



All-Party Groups

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Several inquiries have been conducted in the past by the House of Commons (Services) Committee, the Administration Committee and the Committee on Standards and Privileges on All-Party Groups. Each inquiry has tried to address issues such as transparency, funding and the influence of these Groups. Particular attention has also been drawn to the rising numbers of APGs during each parliamentary session, and the effect this could have on the House and its facilities.

In November 2011 the Speakers of both the House of Lords and the House of Commons created a bicameral Working Group chaired by the former Leader of the House of Commons, Rt Hon Jack Straw, to examine these core issues. The Working Group held informal meetings with relevant Committee or APG Chairs; conducted surveys with current Members from both Houses and accepted written contributions from Members, Lords and other relevant organisations and groups. Both Speakers announced the publication of the Working Group Report in June 2012, they went on to confirm the recommendations would be submitted to the Standards and Privileges Committee, the Administration Committee and the Liaison Committee.

The Committee on Standards (successor to the Committee on Standards and Privileges) launched its inquiry into APGs as soon as it was established in January 2013.

Whilst the Committee's inquiry was underway, the House of Commons Commission agreed to withdraw the passes of APG staff, following allegations that a Member was trying to set up an APG at the request of a political consultant.

In November 2013, the Committee on Standards' report on APGs was published. It reviewed the role and regulation of APGs, their activities and also concerns about APGs. It recommended a revised regulatory regime and outlined key principles behind the rules.

The House is expected to debate a motion to approve the Committee's report on 13 May 2014, to agree that Chairs of APGs are responsible for ensuring that groups comply with the rules on registration and to give the Committee on Standards some powers to amend the rules.

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1 Speakers' Working Group on All-Party Groups: Report to the Speaker and Lord Speaker June 2012

The Speakers' Working Group on All-Party Groups was set up in November 2011 to consider the implications of how APGs operate and are funded:

The Speakers' Working Group will be chaired by the Rt Hon Jack Straw MP and will consist of Members of both Houses. Among the areas to be looked at will be; implications of the growing number of All Party Groups; the extent to which there is the risk of confusion with formally constituted Select Committees of both Houses; whether APPGs should be required to publish minutes and accounts; and the funding of APPG activities.¹

The Working Group published its report on 11 June 2012.² A press notice outlined the main issues considered in the report:

The Working Group looked at a number of areas including:

- the implications of the growing number of APGs;
- the extent to which there is the risk of confusion with formally constituted select committees of both Houses;
- whether APGs should be required to publish minutes and accounts; and
- the funding of APG activities.

The Working Group found APGs are an effective way for Members of both Houses to inform themselves about specific subjects, to respond to outside concerns, and to have direct contact with external audiences.

The Working Group recommends, however, that more coherent registration arrangements are put in place for APGs. Pointing to the receipt of material benefits by APGs from companies, charities and other organisations, the Working Group suggests a regular examination of registration rules is necessary.

The Working Group finds that greater transparency is required, both in terms of the funding of APGs and the rules on how they present themselves to the wider world. The Working Group makes a number of recommendations, including:

- the nomination of a Panel of Members of both Houses to advise on the formation of new APGs to ensure groups are not formed which duplicate each other's work;
- APGs should be required to prepare an income and expenditure statement. The threshold should also be lowered for the registration of benefits. External funding should be permissible but a strict obligation should be placed on APGs to be transparent about the resources provided;
- the "Associate" Parliamentary Group category should be abolished;

¹ Houses of Parliament, [Public statement on the Speakers' Working Group](#), News from Parliament, 28 November 2011

² Speakers' Working Group on All-Party Groups, [Report to the Speaker and Lord Speaker](#), June 2012

- a table listing the number of Groups for which every Member and Peer is a qualifying member should be included in the APG register;
- the portcullis should not be used by APGs on reports, websites, or correspondence to ensure APGs are not confused with official Parliamentary Committees and every APG report should carry a statement that the group is not an official Parliamentary body;
- higher eligibility requirements should be introduced to qualify for an APG Parliamentary pass.³

In their statement on the publication of the report, the Speaker and Lord Speaker said that:

The report will be forwarded to the Standards and Privileges, Administration and Liaison Committees in the House of Commons in the first instance to look at how the recommendations might be implemented.⁴

2 Developments following the Report from the Speaker’s Working Group on All-Party Groups

2.1 Committee on Standards Report

The Committee on Standards and Privileges did not begin an inquiry as it was about to be split into a Committee of Privileges and a Committee on Standards. The Committee on Standards launched its inquiry into APGs as soon as it was established in January 2013.⁵

The Administration Committee discussed issues relating to APGs at several meetings and held a meeting with Jack Straw, who chaired the Speakers’ Working Group.⁶ It shared evidence with the Committee on Standards,⁷ and the two committees undertook a joint survey.⁸

A single report was prepared by the Committee on Standards. It was published in November 2013. The Committee identified two aims for its report:

In making this Report we have two aims. The principal one is to propose a package of measures which will retain the benefits which APPGs bring, while putting in place stronger measures to ensure transparency and propriety. The other is to improve understanding of APPGs’ place in Parliament.⁹

