



Subject:	Notice of Motion : Donations to Political Parties
Date:	22nd September, 2017
Reporting Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager
Contact Officer:	Jim Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To consider a response which has been received on behalf of the Secretary of State in relation to the Council's Motion on Donations to Political Parties.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to <ul style="list-style-type: none">Note the response and take any such action as may be determined.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<u>Key Issues</u> The Council, at its meeting on 3rd July, passed the following motion on Donations to Political Parties, which had been proposed by Councillor Nicholl and seconded by Councillor Milne:

"This Council notes the motions passed in March, 2016 and January, 2017, recognising the importance which the citizens of Belfast place on being able to trust their elected representatives to work for the common good; further recognises the corrupting influence which money can have on political decision-making; considers it unacceptable that donations to political parties continue to remain secret in Northern Ireland; reiterates its calls on the Secretary of State to immediately lift the exemption to reveal all declared donations from £500 upwards to political parties since January 2014; and calls on all political parties to voluntarily publish donations until this time."

3.2 A response has now been received, on behalf of the Secretary of State, from Minister Chloe Smith MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. A copy of the response is attached.

3.3 Minister Smith explains that the Secretary of State had, in January, 2017, written to the leaders of the Political Parties in Northern Ireland to seek their views on whether to move to full transparency for political donations and loans and, if so, to suggest a date from which such transparency should take effect. All of those parties which had responded had expressed the view that full transparency should be introduced, only one of which had proposed that it be implemented retrospectively.

3.4 She points out that, in light of those responses and the widespread support amongst the people of Northern Ireland around the importance of transparency to the wider political process, the Secretary of State had, on 3rd July, stated his intention to bring secondary legislation before Parliament shortly, with a view to having it passed in the autumn. That would provide for the publication of all donations and loans received by Political Parties in Northern Ireland on or after 1st July, 2017. On the basis of the representations which he had received from the parties, the Secretary of State did not consider it appropriate to impose retrospective regulations on those who had donated in accordance with the rules set out at the time.

3.5 The Minister goes on to point out that the threshold for reporting and publishing donations and loans would be the same as in the rest of the United Kingdom, that is, over £7,500 or £1,500 for local accounting units. She concludes by stating that, whilst there are no plans to change those thresholds, the Secretary of State is aware that the Political Parties in Northern Ireland have been considering the possibility of reducing them and the Northern Ireland Office would be interested in obtaining their views in that regard.

3.6	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> None
3.7	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u> None
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Response from Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland