

Summary of the Nolan Committee's First Report on Standards in Public Life

At the request of the Prime Minister, the Nolan Committee has spent six months inquiring into standards in British public life. We have concentrated on Members of Parliament, Ministers and Civil Servants, executive Quangos and NHS bodies.

We cannot say conclusively that standards of behaviour in public life have declined. We can say that conduct in public life is more rigorously scrutinised than it was in the past, that the standards which the public demands remain high, and that the great majority of people in public life meet those high standards. But there are weaknesses in the procedures for maintaining and enforcing those standards. As a result people in public life are not always as clear as they should be about where the boundaries of acceptable conduct lie. This we regard as the principal reason for public disquiet. It calls for urgent remedial action. This leaflet summarises the Committee's unanimous conclusions and lists its recommendations.

The Seven Principles of Public Life

Selflessness

Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

These principles apply to all aspects of public life. The Committee has set them out here for the benefit of all who serve the public in any way.

General recommendations

Some of our conclusions have general application across the entire public service:

Principles of public life

The general principles of conduct which underpin public life need to be restated. We have done this in the seven principles opposite.

Codes of Conduct

All public bodies should draw up Codes of Conduct incorporating these principles.

Independent Scrutiny

Internal systems for maintaining standards should be supported by independent scrutiny.

Education

More needs to be done to promote and reinforce standards of conduct in public bodies, in particular through guidance and training, including induction training.