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MEDIA RELEASE

Further considerations are required before any lobbying reform takes place in Wales says committee

Learning from the experience of how statutory lobbyist registers operate elsewhere in the UK and gathering additional information of the scale of lobbying activity in Wales needs to be considered before any changes are made to lobbying regulation according to a National Assembly for Wales committee.

A new report by the Standards of Conduct Committee on their inquiry into Lobbying says that there should be as much transparency as possible regarding how decisions are being influenced in Wales and that a statutory register of lobbyists should be considered, but not until further information is gathered on registers elsewhere to enable Wales to learn from best practice emerging from the rest of the UK. The report also says that there is little evidence to show that statutory registers in their current form provide the correct information to enhance and improve transparency.

During the course of their evidence gathering the Committee received little evidence in support of a voluntary register, but the Committee believes that the period up to the review of Scottish lobbying legislation provides time for the lobbying industry in Wales to demonstrate how a voluntary system could work. In addition the Committee also received evidence which suggested that the publication of Assembly Member diaries may help establish the size and scope of lobbying activity in Wales and as such recommend that a pilot of publishing diaries of AMs takes place.

Other recommendations from the report include:

- The Assembly Commission ensure all National Assembly staff security passes cease to work on their last day of employment. This would ensure that no lobbyist possess a National Assembly pass making it easier to maintain the reputation of the Assembly as an institution which allows fair and equal access to all;
- That information about all Assembly Member sponsored events held on the Assembly Estate and not just those events in public spaces is included within the public calendar;
- That research is commissioned by the Assembly Commission, mapping out routes of influence to build an informed evidence base and consider alternative, and potentially more effective ways to increase transparency other than a statutory register;
- That relevant sections of the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 which apply to Wales are considered by a Committee of the National Assembly for Wales once the Wales Act 2017 is enacted.

Committee Chair Jayne Bryant AM said:

“We have concluded from this inquiry that lobbying needs to be part of an ongoing dialogue in an engaged and open democracy. It is apparent from the evidence gathered that there is no easy answer to the questions of how to define or share information about lobbying. It is in the public interest to establish the impact of groups seeking to influence politicians. However, the Committee has concluded that there is insufficient evidence at present regarding how the public can best access this information once it has been obtained.

“The findings of this report are an interim position. The Committee feel it is crucial to learn from experience and gather further evidence of best practice. The Scottish legislation is in its infancy and we will therefore closely monitor what happens there and the review of its legislation in 2020. Careful attention must also be paid to developments in Westminster and further afield and we will periodically review the situation.”

Notes to editors

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English

