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Holyrood committee to conduct lobbying inquiry

A Holyrood committee is to conduct an inquiry into lobbying to determine whether there is a problem in Scotland, either “actual or perceived”.

The Standards, Procedures and Public Appointments Committee (SPPA) is also to consider what steps might be needed to improve transparency and whether the introduction of a statutory register of lobbyists will help address any such problem.

The move by the Committee follows the Scottish Government’s indication (13 June 2013) that it intends to introduce legislation in this area within this parliamentary session (2011-2016).

Launching a call for evidence from interested parties, Helen Eadie MSP, Deputy Convener of the SPPA Committee, said:

“Throughout this inquiry our Committee will examine the issue of lobbying and access to MSPs.

“Our main focus will be whether there is a problem, either actual or perceived, with lobbying in Scotland, and what steps should be taken to address any issues that are identified.

“The Committee would therefore like to receive views on these issues. In particular the Committee seeks views on the proposed statutory register of lobbyists, who should be on such a list, how it would operate and whether other steps might be needed to ensure integrity and public confidence in the decision-making process.”

The remit for the SPPA inquiry is:

- To examine whether there is a problem, either actual or perceived, with lobbying and, if so, how this can most effectively be addressed;
- To what extent a register of lobbyists would help with this process, who such a register should cover and how it would be operated in practice, and;
- Whether other steps might be needed to improve probity and transparency in this area.

The deadline for inquiry responses is 10 January 2014.

Background

On 13 June 2013, the Scottish Government indicated that it will legislate within this parliamentary session to give effect to proposals first raised by Neil Findlay MSP.

On 17 May 2013, Neil Findlay MSP presented a final proposal for a member's bill, which would require individuals and organisations that lobby MSPs, Scottish Ministers or relevant public officials, either on their own account or on behalf of third parties, to record relevant information about their activity in a published register.

In Session 1 of the Scottish Parliament the Standards Committee undertook an inquiry into lobbying which resulted in its '1st Report 2002, Report on Lobbying'. The report recommended the introduction of a statutory registration scheme for commercial lobbyists and a voluntary code of conduct for all lobbyists, but was not implemented by Parliament.

The Report on Lobbying also recommended, however, revisions to the Code of Conduct for MSPs in relation to paid advocacy which have been incorporated into by the Code.

The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill is currently being scrutinised by the UK Parliament. Under the proposed laws, individuals and companies lobbying ministers and civil servants would have to declare who they represented.

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