EC0509n1\_first draft programme

Better Government Initiative 7th Plenary Conference

in association with The Constitution Society

Ditchley Park 19th – 20th June 2014

Better Government: Preparing for the

Post-election Government

**PROGRAMME**

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| **Thursday 19th June** | |
| 1215 | Lunch |
| 1315 (1) | **Welcome and conference overview**: **Richard Mottram** |
| 1330 (2) | **The Coalition’s Record**  Chair: Richard Mottram  Lead speaker: Peter Riddell  “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, strengthening scrutiny by Select Committees and the move away from micro-management by the centre of government. We remained concerned about poor and rushed preparation of policies and 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:   * Cabinet and policy making; * Legislation and Parliament; * Delivery and organisation; * Managing the civil service? |
| 1445 | Tea/Coffee |
| 1500 (3) | **BGI’s operational recommendations**  Chair: Richard Mottram  Lead speaker: Leigh Lewis  Key operational recommendations in “Mid Term Review” were:   * Rules for collective decision-making laid down by the Prime Minister and enforced by the Cabinet Secretary. * Explicit standards for preparing major policies and fresh legislation. * Restricting the legislative programme to a manageable size. * Close monitoring of the Treasury’s capacity to perform its core functions. * Preparation by Departmental Boards of clear strategic plans for every department. * Protocols clarifying the responsibilities of officials and ministers in managing projects. * A published strategy for the implementation of localism. * A coherent workforce strategy for the civil service covering numbers, skills, recruitment and training.   Are these still relevant for the next Government? Have other more pressing issues now come to the fore? |

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| 1615 | Afternoon tea |
| 1645 (4) | **Parliament – what roles?**  Chair: Robin Butler  Lead speaker: Alan Beith  The BGI takes the view that effective Parliamentary scrutiny must be a key component of good government; the threat of being called to account for errors of policy or financial management provides a powerful incentive to the Executive to get things right. “Mid Term Review” accordingly included specific recommendations for strengthening Parliamentary oversight of the quality of legislation and supported the Liaison Committee’s suggestion that departmental Select Committees should focus on value for money and service improvements.  However, majorities in both Houses enable the Government to limit 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. Is Parliament becoming increasingly irrelevant? |
| 1800  1900  1930 | Break  Drinks  Dinner |
| 2100 (5) | **After dinner discussion: Are we sleepwalking into a constitutional crisis?**  Introductory speakers: Robin Butler, Richard Gordon  The established consensus that underpins our unwritten constitution is under strain, with pressures to politicise the civil service and restrict the scope for judicial review and determined resistance to proposals for enhanced Parliamentary scrutiny. Is the time approaching when we need a written constitution to define the limits of Executive power? |

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| **Friday 20th June** | |
| 0830 | Breakfast |
| 0900 (6) | **Preparing for Government**  Chair: Robin Butler  Lead speaker: John Elvidge  The continuity provided by a permanent civil service enables United Kingdom Governments to “hit the ground running”. That has dangers as well as advantages: a new administration needs to be thoroughly prepared to take up the reins.  “Mid Term Review” made several recommendations in this area:   * 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 proposal to allow six months’ Opposition access to the civil service be sufficient? Are there lessons to be learned from the devolved administrations? |
| 1015 | Tea/Coffee |
| 1030 (7) | **Blunder-free Government**  Chair: Christopher Foster  Lead speaker: Anthony King  “The Blunders of our Governments” by Anthony King and Ivor Crewe examined a number of notorious recent policy failures. BGI recommendations for avoiding such failures focus on technocratic solutions: explicit standards for staged policy development with detailed calculations of costs and benefits and full consultation with those responsible for implementation. But the King/Crewe analysis shows that failures of political judgement were a major factor.     * Would a more rigorous application of standard procedures for policy development make a significant difference? * Might increased 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. |