



STANDING UP FOR
EQUALITY, RESPECT
AND INTEGRITY



AG SEASAMH AR SON
COMHIONANNAIS, MEASA
AGUS IONRACAIS



INTEGRITY

IN GOVERNMENT



INTRODUCTION

There is an onus on all in public office to operate to the highest standards and to act in the public interest at all times. Allegations of corruption undermine the political process and actual corruption costs our public services.

Over the past number of years we have had the scandals of Red Sky, Nama and now RHI. These scandals have involved hundreds of millions of pounds and have brought the political process to the point of collapse.

There can be no place for corruption and malpractice. We can demonstrate and ensure the highest standards in public office through transparency and accountability. This is not an orange/green issue. This affects all in society. Corruption picks everybody's pockets.

SINN FÉIN'S PROPOSALS INCLUDE:

- Ensure that the source of donations and loans to political parties are published and lower the reporting requirement from £7,500 to £500;
- Introduce a statutory Register of Lobbying;
- Immediately amend the Ministerial Code to require Ministers to declare all meetings with lobbyists;
- Introduce a mandatory 'cooling off period' to prevent lobbying by former Ministers and Special Advisors for two years after they leave office and to mitigate against 'conflicts of interest';
- Legislate to make the non-disclosure of a conflict of interest a prosecutable offence;
- Roll-out public education and awareness campaign on whistleblowing;
- Standardise application of legislative provisions across all sectors to ensure best-practice policies and procedures relating to whistleblowing.
- Establish a local cross-party chapter of GOPAC - Global Organisation of Parliamentarians Against Corruption in the Assembly.



CONTEXT

The RHI Scandal and the associated DUP actions have undermined public confidence in the institutions and political processes. The misuse and abuse of public funds means less money for health, housing, education and communities.

We must be pro-active in the fight against corruption, incompetence and malpractice. Sinn Féin believes in accountable and transparent governance. This means all allegations of corruption must be investigated, and those responsible held to account. We also require robust systems to prevent and detect corruption.

Decision making cannot take place against a backdrop of, secret donations and undisclosed lobbying. A comprehensive anti-corruption strategy is required to reduce the risks in the fields of politics, planning or procurement for example.

In advance of a Comprehensive Anti-Corruption strategy Sinn Féin has identified a number of measures that should be immediately introduced to close down opportunities for those who engage in unethical or corrupt decision-making while in public office.

POLITICAL DONATIONS

Sinn Féin have been pushing for greater transparency and openness within the system of political donations for several years.

Sinn Féin makes public our accounts and donations as does Friends of Sinn Féin USA in line with all legal requirements and to the highest standards.

In the Sinn Féin submission to the review into legislation governing donations in 2013, we called for an end to the practice of keeping the identity of donors secret and that the threshold for reporting donations be lowered to £500.

These were rejected by the British Secretary of State after lobbying from other political parties.

Vested interests being allowed to secretly contribute £7,500 to a political party does a disservice to politics in general. It is a practice that needs to be brought to an end.

SINN FÉIN PROPOSES:

- Ensure that the source of donations and loans to political parties are published and lower the reporting requirement from £7,500 to £500.

LOBBYING

Sinn Féin have been pushing for greater transparency and openness within the system of political Lobbying in and of itself is not a negative thing. Politicians need to hear regularly from those impacted by their decisions. A government in the pocket of business or secretive lobbying however is a bad government.

Problems arise when stakeholders gain disproportionate access to political office holders or public officials whether via backhanders, hospitality or the prospect of a future job offer resulting in distorted influence on decisions.

The intention of regulating lobbyists is to level the playing field in order that all stakeholders have equal access to decision-makers in matters of policy-making or drafting legislation.

The operations and public perceptions of the political institutions in the North would benefit greatly from the introduction of a register of lobbyists, widely defined so as we can be assured that decisions made are done so in the best interests of everyone and not simply a lobby group which has the financial backing to buy influence and votes.

Transparency International have recommended

Lobbyists should be compelled to share policy submissions and any documents that they have shared with public officials aimed at influencing legislation or government decisions. These should be published on the new register. Such a measure would help inform debate on public policy.

Financial data on sources of client or donor income should also be published on the register, allowing the public to better follow the money trail in politics.

Lobbyists should disclose any activities undertaken on behalf of political parties, elected officials or election candidates. This would include any voluntary support a lobbyist has given such as public/media relations advice, fundraising, strategic advice and research to parties and candidates.

Ministers and Special Advisers (SPADs) should declare all meetings with lobbyists and neither should be allowed to take up a paid lobbying role until they have been out of office for two years.

In order to ensure that proper procedures are adhered to and determine where a potential conflict of interest exists we will need to establish an Independent Oversight body.

As an interim measure, and until such time as the register of lobbying proposed by Sinn Féin is established, Stormont Ministers and their Special Advisors (SPADs) should be similarly required to declare all such meetings.

SINN FÉIN PROPOSALS INCLUDE:

- Introduce a statutory Register of Lobbying;
- Immediately amend the Ministerial Code to require Ministers to declare all meetings with lobbyists;
- Introduce a mandatory 'cooling off period' to prevent lobbying by former Ministers for two years after they leave office and to mitigate against 'conflicts of interest';
- Legislate to make the non-disclosure of a conflict of interest a prosecutable offence.

WHISTLEBLOWING

Whistle-blowers provide a great service to the public.

It falls to each and every one of us to stand vigilantly against corruption and to stand with those who seek to call time on it.

Potential whistle-blowers fear consequences such as isolation in their workplace, losing their job or being blacklisted. And too often despite the personal risk undertaken by themselves they are disheartened to find that their disclosure has not resulted in adequate follow-up action.

Sinn Féin believes it is absolutely imperative that workers, business people, officials, political representatives and the wider public are encouraged, empowered and protected to speak-up when wrongdoing comes to their attention. They must be equipped with knowledge and information including what to report, to whom and how to report in a manner that protects themselves.

Likewise recipients of disclosures or allegations should be supported with appropriate guidelines, training and oversight to ensure they respond appropriately to reports made to them.

SINN FÉIN PROPOSALS INCLUDE:

- Roll-out public education and awareness campaign on whistleblowing;
- Standardise application of legislative provisions across all sectors to ensure best-practice policies and procedures.

ASSEMBLY AND EXECUTIVE

All parties in the assembly have a duty to work together to promote transparent and good governance, to develop systems that deter and detect corruption and to ensure robust scrutiny of public expenditure and decision making.

Legislative proposals with financial implications should be subject to greater scrutiny, including the provision of greater detail from the sponsoring department.

SINN FÉIN PROPOSALS INCLUDE:

- Establish a local cross-party chapter of GOPAC - Global Organisation of Parliamentarians Against Corruption in the Assembly.



**STANDING UP FOR
EQUALITY, RESPECT
AND INTEGRITY**



**AG SEASAMH AR SON
COMHIONANNAIS, MEASA
AGUS IONRACAIS**