The Committee reviewed the role and regulation of APGs, their activities and also concerns about APGs. It reported on the activity of groups (meetings held); the financial support they received, where it came from and how it was used; and considered whether APGs were manipulated by public affairs and lobby groups. It recommended a revised regulatory regime

³ Houses of Parliament, [Speakers publish Working Group report on All-Party Groups](#), News from Parliament, 11 June 2012

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ Committee on Standards news, [Inquiry into All-Party Groups](#), 31 January 2013

⁶ Administration Committee, [Formal Minutes 2012-13](#), Meeting held on Monday 17 December 2012; see also Administration Committee, [Formal Minutes 2013-14](#), Meetings held on 17 and 24 June 2013

⁷ Committee on Standards, [All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#), 29 November 2013, HC 357 2013-14, para 3

⁸ Committee on Standards, [All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#), 29 November 2013, HC 357 2013-14, Annex 2, fn24

⁹ Committee on Standards, [All-Party Parliamentary Groups](#), 29 November 2013, HC 357 2013-14, para 4. The Committee on Standards said that “The terms APG and APPG have been used interchangeably in the past. In this Report we use the abbreviation “APPG”—All-Party Parliamentary Group, but APG may appear in some quotations” [fn1]

and outlined key principles behind the rules. The Committee noted that the existing rules were “extensive and detailed, and so our proposals have to be similarly detailed”. However, it said that there were a number of key principles behind its proposed rules:

- APPGs should be driven and controlled by Parliamentarians;
- Members playing an active part in an APPG’s activities should recognise their responsibility for its governance and understand they may be held to account over any failings;
- there should be transparency about APPGs’ activities and expenditure, as well as about the support they receive from external sources;
- information should be provided in a way which makes it easier for the public to understand how APPGs work and how they are regulated; and
- regulation should be appropriate to an APPG’s size and activities.¹⁰

The Committee outlined the changes its proposed rules made to the existing rules and explained why it recommended the changes. In its summary at the beginning of its report, the Committee said that:

There is a longstanding dilemma about the regulation of APPGs: they are essentially informal groupings, established by individual Members, yet the more restrictions and requirements that are placed on them, the more they appear to be endorsed by the House. Work of this sort would continue whether or not APPGs were regulated; there would simply be less transparency about it.

We believe that this problem can only be resolved by ensuring the rules require appropriate transparency from APPGs, while giving groups of Members sufficient incentives to register and abide by the APPG rules. One incentive would be to ensure that groups which are not registered as APPGs, and so avoid the House’s requirements, should not benefit from the “brand of Parliament”.¹¹

It set out its proposed rules APGs in Annex 1 of its report.

2.2 Withdrawal of passes of APG staff

Whilst the Committee’s inquiry was underway, allegations were made that a Member was trying to set up an APG at the request of a political consultant.¹²

The Administration Committee discussed the issue,¹³ and at its meeting on 15 July 2013, the House of Commons Commission agreed that “APPG staff passes should be withdrawn and that this category of pass should not be used in future”.¹⁴

2.3 Implementing the Committee on Standards’ recommendations

The House is expected to debate a motion to approve the Committee’s report on 13 May 2014, to agree that Chairs of APGs are responsible for ensuring that groups comply with the

¹⁰ Committee on Standards, *All-Party Parliamentary Groups*, 29 November 2013, HC 357 2013-14, para 34

¹¹ Committee on Standards, *All-Party Parliamentary Groups*, 29 November 2013, HC 357 2013-14, Summary

¹² Following an investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Patrick Mercer was found to have “involved his colleagues in setting up an APPG to further his commercial interests” [Committee on Standards, *Patrick Mercer*, 1 May 2014, HC 1225 2013-14, para 27

¹³ Administration Committee, *Formal Minutes 2013-14*, Meeting held on 24 June 2013

¹⁴ House of Commons Commission, *Decisions 15 July 2013*, Item 1

rules on registration and to give the Committee on Standards some powers to amend the rules:

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUPS

Kevin Barron
Mr Andrew Lansley

That—

(1) this House approves the Sixth Report of the Committee on Standards, Session 2013-14, HC 357, on All-Party Parliamentary Groups, and the Rules for All-Party Parliamentary Groups contained in Annex 1 of that Report.

(2) the Resolution of the House of 17 December 1985, as amended on 10 March 1989, 29 July 1998, 7 February 2011 and 12 March 2012, relating to the registration of interests be further amended with effect from the beginning of the next Parliament by:

(a) leaving out paragraphs 3 and 4; and

(b) inserting a new paragraph 3:

“Chairs of All-Party Parliamentary Groups shall be responsible for registering the matters specified in the rules for such groups and for the group’s adherence to the Guide to the Rules for All-Party Parliamentary Groups”; and

(3) the Committee on Standards shall have power to update the Guide to the Rules for All-Party Parliamentary Groups from time to time and to make such minor changes to the Rules for All-Party Parliamentary Groups as are necessary to ensure the effective operation of the Register of APPGs and the regulatory regime applying to such groups.¹⁵

3 History of All-Party Groups (APGs)

It is not known when All-Party Groups first came into existence, especially as they have no official status.

