



Justice Committee

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Sir Christopher Kelly KCB
Chairman of the Committee of Standards and Public Life
35 Great Smith Street
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9 February 2009

Dear Sir Christopher,

Committee Inquiry: Local Leadership and Public Trust

I am writing in relation to your Committee's inquiry into local leadership and public trust. The Justice Committee published a relevant report, *Public Appointments: Lord-Lieutenants and High Sheriffs*, (Sixth Report of Session 2007-08, HC 1001), last year. In this report we indicated that the broad principles set out by the Nolan Committee in relation to public appointments should be applied to all public offices (including significant ones which are not remunerated). The application of Nolan principles could be a key factor in achieving public confidence and trust in this facet of local leadership.

However, our report found that the process for appointing High Sheriffs and Lord-Lieutenants did not reflect these principles. Instead, in the case of High Sheriffs, the arrangements are dominated by people who hold, or have previously held, the position, with little or no opportunity for candidates' names to arise from outside their own circle of acquaintances. As a result, there is very limited diversity—and not simply of gender or ethnicity—amongst High Sheriffs. Attempts have been made to widen the range of people appointed as Lord Lieutenant, and Ministers have claimed, as evidence of this, that only 7 current holders of the post are peers, compared to 21 a few years ago. However, in the public mind, such offices are associated with people from a narrow stratum of society.

We recommended reform of this system. In the Government's response to our report, Cm 7503, December 2008, it was made clear that these offices have more than just a ceremonial function; in my view, this strengthens the case for reform and for the creation of a transparent and modern appointment system. This proposal was, however, rejected by the Government.

I hope that your Committee will look at the extent to which Nolan principles can or should be applied to these offices. I enclose a copy of the Committee's report and of the Government's reply. If I can be of any further assistance during the course of your inquiry, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours ever
Alan Beith

Rt Hon Sir Alan Beith MP
Chairman
Justice Committee