TRANSCRIPT OF “FILE ON 4” – “REVOLVING DOORS”

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REPORTER: Julian O’Halloran
PRODUCER: Andy Denwood
EDITOR: David Ross

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Each year, scores of top civil servants leave Government. But while some just retire, many go into companies linked to their former policy areas. Ex ministers and armed forces chiefs are also eagerly recruited by the private sector. But how much do we know about the role they then play in lobbying or winning favours from their old friends and colleagues in Government?

What we need is transparency, transparency to the public. If we could see who’s going into former Whitehall departments and having meetings, if we could see the minutes of those meetings, then I think people could make up their mind as to what is and what isn’t ethical behaviour.

With the phone hacking scandal prompting demands for the dealings of Government to opened up to more scrutiny, we ask what restrictions are placed on people from Whitehall being recruited by business? And how well are the rules working?

SIGNATURE TUNE

ACTUALITY OF SEARCH AND RESCUE – SOUND OF HELICOPTER
O’HALLORAN: The search and rescue service - run by the RAF, the Fleet Air Arm and the coastguard - from a dozen bases across Britain, it’s often taken for granted. But its helicopters are ageing and need to be replaced. Six years ago, the Government kicked off a plan for the whole service to be outsourced in a multi-billion pound procurement. Sir Alan Beith, MP followed its progress. Not just because the airborne teams save many lives on Britain’s coasts and mountains, but also because one of the rescue bases is in his own constituency of Berwick-Upon-Tweed.

BEITH: The previous Labour Government took a decision which had been put off for years about how to replace the thirty year old Sea King helicopters, which the RAF uses, and how to have more permanent arrangements for the other providers of this service.

O’HALLORAN: Just how big a contract was this, and over how many years?

BEITH: This was a twenty-five year contract worth over £6 billion, so clearly a massive investment.

O’HALLORAN: A competition between several consortia bidding for the work had been started in 2005. It was handled by a joint project team from the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Transport. Early last year a preferred bidder was chosen. The contract was due to be launched last December. But early this year, the Government revealed there was a major problem. The consortium of companies, known as Soteria, who were in the frame to win the contract, had owned up to serious irregularities in their bid team. The news came in a written statement to the Commons from Transport Secretary, Philip Hammond.

READER IN STUDIO: The irregularities included access by one of the consortium members to commercially sensitive information regarding the joint project team’s evaluations of industry bids, and evidence that a former member of that project team had
READER IN STUDIO cont: assisted the consortium in its bid preparation, contrary to explicit assurances give to the project team at the time.

O’HALLORAN: It meant the collapse of the procurement, the waste of years of work on the Government side, and the loss of tens of millions of pounds invested in the competition by the various bidding consortia. Working with one of those, Air Knight, until early last year, was a former senior RAF officer, Group Captain David Simpson. He says the ministers’ revelation of the alleged irregularities came as a shock.

SIMPSON: My initial sense was, of course, of immense disappointment for the country as a whole, as it were, because we were on the threshold of getting a brand new search and rescue service which the country would have been proud of.

O’HALLORAN: In all your years in the armed services, had you ever heard of a procurement going wrong in this particular way?

SIMPSON: Not of such magnitude and certainly not in the sense of one individual being able to undermine the whole programme.

O’HALLORAN: His sense of surprise was shared by Sir Alan Beith, a veteran member of the Commons who’s been in the house for 38 years.

BEITH: I have never heard such clear evidence or clear statement presented by a Minister to Parliament before the outcome of inquiries. There have been many procurement decisions by the Ministry of Defence which have been pretty awful. There have been some in which people have had suspicions that somebody on the inside has played a role, but this is the most clear case I have ever come across where ministers have had to say, in effect, at the time that they were supposed to be issuing the contract, ‘We cannot go ahead because it is clear that somebody who was in the project team, inside the Ministry of Defence has been helping one of the bidders.’

O’HALLORAN: The Ministry of Defence Police began an investigation, which is still going on. No arrests have been made. But there have been claims of an attempt to warn the MoD about irregularities as long as three years ago. One of the consortia that was
in the bidding at that time, is said to have written to a Government department in 2008 alleging irregular behaviour by a member of the Government joint project team. The consortium later pulled out of the competition. It declined our request for an interview. We also heard claims that people in the Government project team might have used meetings with bidding companies to pitch for later employment. What does Group Captain David Simpson make of such claims? Some reports suggested that two or three people from that Government project team might have been sort of touting themselves or hawking themselves around to bidding companies. Do you know anything about that?