The importance of these groups was first recognised by the Public Information Office when it was established in 1978. This led to the first official (House-issued) lists of APGs being published as Factsheets numbers 7 and 8 in May and July 1980.

The current Register of All-Party Groups states:

APGs are informal, cross-party, interest groups that have no official status within Parliament and are not accorded any powers or funding by it...

APGs are essentially run by and for Members of the House of Commons and House of Lords. Mostly they are run by backbenchers, though ministers may also be officers or members of APGs and many groups choose to involve individuals and organisations from outside Parliament in their administration and activities.¹⁶

¹⁵ House of Commons, *Future Business*, 12 May 2014

¹⁶ House of Commons, [Register of All-Party Groups](#), 11 April 2014, p3

3.1 Number of APGs

By 1983, there were concerns about the Membership of APGs and their use of facilities of the House. As a result, the House of Commons (Services) Committee conducted an inquiry into APGs in 1984, noting that it was not certain how many APGs there were.¹⁷

In his inquiry, in 2006, into allegations that a number of APGs had breached House rules (see section 3.4), the Parliamentary commissioner for Standards noted that “the number of groups has grown inexorably over the last 20 years”, and provided the following table:

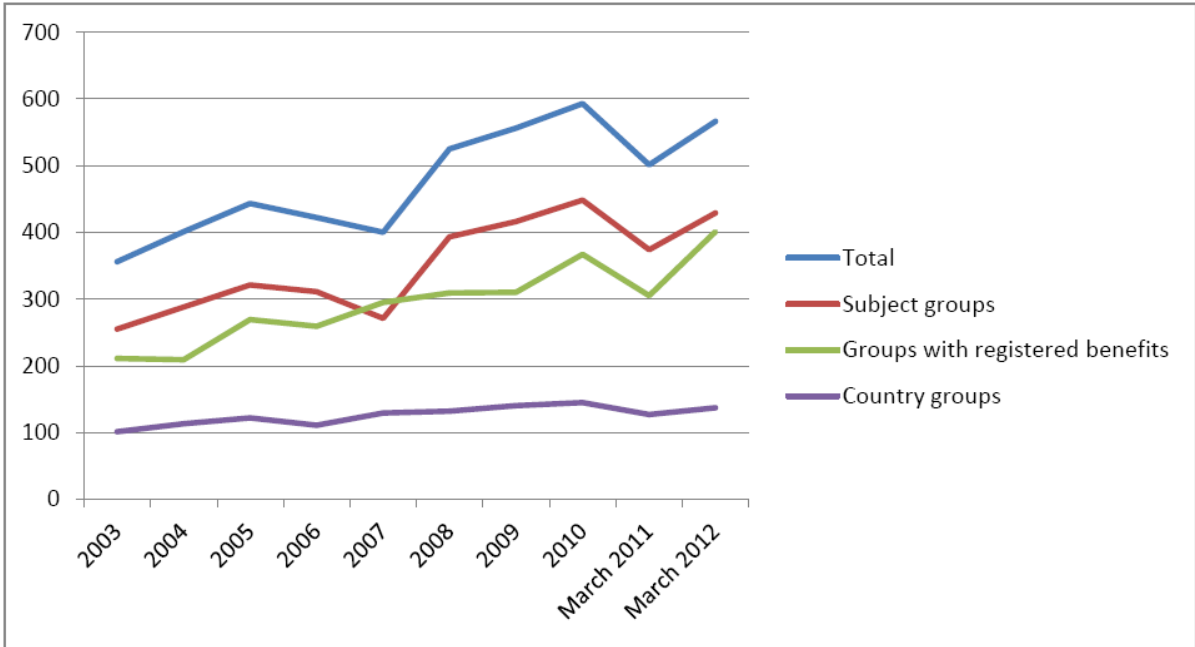
Date	Country Groups	Subject Groups	Total
1986	68	80	148
1996	93	142	235
2006	121	321	442

Source: Committee on Standards and Privileges, *Lobbying and All Party Groups*, 25 May 2006, HC 1145 2005-06, Appendix para 9

The Speakers’ Working Group on All-Party Groups reported more data:

The number of APGs has grown during every recent Parliament, reaching a peak of nearly 600 just before the 2010 General Election. Following a dip immediately after the Election (when Groups have to re-register) this trend has continued during the current Session and the current number of Groups stands at 566.¹⁸

The group provided the following chart:



Source: Speakers’ Working Group on All-Party Groups, *Report to the Speaker and Lord Speaker*, June 2012

After presenting the chart, the Working Group made the following comment:

The trend here is very clear – an increase in the number of APGs during a Parliament, with a fall-back in numbers at the beginning of a new Parliament when Groups have to

¹⁷ Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), *All-Party and Parliamentary Groups*, February 1984, HC 256 1983-84, para 2
¹⁸ Speakers’ Working Group on All-Party Groups, *Report to the Speaker and Lord Speaker*, June 2012, para 6

re-register: April 2010 (end of last Parliament): 599; July 2010 (first register of this Parliament): 339; 31 March 2011: 501; March 2012 (latest register): 566. The increase is more marked in subject groups than country groups, and is most marked of all in respect of “Groups with registered benefits” (which includes Groups from both the country and subject categories).¹⁹

4 Inquiries into APGs

4.1 The House of Commons (Services) Committee Report (February 1984)

In February 1984, the House of Commons (Services) Committee reported on *All-Party and Parliamentary Groups*. In the previous Parliament, its Accommodation and Administration Sub-Committee had considered a report on All-Party Groups from the Parliamentary Labour Party, the 1922 Committee Executive and representatives of the smaller parties. The Sub-Committee had taken oral evidence from the parties and from the Serjeant at Arms.

