

GOVERNANCE PROJECT



Annex 4 – The principles applied and working methodology adopted by the Commission

A.4.1. None of the Commissioners or senior support staff have received any payment in relation to their work on the Commission. Funders for the limited costs of the Commission have neither sought nor had any influence over the process, scope or detail of Recommendations, all of which have been entirely for the Commissioners to determine, with the help of the work undertaken by the support staff.

A.4.2. The Commission has applied the following guiding principles in its task:

- To work within the current system rather than to change it fundamentally (which would require far more analysis and consultation and would bring with it much increased risk of unintended consequences).
- To follow, reinforce and instil the Nolan principles for standards in public life and, more widely, the traditional British values of the rule of law, transparency, fairness, professionalism and high ethical standards.
- To underpin democracy, based upon the sovereignty of an elected parliament.
- To increase public confidence in Government and in our democratic system.
- To propose changes which are relatively easy to make but which would make real improvements.
- To acknowledge and build on the great deal of excellent work that has already been done in these fields.
- To avoid the need for primary legislation (and thus limit the impact on Government time and on the legislative timetable), except where justified, for example to create new independent legal structures, or to confer enforceable legal powers.
- Where legislation is necessary, to keep it as simple as possible.
- To respect the role of the Prime Minister as the head of Government.
- To make the working of Government more efficient and effective.
- To make proposals that (a) would have limited cost to implement; and (b) have limited risks of unintended or adverse consequences.
- To produce a set of recommendations that could be implemented either as an integrated package or individually.
- Not to make recommendations in areas where it is not reasonable to expect rapid implementation, even where far-reaching (but more controversial) reforms could be justified and, in particular, not to consider the topics of:
 - House of Lords Reform;
 - Electoral Reform;
 - Devolution (and relationships between the nations); or
 - a Written Constitution (and related issues),

on the basis that these topics are ones of particular complexity, which are actively debated elsewhere and which are not capable of rapid implementation, whatever the views on their respective merits.

- To retain a focus on
 - the need to strengthen the effective decision-making and decision-implementation capability of ministers and the quality of the working relationship with the Civil Service;
 - the need to restore public confidence in the ethical and propriety standards of both elected and unelected decision-makers in central UK Government, considering both what those standards should be and the appropriate mechanisms for their enforcement;
 - the need to ensure confidence in and transparency of our electoral systems;
 - the importance of ensuring an appropriate and proportionate degree of scrutiny over those exercising executive power in the national interest; and
 - the fact that the overwhelming majority of individuals engaged in public life are committed to acting in accordance with high standards of integrity and ethics, and must not be discouraged from entering public service.

A.4.3. The recommendations in this Report reflect the above principles and were developed in discussions within the Commission, with expert third parties, and with the three main political parties. The conclusions are, obviously, those only of the Commission itself.

A.4.4. Applying these principles, the Commission followed the following methodology:

- I. Commissioners choose key areas, where positive change appears to be possible in the short term without significant cost, including expenditure of legislative time. A short list of eleven focus areas is chosen.
- II. For each area, a sub-group of two or three Commissioners, with support from a team of researchers and project-managers, read all relevant materials and discuss with other expert individuals.
- III. This sub-group engages in discussion, bringing in views of other Commissioners as needed.
- IV. Each sub-group prepares a draft Recommendation which is then tested (a) at a series of weekly all-Commissioner meetings, held during September, October, November and December; and (b) in interviews with expert individuals including those specified in Annex 5; these interviews were conducted between August and December by one or more Commissioners together with at least one member of the support team, and a confidential note of the main points discussed was prepared, agreed with the interviewee and shared with all Commissioners.
- V. As the draft Recommendations evolved into firmer and more detailed proposals, the interviews described above became increasingly focussed on this detail, and took the form of seeking challenge to what was being proposed, with a view to maximising the range of perspectives from which each Recommendation was tested and analysed, and to try to identify as early as possible any unintended consequences which might result from the detail of each Recommendation.
- VI. Engagement with the three main political parties was an important practical element, during the period when the Commission was being established and throughout its life. This was based on a recognition that the Commission's aim to articulate implementable proposals would require the buy-in of as many as possible of these political parties, as being the groups who would determine the initial legislative programme of the next Government. This engagement was essentially informational and involved no surrender of autonomy or independence of thought on the part of the Commission.
- VII. The final stage in the preparation of this Report took place in December, following completion of the review, engagement, interview and challenge process described above. This stage was essentially one of refinement and finalisation of each Recommendation and of the other elements of this report.