SIMPSON: I think that’s a rather sort of aggressive viewpoint. I think it’s human nature that in discussing privately where programmes are going, that if you have an interest, at some stage you would say to somebody that you would perhaps like to be employed in the future, but that doesn’t in any way suggest that you are going to enter into some sort of corrupt practice.

O’HALLORAN: So to let it be known that you might look for a job one day, that would be all right, but to consider it some kind of deal or to offer anything in exchange for a helping hand later on, that would be utterly wrong, would it?

SIMPSON: Absolutely, and crossing a very clear line of inappropriate activity.

O’HALLORAN: Whilst the line dividing what is permissible from what is wrong may be clear to those with strong ethics, the system for regulating the revolving door for middle ranks and grades in the armed forces and civil service is shrouded in obscurity. However, for top level Whitehall mandarins and Government ministers, the process is much more visible.

ACTUALITY WITH TAMASIN CAVE IN WHITEHALL

CAVE: This building in front of us here is Richmond House. This is home to the Department of Health and where the offices of the Minister for Health and the senior civil servants in the Department are. This is where the policy is designed, this
CAVE cont: is where the management consultants get together with the senior civil servants and the Minister and design the policy.

O’HALLORAN: In Whitehall – a short step from Downing Street - Tamasin Cave, of the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency, has been observing the comings and goings at this Government department.

CAVE: My concerns with the civil servants that actually work here is the revolving door between them and the private sector – so the speed with which they can leave their jobs here and step straight into a private sector job, taking their experience, understanding of how the Department works and, crucially, contacts with them.

O’HALLORAN: One civil servant Tamasin Cave focused on was Mark Britnell. Under the last Government, he was the mastermind behind new ways of commissioning health treatment. As commissioning has developed, it has opened the way to give private sector firms more access to bid for contracts with the NHS.

CAVE: Clearly Mark Britnell not only designed the policy but also knows the people who are handing out contracts and making the decisions now. He was top of the tree at the Department of Health a couple of years ago. He was Director General of Commissioning. This is a key area for the private sector. So he left his position at the Department of Health in June 2009 and three months later walked into a job in KPMG, which is the global accountancy giant, where he became their Global Head of Healthcare.

O’HALLORAN: What is really wrong with that? I mean, they are paying after all – KPMG – for the privilege of employing him?

CAVE: It gives KPMG a head start over any other company wanting to get into this market.

O’HALLORAN: Mark Britnell was replaced at the Department of Health by one of his close colleagues, Gary Belfield. He was described as acting Director General of Commissioning. But Tamasin Cave says it wasn’t long before he was heading out of the civil service in the same direction as his former boss.
Gary Belfield was actually only in post around a year before he too decided to make the move into the private sector and into KPMG. So he followed his colleague, Britnell. Gary Belfield, like Britnell, went on gardening leave for three months.

And do you have a particular problem with two of these senior civil servants, one after the other, going out into the private sector, to the same management consultancy company?

Clearly this is - in words of Mark Britnell - a huge opportunity for companies like KPMG. So for KPMG to employ two people coming from the same key department - the Department of Health – is a concern.

Soon after joining KPMG in September, Gary Belfield was announcing a new contract which a partnership of companies - led by KPMG - had won with NHS London. It was to help so-called pathfinder consortia, led by family doctors. They were gearing up to replace primary care trusts as the bodies commissioning treatment in the controversial re-structuring process called for by the Government. A KPMG statement in January this year quoted Gary Belfield:

We look forward to working closely with the early pathfinders in London to ensure that they are as prepared as possible to meet the commissioning challenges that face the NHS in the coming years.

KPMG told us this was one of three successful bids for work with parts of the NHS that Gary Belfield had been involved in since joining the company. Because of the interest KPMG has is in winning contracts resulting from commissioning reforms, the British Medical Association – representing doctors – has also taken an interest in the career moves of the two former Department of Health Commissioning chiefs. Dr Richard Vautry is Deputy Chair of the BMA’s GP Committee.

The pattern seems to be sort of for senior civil servants and indeed former Government ministers to very rapidly utilise their expertise in private and commercial industry. I think the concern would be is that these people have effectively set
VAUTRY cont: the rules of engagement over recent years and the companies who have encouraged them to join them sort of are the ones who are going to directly benefit from that.

O’HALLORAN: So when KPMG is able to hire not one, but two recent directors, chiefs as it were of commissioning at the NHS, the architects really of the policy, it seems, that is an issue in itself, is it?

VAUTRY: I think it’s important that people are aware of this potential conflict of interest, that they are aware of the way that people who develop a policy and are very closely involved in that development are then head-hunted, or are approached by large multinational companies who will directly benefit sort of from those rules of engagement.