The introduction to the Committee’s report stated that:

All-party groups have become a recognised part of Parliamentary life, though they have no direct connection with the House, and it is not even certain how many there are.²⁰

The Committee was especially concerned with the degree of involvement in Groups’ activities in the Palace of non-Members of either House. It also looked at the pressure created on a finite number of meeting rooms by the large numbers of meetings of the groups.

It identified three distinct groups:

- groups of Members belonging to the same party;
- all-party groups consisting of Members of either House and Members of more than one political party; and
- parliamentary groups, i.e those that “admit both to its membership and to its meetings in the precincts those who are not Members of either House”.

It continued that:

All-party groups – as we propose to define them – would not require to be registered and listed. Their nature is sufficient guarantee of the parliamentary character of the meeting. Parliamentary groups would however require to register in order to benefit from the advantages in the booking of rooms which it is proposed to confer on them.²¹

It then suggested rules to which parliamentary groups would have to give assent in order to qualify for priority booking of Committee rooms in the Palace.

The Committee’s report was debated on 31 October 1984, and the House agreed:

That this House takes note with approval of the Second Report of the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services) (House of Commons Paper No. 256) but considers that any group falling outside the recommended definition of all-party groups

¹⁹ Speakers’ Working Group on All-Party Groups, *Report to the Speaker and Lord Speaker*, June 2012, para 12

²⁰ Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), *All-Party and Parliamentary Groups*, February 1984, HC 256 1983-84, para 2

²¹ Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), *All-Party and Parliamentary Groups*, February 1984, HC 256 1983-84, para 6

should not be entitled to use the term "parliamentary" but may be described as a registered group.²²

4.2 Select Committee on Members' Interests (May 1985)

The Select Committee on Members' Interests considered the effect of lobbying on the House's rules on registering interests. It devoted one paragraph of its short report to All Party and Registered Groups. It noted that "some receive support, financial or secretarial, from outside interests". It recommended that:

... the Commons officers of All Party and Registered Groups be required to register the names of the officers of the Group, the source and extent of any benefits, financial or in kind from outside sources which they may enjoy, together with any other gainful occupation of any staff which they may have. Where a public relations agency provides the assistance, the ultimate client should be named. A copy of this Register, also, should be placed in the Library for the use of Members.²³

The House debated the report on 17 December 1985. An amendment was made and the Committee's recommendation on all party groups was agreed. The resolution agreed by the House included the following provisions:

3. Commons officers in All-Party Groups, Parliamentary Groups, and Groups whose membership is open to Members of either House of more than one party, be required to register the names of the Officers of the Group, and the source and extent of any benefits financial or in kind from outside sources which they may enjoy, together with any other relevant gainful occupation of any staff which they may have. Where a public relations agency provides the assistance, the ultimate client should be named;

and that copies of these Registers be placed in the Library for the use of Members.²⁴

4.3 The Administration Committee Report (June 1996)

A decade later the Administration Committee conducted a further inquiry into All-Party and Parliamentary Groups and found that many of the issues examined by the House of Commons (Services) Committee still existed:

As already stated, the intervening 12 years have not resolved any of these problems; indeed, the situation has exacerbated. There is still concern expressed over the use of House facilities and status, and the pressure on accommodation has worsened as, whilst there are still 100 or so "country groups", and the number of "subject groups" in existence is now approaches 150.²⁵

The Administration Committee acknowledged that the rules could easily be misinterpreted and recommended a number of changes:

During the course of the inquiry, the Committee became aware that the rules, as currently drafted, did offer scope for misinterpretation or misunderstanding. It was therefore agreed that the rules should be amended to remove any imprecision.²⁶

²² HC Deb 31 October 1984 cc1362-1374

²³ Select Committee on Members' Interests, *First Report*, May 1985, HC 408 1984-85, para 17

²⁴ HC Deb 17 December 1985 Vol 89 cc219-57

²⁵ Administration Committee, *All Party and Parliamentary Groups*, June 1996, HC 494 1995-96, para 5

²⁶ Administration Committee, *All Party and Parliamentary Groups*, June 1996, HC 494 1995-96, para 12

It published its “Proposed amended written undertaking to be given by prospective all party or parliamentary groups” as an annex to its report.

