**Better Government: Preparing for the**

**Post-election Government**

**PROGRAMME**

Better Government Initiative 7th Plenary Conference

in association with The Constitution Society

Ditchley Park 19th – 20th June 2014

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| **Thursday 19th June** | |
| 1215 | Lunch |
| 1315 (1) | **Welcome and conference overview**: **Richard Mottram** |
| 1330 (2) | **The Coalition experience**  Chair: Richard Mottram  Lead speaker: Peter Riddell  BGI’s “Good Government: Mid Term Review”, published in November 2012, looked at the activities of the Coalition Government under four main headings to see how far it had contributed to improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of the processes of government. We concluded that progress had been made in some areas such as more effective Cabinet government but we remained concerned about poor and rushed preparation of policies, the lack of agreed standards for legislation and strategies for dealing with failures of implementation.  What do we think of the progress made since then in:   * Policy making; * Legislation and Parliament; * Delivery and organisation; * Relations with the civil service? |
| 1445 | Tea/Coffee |
| 1500 (3) | **Accountability in new models of delivery**  Chair: Stephen Dorrell  Lead speakers: Ursula Brennan, Richard Bacon, Alan Downey  The answer to the question “who is to blame?” when delivery of outsourced government projects goes wrong tends to be long and complicated. It is not easy to prise apart the strands of responsibility of ministers, officials, consultants and contractors, all of whom have key parts to play.  The accountability to Parliament of ministers and officials for delivering major projects has been a particular bone of contention.  “Mid Term Review” proposed formal sign off and change management protocols designed to produce greater clarity about the roles and responsibilities of officials and ministers. The PAC has made a number of suggestions to clarify the situation such as open-book accounting by contractors. Can we see a way forward in dealing with these issues? |

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| 1615 | Afternoon tea |
| 1645 (4) | **Parliament and the unwritten constitution**  Chair: Alan Beith  Lead speakers: Bernard Jenkin, Richard Gordon  Parliamentary sovereignty has its limitations. Majorities in both Houses enable the Government to curtail the influence of Parliament should it wish to do so. Recent Commons proposals for setting legislative standards and establishing a Parliamentary Commission on the civil service have been summarily dismissed. The position of the Lords remains unresolved.  The consensus that underpins our unwritten constitution is also under strain in other areas, with pressures to politicise the civil service and tensions between Ministers and the judiciary.  The Scottish referendum, whatever its outcome, will raise profound new questions about the relationship between the component parts of the United Kingdom.  Is Parliament becoming increasingly irrelevant? Is the time approaching when we need a written constitution to define the limits of Executive power? |
| 1800  1900  1930 | Break  Drinks  Dinner |
| 2100 (5) | **After dinner discussion: The shape of government to come**  Chair: Tom Legg  Lead speaker: Geoff Mulgan  Over the last half-century the processes of government have been transformed. The post-war concentration on a “command economy” approach to the provision of public services has been whittled away through denationalising, outsourcing and the creation of autonomous bodies. Increasingly, reliance has been placed on regulation rather than direct control.  Meanwhile, technological advances have made it possible to do more, and know more, with previously unimaginable speed, precision and economy. Governments’ record in taking advantage of that has been mixed, but there have been some notable successes.  Where will the next half-century take us? Will central government’s role in service delivery wither away or will it be forced by political pressures to retain an active commanding role? |

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| **Friday 20th June** | |
| 0830 | Breakfast |
| 0900 (6) | **Preparing for Government**  Chair: David Normington  Lead speakers: Nick Herbert, Oliver Robbins  Our 2010 report “Reforming Parliament and the Executive” and the more recent “Mid Term Review” both emphasised the importance of thorough preparation of ministers taking up new roles and made several detailed recommendations:   * There should be systematic arrangements for induction and training of ministers moving to new posts; * Opposition parties should have ample access to civil service advice in the run up to an election; * When a coalition is formed negotiations should not be rushed, civil service support should be available throughout, and the first Queen’s Speech should be largely confined to statements of policy with the detailed legislative programme following on at a later stage.   Will the Opposition have fair and sufficient access to civil service advice in advance of the May 2015 general election? Are there lessons to be learned from the devolved administrations? |
| 1015 | Tea/Coffee |
| 1030 (7) | **Blunder-free Government**  Chair: Christopher Foster  Lead speakers: Anthony King, ??  “The Blunders of our Governments” by Anthony King and Ivor Crewe and “Conundrum” by Richard Bacon and Christopher Hope examined a number of notorious policy failures. BGI recommendations for avoiding such failures focus on technocratic solutions such as explicit standards for staged policy development. The King/Crewe analysis shows that failures of political judgement were also a major factor.     * Would a more rigorous application of standard procedures for policy development make a significant difference? * Might greater ministerial involvement in civil service appointments threaten the quality of unbiased advice from departmental experts? * Is the increasing lack of experience of the world outside politics of both ministers and special advisers a problem? |
| 1145 (8) | **Summarising the conference’s outcome: Richard Mottram** |
| 1230 | Conference ends. |