O’HALLORAN: So what process did the two senior civil servants go through before taking up their private sector jobs? All top level civil servants and ministers are meant to clear any such career move into the private sector with a small committee appointed by the Prime Minister.

ACTUALITY IN WESTMINSTER

O’HALLORAN: The organisation responsible for overseeing the so-called revolving door between Government and the business world is based here in a narrow side street in Westminster, a few hundred metres from Whitehall and Parliament. The rather bland five storey office building in front of me, with its brown double front doors, has no sign on it, just a street number, but it contains several public bodies, including one with a staff of just four people - ACoBA – the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments.

LANG: We are an independent advisory body. We assess the facts on a case by case basis and we make our recommendation subject to the rules set down by the Government.

O’HALLORAN: The chairman of ACoBA is Lord Lang, who was a minister under John Major in the 1990s.
LANG: We are there to prevent any unfair advantage being derived by the individual who uses the background of his employment in Government - whether as a Minister or a civil servant - for the benefit of his career subsequently in industry. We have to take account, of course, of the view agreed by governments of all persuasions that it is in the public interest that people leaving Government and leaving the civil service should be entitled to earn a living, but also we have to take account of the public perception of whether or not they are benefiting in the way I have described, and we have to reach an individual conclusion in every case based on the facts.

O’HALLORAN: The ACoBA committee advises scores of top level departing civil servants every year. And what it says to each one is summarised on its website. The entries are short on detail, but they show that Mark Britnell’s last day in post in the civil service was in June 2009. Also given are brief details of the job he wanted approval for.

READER IN STUDIO: Partner & Head of Healthcare, UK and Europe, KPMG.

O’HALLORAN: Also recorded on the website is the advice he was given by the ACoBA committee.

READER IN STUDIO: Approved, subject to a waiting period of three months from his last day in post and the condition that, for twelve months from the same date, he should not be personally involved in lobbying UK Government Ministers or Crown servants on behalf of his new employer.

O’HALLORAN: Although Gary Belfield’s departure from the Department of Health mirrored that of his predecessor, we could find no record of him going through the ACoBA committee. When we queried this with the Department of Health, we were told he had instead gone through an internal approval process within that Department. ACoBA had not been involved. The Department said this was because Mr Belfield had been only an acting Director General.
READER IN STUDIO: The Permanent Secretary, in consultation with the Cabinet Office, considered his application under delegated arrangements.

O’HALLORAN: But while ACoBA’s advice to Mark Britnell had been published, the Department’s advice to Gary Belfield was not, even though the two men had effectively done the same job there. It was only after we posed the question that the Department revealed how it had advised Gary Belfield.

READER IN STUDIO: A waiting period of three months after his last day of service with the Department was imposed before he could take up the appointment. A further condition was that he could not personally Government ministers or civil servants for a period of twelve months from the last day of service.

O’HALLORAN: It seems that a similar process, hidden from public view, is going on in other Government departments as well. And while ACoBA’s advice is routinely published, the advice given to all civil service grades below the most senior ranks is not. Tamasin Cave of the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency is perplexed by the different processes the two men went through.

CAVE: There is no distinction between the two of them and yet one passes through the system and the other doesn’t. And his movement through the revolving door remains hidden.

O’HALLORAN: What do you know about that process within those departments at the moment?

CAVE: We have got very little information about it. There’s no register of who’s moving, beneath the very senior people, who’s moving from the public sector into the private sector, none of this is in the public domain.

O’HALLORAN: But some of the restrictions advised to departing civil servants, whether by their own Department or by ACoBA, are questioned by one keen advocate of more private sector involvement in the NHS. Nick Bosanquet is Professor of Health Policy at Imperial College and chairman of a company consulting on health service
O’HALLORAN cont: reorganisation. He can’t see why any delay was imposed on the two civil servants before they could start their new jobs.

BOSANQUET: I think the three months delay was token and absolutely pointless. While, of course, there must be governance to make sure there can’t be undue influence on procurement contracts, we should be, I think, in favour of much more interchange between the private and public sector.

O’HALLORAN: So do you see the whole concept of any delay between a Government job and a private sector job as being ridiculous?

BOSANQUET: Well, I think it’s a waste of time of somebody who’s got a lot of experience in the field, and as long as they are not involved in trying to warp and bend the contracting process, I don’t see any harm in them getting up the learning curve in the private sector.

O’HALLORAN: But in this very specific area of commissioning health services, are there not very specific dangers with someone like a Director General of Commissioning at the Department of Health going straight into one of the companies who stands to benefit from the kind of policies he was creating at the Department of Health?