It also suggested that consideration should be given to publishing the register of groups, rather than making them available in the Library.²⁷

On 29 July 1998, the House agreed (without debate or division) that the registers should be made available for public inspection.²⁸

4.4 The Committee on Standards and Privileges Report (May 2006)

The next select committee report on APGs did not occur until the 2005-06 parliamentary session. In January 2006, the *Times* ran a series of articles reporting an investigation into APGs. The paper’s editor wrote to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, then Sir Philip Mawer, alleging that six APGs had breached House rules.²⁹

On 25 May 2006, the Committee’s report, *Lobbying and All Party Groups* was published, along with a memorandum from Sir Philip Mawer. The Committee noted that:

5. The complaint from The Times also suggested that the cause of the alleged breach might lie in an apparent discrepancy between the wording of the Rules and guidance issued by the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

6. In the light of this, the Commissioner has sought views on the APG regulatory regime generally, and the need for any change in this. The Commissioner has also included in his memorandum an account of the responses he received, and has made seven specific recommendations. Taken together, the Commissioner believes that these recommendations represent a proportionate approach, which will improve transparency and accountability without imposing undue fresh burdens on APGs.

7. We share the Commissioner’s view that APGs fulfil a valuable role as forums in which Members of both Houses and those interested in a particular subject may meet to exchange information and views and to advance a particular cause. Assistance from outside interests frequently has a part to play in helping such groups to achieve their objectives. It is, however, important that outside interests should not control them, or be perceived as doing so. We are pleased to note from the Commissioner’s memorandum that there appears to be no evidence that any APGs have been suborned by outside interests.

8. Before we take decisions on the Commissioner’s recommendations on revision of the rules applying to APGs, we would like to give APGs and others the chance to comment on his proposals. ... We shall then take any such representations into account when we give further consideration to the Commissioner’s recommendations.³⁰

After noting that APGs had no official status (except for the British American Parliamentary Group), Sir Philip Mawer reviewed their role, the opportunities they afforded lobbyists and the 1985 rules:

²⁷ Administration Committee, *All Party and Parliamentary Groups*, June 1996, HC 494 1995-96, para 41

²⁸ HC Deb 29 July 1998 c501

²⁹ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *Lobbying and All Party Groups*, 25 May 2006, HC 1145 2005-06, Appendix para 1

³⁰ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *Lobbying and All Party Groups*, 25 May 2006, HC 1145 2005-06, paras 5-8

The regime thus established has continued in being to the present time, with modest amendment and without significant challenge. On 29 July 1998, the House agreed a Resolution allowing public access to the Register for the first time. A copy of the Register was put in the Committee Office of the House for inspection by appointment. In July 2000 following a recommendation by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in its Sixth Report, the Register was also put on the internet, where it is more readily accessible to the public as well as to Members.³¹

Sir Philip Mawer described the distinction between the Register and the 'Approved List':

Being on the 'Approved List' is not compulsory but confers certain benefits on a group in terms of recognised status and access to facilities. Before it can be included on the Approved List a group must provide certain information about itself and sign a declaration undertaking to adhere to various rules laid down by the Administration Committee. The distinction between the Register and the 'Approved List' is frequently the source of confusion and proposals to end the distinction and amalgamate the two documents were put forward by my office and approved by the Administration Committee towards the end of the last Parliament, but the Dissolution intervened before the approval of the Committee on Standards and Privileges could be sought. This matter will be taken forward in the present Parliament.³²

After examining the *Times*' allegations, Sir Philip considered the wider issues raised and other suggestions for amending the rules on APGs. He argued that there was nothing wrong with representing interests or with lobbying. Consequently regulation should be proportionate and he echoed comments that "the key to much of this discussion lies in ensuring full transparency in a realistic way". He continued:

Two factors are critical. The first is that *Members must remain in control* of Groups. These are, after all, Parliamentary groups. The Rules must assist Members in this and Members must be prepared to take responsibility themselves for the way in which each Group of which they are a part operates, including for any reports that it produces. Members must in turn be accountable to the House for the proper operation of such Groups. The second is indeed transparency. The arrangements must be such as to lay bare the influences playing on Groups, so that Members and the public can draw their own conclusions.³³

Sir Philip Mawer commented on the possible narrow interpretation of the term "ultimate client". This confusion arose from the original 1985 rules in defining the term "ultimate client".

...it is not surprising that the requirement to name the "ultimate client" should be assumed to be limited to the client at whose request and with whose financial help the Group is being assisted. Indeed the phrase "ultimate client" implies an assumption that the assistance is being provided *on behalf of* a particular client.³⁴

A recommendation was therefore put forward to amend the interpretation of "ultimate client":

...the interpretation of the "ultimate client" rule should be amended. In future, where a Group is assisted by an outside consultancy, the names of any clients of the

³¹ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *Lobbying and All Party Groups*, 25 May 2006, HC 1145 2005-06, Appendix para 16

³² Committee on Standards and Privileges, *Lobbying and All Party Groups*, 25 May 2006, HC 1145 2005-06, Appendix para 24

³³ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *Lobbying and All Party Groups*, 25 May 2006, HC 1145 2005-06, Appendix para 48

³⁴ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *Lobbying and All Party Groups*, 25 May 2006, HC 1145 2005-06, Appendix para 52

consultancy with a direct interest in the work of the Group should be listed in the register. Similarly, where assistance is provided by a charity or not-for profit organisation, the name of any commercial company with a direct interest in the work of the APG which contributes materially (say more than £5,000 or 5%, whichever is the lower) to meeting the central costs of the charity should be listed.³⁵

