order) had already been sent to the speakers. Copies of “The Next Government” would be emailed to those attending in advance of the event and paper copies would be available at the venue. The headlines of the proposals would be projected on to a screen during the discussion.

In discussion the following main points were made.

* Lord Falconer’s contribution would be particularly interesting since he was taking the lead for the Labour Party on work in this area.
* It might help to stimulate debate by referring to the failures of recent administrations in the areas covered by “The Next Government” and challenging the speakers to say how they will avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

In conclusion it was agreed that Peter Owen should help the external speakers prepare for the debate by indicating the line that Richard Mottram would take in setting the scene.

**Collective decision-taking in a coalition**

Paul Britton said that the draft blog attached to the paper had been revised in the light of comments at the previous meeting and consideration of the proposals in the Lords Constitution Committee report on coalition government.

It was agreed that Paul Britton should amend the document to take account of a number of minor drafting suggestions made in discussion and that it should then be published without further consideration by the group.

**Other business**

Christopher Foster is beginning work on a second edition of his book which will draw on, and refer to, the work of the BGI. An outline will be circulated for discussion at the next meeting.

Geoffrey Chipperfield had asked to draw the group’s attention to a proposal to extend the Government’s influence over the allocation of research grants by requiring regional considerations to be taken into account. He had prepared a short briefing note which would be circulated for information.

It was agreed that Barbara Moorhouse should be invited to join the group. Peter Owen will contact her.

The next meeting will be on 7th April.

11th March 2015