**THE BETTER GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE**

**Executive Committee**

**Minutes of the Meeting held at the Institute for Government on 7th October 2014**

**Present:** Richard Mottram (Chair)

Paul Britton

Robin Butler

Roger Dawe

Christopher Foster

Howell James

Tom Legg

Aaron Ritchie

Nat le Roux

Peter Owen

Adam Sharples

Martin Stanley

Phillip Ward

**Apologies:** Penny Boys

Geoffrey Chipperfield

Leigh Lewis

Peter Makeham

**Minutes of the meeting on 26th August 2014**

The minutes were agreed.

**Updates**

It was agreed that Peter Owen should recombine the “Thoughts for an incoming Government” blogs into a single report for consideration at the next meeting. The aggressive tone of the section on the Cabinet might need further consideration. The final agreed version might warrant a more targeted distribution than publication on the website.

The Manzoni appointment was welcome; he had a good reputation in the civil service and was well liked. His job description and the update to the civil service reform plan, in particular its skillfully drafted foreword signed by Francis Maude and Jeremy Heywood, (<https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/360637/Civil_Service_Reform_Plan_-_Progress_Report__web_.pdf>) seemed to suggest that we could begin to be more receptive towards the government’s proposals. The job description however said little about policy-making. We should consider at the next meeting whether, and if so on what basis, to seek a meeting between John Manzoni and a small group of members.

**BGI communication strategy**

Richard Mottram, introducing the discussion, said that it would be helpful to briefly revisit previous conclusions on strategy and target audiences before considering how we might best deploy our resources in the time remaining before the election to influence subsequent Government action.

In discussion the following main points were made.

* The description of our aims in the “Our Work” section of the website remained valid, but we should perhaps focus on a limited number of areas where we were particularly keen to achieve change.
* Our key concern was the quality of policy making. That would be influenced by the strength of the accountability of the Executive to Parliament and the public.
* A possible theme might be the need, alongside the professionalisation of the civil service, for professionalisation of ministers, whose previous experience no longer fitted them for their role in government. Incoming ministers needed high quality induction and “navigating” in their new tasks. The meeting with Manzoni might provide a “hook” for a statement on this.
* Other possible themes might be the processes of constitutional change, and reflections on the United Kingdom experience of coalition.
* We should not lose sight of topics we had previously treated as priorities such as the quality of legislation and the effectiveness of Cabinet.
* A list of key topics might include legislation, Cabinet, spads, fiscal control, accountability, the capacity of the civil service and its constitutional significance. We might need to meet more frequently to develop some of these topics.
* BGI had received fairly wide recognition with its first report, but less since. That was perhaps because the first report coincided with the end of the Blair regime when improving the quality of governance was a hot topic; we had also been somewhat eclipsed by the rise of the IfG with its much greater resources.
* The Constitution Society had been spreading its message by posting blog pieces on other sites such as LSE Politics and Shifting Grounds.
* We might achieve greater interest from journalists as we approached the election; they would be particularly interested in more confrontational themes.
* In the limited time available before the election we could manage only one or two events. Ditchley was no longer so attractive to younger politicians. The IfG or House of Lords could provide a more suitable venue – perhaps for a debate with prominent platform speakers and a carefully selected audience. We might consider working with a partner organisation such as City University or the IPPR.

In conclusion it was agreed that we should return to this subject at the following meeting with a view to setting a firm programme of action. In preparation for the meeting Richard Mottram and Peter Owen would draft a provisional list of five or six key topics. Howell James could then advise on handling.

**Scottish referendum**

Peter Owen said that the undertakings given by the Government in the closing stages of the Scottish referendum and the read-across to other parts of the United Kingdom would raise a host of issues affecting the quality of governance. The Constitution Society would have the lead interest, but were there specific operational topics on which BGI should comment, for example the role of the civil service in a more devolved structure?

Nat le Roux said that many of the issues raised by what was in practice a “devo-max” outcome could not be satisfactorily dealt with through the normal processes of electoral politics. The Constitution Society would argue for some form of broadly-based constitutional convention (this was also the approach favoured by the Labour party, though perhaps largely for tactical reasons).

In discussion the following main points were made.

* It would be appropriate for any BGI comment to focus on process aspects of constitutional change: how the civil service would work, how the Treasury would work, etc.
* The McKay Commission’s proposals had suggested a reasonable pragmatic approach to dealing with English votes for English laws.
* It would be appropriate for the BGI to support the Constitution Society’s preference for a constitutional convention to allow for thorough consideration of a wide range of complex policies with far-reaching consequences.
* The Commons Library had produced a useful paper on the Barnett Formula (http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/RP01-108/the-barnett-formula).

In conclusion, it was agreed that it would be helpful if BGI had something to say on the need for respecting the requirements of good government in dealing with follow-up to the referendum. Adam Sharples undertook to draft a piece on the Barnett Formula.

**Public service providers**

Item deferred to the following meeting.

**Request from Prof. Salomonsen**

PeterOwen will inform Prof. Salomonsen that Howell James would be prepared to meet her.

**Other business**

In a recent lecture by Francis Fukuyama at the IfG he had expressed great respect for the Northcote Trevelyan approach. it would be useful to be able to quote such an internationally respected figure and perhaps get him to attend an event.

The next meeting will be held on 21st October. Items for the agenda (not all of which may in practice be able to be accommodated) will include the choice of main topics to be promoted for the remainder of the year and the means of handling them; a possible approach to John Manzoni; a draft report combining the “Thoughts for an incoming Government” blogs; public service providers (held over from the present meeting); draft evidence to the PCRP on constitutional matters (Phillip Ward); and a draft report/blog on the deployment and development of senior civil servants (Leigh Lewis).

8th October 2014