Sir Philip Mawer's memorandum went on to comment on improving transparency:

Transparency would undoubtedly be assisted if all consultancies named their clients, and when considering whether or not to accept assistance from a consultancy, officers of APGs may wish to check whether or not the consultancy does so.³⁶

Sir Philip Mawer also recommended that APGs be required to provide information to enable a URL to be inserted in the web edition of the Register of APGs. This again would improve transparency and accountability for APGs.³⁷

Sir Philip recommended that the authorship and status of APG publications should also be transparent. He noted that "under the House's Rules, responsibility rests on the officers of the Group to ensure that they, and not anyone assisting the Group, do so".³⁸ He recommended that:

Publications (including reports and press releases) produced by APGs should carry the name of their author(s), the organisation(s) which provide secretariat services to the Group and any relevant client or sponsor.³⁹

He also considered concerns about the scope for confusion between APG reports and select committee reports; and the effect of outside funding.

Finally, he addressed the question of responsibility for complying with the rules of the House. He recommended that:

An officer of each APPG from the Commons should be the nominated point of contact of each Group and should also be the person ultimately responsible for ensuring the Group's compliance with the relevant Rules of the House.⁴⁰

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards' Overall Conclusion and Summary of Recommendations

95. APGs fulfil a valuable role as a forum in which Members of both Houses and those outside Parliament interested in a particular subject may meet to exchange information and views, and to advance a particular cause. As such Groups are not publicly funded—and there would be disadvantages in terms of flexibility and adaptability, as well as significant budgetary implications, if they were—they will inevitably seek assistance and other resources from outside to undertake their work. There is nothing

³⁵ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *Lobbying and All Party Groups*, 25 May 2006, HC 1145 2005-06, Appendix para 56

³⁶ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *Lobbying and All Party Groups*, 25 May 2006, HC 1145 2005-06, Appendix para 58

³⁷ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *Lobbying and All Party Groups*, 25 May 2006, HC 1145 2005-06, Appendix para 65

³⁸ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *Lobbying and All Party Groups*, 25 May 2006, HC 1145 2005-06, Appendix para 69

³⁹ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *Lobbying and All Party Groups*, 25 May 2006, HC 1145 2005-06, Appendix para 75 [Recommendation 6]

⁴⁰ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *Lobbying and All Party Groups*, 25 May 2006, HC 1145 2005-06, Appendix para 94 [Recommendation 7]

intrinsically improper in external sources providing, or Groups accepting such assistance.

96. What must be avoided, in the public interest, is the provision of such assistance enabling outside bodies effectively to control such Groups or to advance their concerns in covert ways. The keys to preventing this are vigilance by Members in ensuring that they maintain control over the Groups' agendas and activities, and transparency about the influences playing on Groups.

97. Neither the investigation of APGs conducted by "The Times" earlier this year nor my enquiries have suggested that APGs have been suborned by outside interests. They have, however, suggested that the Rules introduced by the House in 1985 could helpfully be strengthened to increase transparency. I have recommended that this could be achieved by:

- A more demanding interpretation and application of the "ultimate client" rule, so that the APG Register carries the names not only of those who provide secretariat assistance to Groups but of any client (or in the case of a not-for-profit organisation, any commercial supporter) with a direct interest in the work of the Group.
- Linking the web edition of the APG Register to the websites of those providing secretariat assistance to Groups; of any associated clients or commercial supporters with a direct interest in the work of the Group named in the Register; and, where they exist, of Groups themselves, so that information about who stands behind Groups is much more readily available through the Register than it is at present.
- Requiring publications produced by APGs to carry the name of their author(s), the organisation(s) which provide secretariat assistance to the Group and any relevant clients or sponsors of the publication.
- I have also recommended focussing responsibility for ensuring each Group's compliance with the relevant Rules of the House on the Commons officer who is each Group's nominated point of contact.

98. Taken together, I believe that these recommendations represent a proportionate approach, which will improve transparency and therefore accountability without imposing undue fresh burdens on Groups. I hope that they provide a helpful basis on which the Committee (itself consulting further on the matter if it thinks this desirable) can consider how best to advise the House on the way forward.

4.5 The Committee on Standards and Privileges Report (July 2009)

The Committee on Standards and Privileges consulted on the Commissioner's 2006 proposals, wrote to APGs and considered the issues. Its conclusions were published in July 2009.⁴¹

The Committee reviewed each of the Commissioner's seven recommendations and considered aligning the rules for registered and approved groups.

