GOVERNMENT HOSPITALITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR THE PURCHASE OF WINE

243rd Meeting held at Lancaster House on Friday 11th December 2009

PRESENT

Chairman : Sir David Wright GCMG, LVO
Members: Mr John Avery MW
Mr Mark Pardoe MW
Mr Sebastian Payne MW

Secretary: Mr Robert Alexander OBE

Apologies

1881. Apologies were accepted from Mrs Blackstock who was unable to attend.

Minutes

1882. The minutes of the 242nd Meeting were accepted as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Business Arising

1883. The Chairman extended apologies to the Committee for the late postponement of the meeting from October. This had been due to a last minute revision to his travel schedule.

The Chairman and the Secretary gave the Committee a summary of their understanding of the story reported in The Guardian newspaper on Saturday 5th December about the future of non-departmental public bodies, and the Committee in particular. In the article concerned comments from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury had indicated that the government had decided to abolish the Committee. Government Hospitality had only heard about the article via the FCO Press Office the evening before publication and had been seeking clarification since. There was little information on any decision available either from the Treasury or within the FCO.

Both the Chairman and Secretary regretted the manner in which the issue had been raised, and the lack of consultation. The Chairman offered to write to the Permanent Under-Secretary at the FCO to seek clarification of the position. The Secretary would continue in the interim to try to establish what was intended, and how the Committee would continue its work if it were no longer a NDPB. [Action: Chairman and Secretary]

The Secretary up-dated the Committee on recent Parliamentary questions and Freedom of Information queries. Questions from Mr G Shapps MP had resulted in a recent article in The Sun (copies circulated). A further question from Mr D Davies MP on the value of the cellar was also likely to attract some attention in the media, as the value of the cellar had risen. The number and frequency of recent questions prompted Members to ask whether the economic recession would affect GH's budget for the cellar, and whether the Committee should consider buying less wine during the recession. The Secretary commented that the budget for the cellar was at the discretion of the Head of Government Hospitality, and that the figure had not increased in real terms for many years. The Committee agreed that the overriding reasons to purchase wines should be the requirements of the cellar, quality and value for money, but that potential public perception of its decisions should legitimately be part of the decision-making process.

The Secretary asked the Committee if it wished to re-consider the Croft 1985 that it had tasted in August 2009, **REDACTED TEXT**. The Committee agreed that it would re-taste the wine in due course. [Action: Secretary]

Stock-sheet and Consumption Statement

1884. The Committee was able to examine a consumption statement generated from the new wines database for the first time. Members suggested two further minor adjustments to the presentation of the consumption statements. The Committee also considered the monthly consumption statements, and commented in the high volume of white Burgundies being used.

Future Tasting Programme

1885. The Committee agreed that the 244th meeting should review red Bordeaux of various vintages from the cellar stock and offer comments on grade and maturity. The date was confirmed for the 18th February 2010. At the 245th meeting (provisionally the 27th May 2010, with a reserve of 5th May 2010) the Committee felt it should consider a purchase of white Burgundy wines from the 2007 and 2008 vintages.

Tasting

1886. The Committee tasted 2006 red Bordeaux wines and made recommendations for purchases.

Lunch

1887. The Committee was joined for lunch by the Prime Minister's Foreign Policy Advisor, Mr Simon McDonald, and by the Director of Protocol, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Mr Simon Martin.

Any Other Business

1888. There was no other business and the meeting concluded.

18th February 2010

Sir David Wright GCMG, LVO
Chairman