The Commissioner had recommended that any assistance from consultancies, charities or not-for-profit organisations to groups should be registered, and that clients or supporters of these with direct interests in an APG's work should be listed. The Committee argued that

⁴¹ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *All-Party Groups*, 16 July 2009, HC 920 2008-09

“the Register should remain a financial register rather than a register of engagement”; and that those assisting APGs should be transparent about their clients or supporters.⁴²

The Committee made a number of comments about the URLs that should be included in the register. It accepted the recommendation that a Commons officer from each APG should be the nominated contact and be responsible for compliance with the rules of the House.⁴³

The Committee also proposed changes to the declaration signed by the Commons officer of a Group and proposed renaming the application form the “Registration Form for All-Party Groups”.⁴⁴

The Committee also concluded that there was a need to align both the rules for registration with those currently applying to Groups on the Approved List. The existing arrangements caused confusion:

The fact that there are currently two sets of rules applying to registered Groups—the rules on registration, which apply compulsorily; and the requirements for inclusion on the Approved List, to which groups can subscribe if they wish—leads to confusion both outside the House and among Members.⁴⁵

After considering the advantages and disadvantages of the amalgamation of the Register (Resolution of the House in 1985) and the Approved List (Resolution of the House in 1984), the Committee concluded that “the balance of advantage lies in the greater transparency and efficiency that will be provided by a single registration and approval regime for APGs”. It then recommended that “the rules relating to the Register and to the Approved List should be amalgamated. In future, only those Groups that meet the current criteria for entry on the Approved List should be permitted to register would result in far greater advantages and would result in greater transparency and efficiency of APGs”.⁴⁶

The House considered the Committee’s report on 7 February 2011. Kevin Barron, the Chair of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, provided the following summary of the Committee’s proposals (the text of the resolution is given in the Appendix):

I now turn to the report on all-party groups, published in July 2009. The proposals set out in the report are a package, most of them originally recommended by the previous Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Sir Philip Mawer, to whom I pay tribute. In summary, the proposed changes will require each group to register the website address of any organisation acting as its secretariat, where the secretarial assistance is more than £1,500 a year; in the case of a charity providing such support, require the charity to make available on request a list of commercial donors who have donated more than £5,000 to it in the previous 12 months; in the case of a consultancy providing such support, require the consultancy to publish on its website its full client list or provide such a list on request; require groups to register their website address; require groups to include on their website details of their sponsors and providers of secretarial services; and require each group to nominate an MP, who must also be an officer of the group, to act as the main point of contact for the group and also as the person who is ultimately responsible for ensuring its compliance with the rules.

⁴² Committee on Standards and Privileges, *All-Party Groups*, 16 July 2009, HC 920 2008-09, paras 6-19

⁴³ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *All-Party Groups*, 16 July 2009, HC 920 2008-09, paras 20-24

⁴⁴ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *All-Party Groups*, 16 July 2009, HC 920 2008-09, paras 40-42

⁴⁵ Eighth Report from the Committee on Standards and Privileges, Session 2008-09, (HC 920), para 34

⁴⁶ Committee on Standards and Privileges, *All-Party Groups*, 16 July 2009, HC 920 2008-09, para 39

In my view, those are sensible tidying-up changes that will increase public confidence in the Register of All-party Groups. The Committee's report also proposes tightening the rules for the registration of all-party groups by aligning them with those for inclusion on the separate approved list maintained by the Commissioner's office. This means that groups will no longer qualify for inclusion on the register unless they comply with the more extensive requirements of the approved list, such as the need to provide the names of 20 qualifying Members.

Taken as a whole, the changes should improve the scheme's operations, providing clearer rules for those running the groups and those compiling the register, and greater transparency and ease of use for those who wish to consult the register.⁴⁷

The House agreed the motion to agree with Committee's report without a division.⁴⁸

4.6 The Committee on Standards and Privileges Report (December 2011)

In December 2011, the Standards and Privileges Committee reviewed the registration requirements for staff of APGs. It was noted that a separate category of parliamentary pass for staff of APGs was introduced in 2009, and that the registration requirements of these staff differed from those of Members' secretaries and research assistants:

The registration requirements for these staff are less comprehensive than for staff who also hold passes as Members' secretaries and research assistants, since only employment is covered, while secretaries and research assistants are also required to register gifts, benefits and hospitality (subject to financial thresholds).⁴⁹

The Committee recommended that "in future staff who hold passes because of their work for an All-Party Group should be required to register":

- any paid employment for which they receive more than 0.5% of the parliamentary salary ... in a calendar year; and
- any gift, benefit or hospitality they receive, if the gift, benefit or hospitality in any way relates to or arises from their work in Parliament and its value is over 0.5% of the parliamentary salary ... in the course of a calendar year".⁵⁰

The House approved the Committee's recommendations on 12 March 2012.⁵¹

⁴⁷ HC Deb 7 February 2011 cc100-101

⁴⁸ HC Deb 7 February 2011 cc122-124

⁴⁹ Twenty-first Report from the Committee on Standards and Privileges, Session 2010-12, (HC 1689), para 4

⁵⁰ Twenty-first Report from the Committee on Standards and Privileges, Session 2010-12, (HC 1689), para 11

⁵¹ HC Deb 12 March 2012 c102

Appendix: Resolutions on all-Party Groups

17 December 1985

Extract from a resolution on the 1984-85 report from the Select Committee on Members' Interests:

3. Commons officers of All Party and Registered Groups be required to register the names of the officers of the Group, the source and extent of any benefits financial or in kind from outside sources which they may enjoy, together with any other relevant gainful occupation of any staff which they may have. Where a public relations agency provides the assistance, the ultimate client should be named;

and that copies of these Registers be placed in the Library for the use of Members.⁵²

10 March 1989

Resolution on Members' Interests (Register of All Party Parliamentary Groups, &c)

That the Resolution of the House of 17th December 1985 relating to Register of Members' Interests be amended, in the third sub-paragraph, by leaving out the words "All Party and Registered Groups", and inserting the words "All Party Groups, Parliamentary Groups and Groups whose membership is open to Members of either House of more than one party".⁵³

29 July 1998

Resolution on Registers of Interests

That the Resolution of 17th December 1985 be amended in line 31, by leaving out the words 'copies of the Registers be placed in the Library for the use of Members' and inserting the words 'the Registers be made available for public inspection under arrangements to be approved by the Committee on Standards and Privileges'.⁵⁴

7 February 2011

Resolution on All-party groups

That-

(1) this House agrees with the recommendations in the Eighth Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges of Session 2008-09, on All-Party Groups (HC 920); and

(2) accordingly the resolution of the House of 17 December 1985, as amended on 10 March 1989 and 29 July 1998, be further amended by leaving out paragraph 3 and inserting:-

"3. Groups whose membership:

- is open to all Members of the House of Commons and House of Lords, and
- includes at least 20 Members (each of whom must be a Member of the House of Commons or House of Lords), comprising: at least 10 Members who are from the same political party as the Government, and at least 10 who are not from the Government's party (of whom at least six must be from the main opposition party), and

⁵² [HC Deb 17 December 1985 Vol 89 cc219-57](#)

⁵³ HC Deb 10 March 1989 c1201

⁵⁴ HC Deb 29 July 1998 c501

• includes at least one officer who is a Member of the House of Commons be required to register the following information on the Register of All-Party Groups:

(a) The full title of the group. If persons other than Members of the Commons or Lords are allowed full membership (i.e. voting rights) the term 'Associate Parliamentary Group' must be included in the group's title. If such persons are not allowed full membership the term 'All-Party Parliamentary Group' must be included instead. The rest of the group's title should simply reflect the group's subject so that the latter is obvious from its title alone.

(b) A brief summary of the group's main purpose.

(c) The names of the group's officers. At least one officer must be an MP; each of the other officers must be a Member of the House of Commons or House of Lords.

(d) The names of exactly 20 qualifying Members (each of whom must be a Member of the House of Commons or Lords), comprising: 10 Members who are from the same political party as the Government, and 10 who are not from the Government's party (of which at least six must be from the main opposition party).

(e) The contact details of the group's registered contact, who must be both an officer of the group and a Member of the House of Commons, and is the person ultimately responsible for the group's compliance with the rules of the House.

(f) Any relevant gainful occupation of staff to the group who hold a parliamentary pass (relevant gainful occupation means any occupation that is advantaged by the privileged access afforded by the pass).

(g) The source and extent of any financial benefit (e.g. donations) and the source and nature of any non-financial material benefit (e.g. provision of goods or services) received by the group from a single source outside Parliament, if the value of the benefit equals or exceeds the financial threshold for registration (currently £1,500) in a calendar year. Once the group has made that initial registration, any further donation received from the same source in the same calendar year should be registered if its value exceeds £500.

(h) The website address of any organisation registered as the group's secretariat.

(i) If a consultancy is registered as the group's secretariat, the names and website of the consultancy plus the name of any client of theirs who is specifically paying the consultancy to act as the secretariat must also be registered. The consultancy must either publish on its website its full client list or agree to provide such a list on request, otherwise it is not allowed to act as the group's secretariat.

(ii) If a charity or not-for-profit organisation is registered as the group's secretariat, the former's name and website must also be registered. The charity or not-for-profit organisation must agree to make available on request a list citing any commercial company which has donated either as a single sum or cumulatively more than £5,000 in the course of the 12 months prior to the month in which the request is made, otherwise it is not allowed to act as the group's secretariat.

(i) The address of the group's website, if it has its own website.

(j) The date of the group's inaugural election of officers and of any Annual General Meeting held thereafter.

(k) Affiliation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union and Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, if the group is affiliated to either or both."⁵⁵

12 March 2012

Resolution on Registration of Staff of All-Party Groups

That

(1) this House agrees with the recommendations in the Twenty-first Report of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, on Registration of Staff All-Party Groups (HC 1689); and

(2) accordingly the Resolution of the House of 17 December 1985, as amended on 10 March 1989, 29 July 1998 and 7 February 2011, relating to the registration of interests be further amended by:

(a) leaving out paragraph 3 (f); and

(b) inserting a new paragraph 4:

“Holders of permanent passes as staff of All-Party Groups be required to register:

i. any paid employment for which they receive more than 0.5 per cent. of the parliamentary salary; and

ii. any gift, benefit or hospitality they receive, if the gift, benefit or hospitality in any way relates to or arises from their work in Parliament and its value is over 0.5 per cent. of the parliamentary salary in the course of a calendar year.”⁵⁶

House of Commons Commission Decision relating to the resolution of 12 March 2012

At its meeting on 15 July 2013, the House of Commons Commission agreed that “APPG staff passes should be withdrawn and that this category of pass should not be used in future”.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ HC Deb 7 February 2011 cc122-124

⁵⁶ HC Deb 12 March 2012 c102

⁵⁷ House of Commons Commission, *Decisions 15 July 2013*, Item 1