BOSANQUET: Well, that’s, if I may say so, a warped description of what the company is trying to do. It is trying to benefit patients by delivering a better service. They are bringing real expertise in how health services actually work and a sense of vision and drive in how to improve them in the future.

O’HALLORAN: Neither of the two former Department of Health commissioning chiefs agreed to be interviewed, but KPMG said in a statement that both men had actively observed and fully complied at all times with the restrictions placed on them. It went on:
READER IN STUDIO: KPMG has ensured that neither was involved in contract bids which would have been in conflict with those restrictions. KPMG requires all new joiners to sign a confirmation that they will comply with specific requirements to act with integrity and ensure that conflicts of interest do not occur.

O’HALLORAN: The statement also referred to the three successful bids for contracts with the NHS which Gary Belfield had been involved in.

READER IN STUDIO: These contracts have been awarded via competitive tenders under formal public sector procurement processes. Mark Britnell has not been involved in any of the three bids. The awarding bodies for the contracts, Strategic Health Authorities and Primary Care Trusts, are statutory bodies separate from the Department of Health. The restrictions placed on Gary Belfield and Mark Britnell relating to contact with Ministers and civil servants do not restrict contact with these organisations.

O’HALLORAN: Since those two top civil servants left Government, the conditions the ACoBA committee can recommend have been strengthened. In particular, it’s now become routine for top civil servants and ministers to be told they should not lobby ministers or civil servants for two years after leaving Government. However, in other ways, Lord Lang concedes, the committee still has very limited powers.

To what extent are you actually able to check that staff who are meant to seek your advice actually do so? Can you monitor that at all?

LANG: We don’t have powers of supervision or investigation or anything of that kind, but anything that comes to our notice that were to suggest a breach would be something to which we would react. And if we were able to establish the facts with ease, we would publish the fact that our rules were not being complied with on our website.

O’HALLORAN: Who covers the middle and lower grades of civil servant when they come out of Government and want to go into a business job or a private sector job?

LANG: That is the responsibility of the Permanent Secretary and the Department in which they have worked.
O’HALLORAN: Because it is fair to say at the moment that that process within Government Departments, that is not at all transparent, is it? We don’t know anything about that advice.

LANG: It is an internal activity that they carry out, but of course they are accountable through the rules that we operate, and the rules that we operate are published, and also at the end of every year the Permanent Secretary has to report to us on everything, and we are in a position to publish that if we think it appropriate.

O’HALLORAN: Nowhere is the revolving door a bigger issue than at the Ministry of Defence. In recent times, the MoD has been dogged by rows over arms and equipment projects that have run way over budget or been delivered years late - or both. It was a shortage of helicopters to support British troops in Afghanistan that led one MP to focus on links between the MoD and arms suppliers.

CARSWELL: I was very surprised to discover that actually the lack of helicopters in Afghanistan is not for lack of spending money on helicopters, so I then put two and two together and started to work out clearly something has gone wrong.

O’HALLORAN: Soon after his election six years ago, Conservative MP Douglas Carswell started probing the background to an order for battlefield helicopters from Agusta Westland, a company owned by the Italian arms giant, Finmeccanica. The contract was for dozens of Lynx Wildcat helicopters - known then as Future Lynx - for which the armed forces are still waiting. Douglas Carswell was unhappy with what he discovered. He concluded that such helicopters could have been bought quicker and cheaper from the USA.

CARSWELL: I think the Lynx Wildcat contract represents appallingly bad value for money for the armed forces and for the British taxpayer. We’re paying two or three times the cost that we should be paying, and I think it’s all the more disturbing to know that this contract was awarded without there being any truly proper competitive tender process.
As part of his research, Douglas Carswell followed the career path of the man who’d been Permanent Secretary at the MoD from the late 1990s to 2005, Sir Kevin Tebbit. Sir Kevin Tebbit left the civil service in 2005, and in 2007 became chairman of Finmeccanica UK, the British end of the Italian arms group. To find out what dealings Sir Kevin then had with his old department, Douglas Carswell requested minutes of all meetings the former mandarin attended at the MoD in 2008 and 2009. After a tussle with officials, he eventually obtained some heavily redacted minutes covering eight meetings in those two years.

I was really quite surprised to discover that the former Permanent Under Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, while Chairman of the Board of Finmeccanica Augusta Westland, was popping back into his old Department, not just sort of once or twice but systematically, meeting with very senior officials, with his predecessor, with the Chief of Defence material, you know, with some very senior officials in the Department.

And so what did you learn about any of these meetings?

Well, I’m looking here at the minutes from a meeting that took place on March 17\textsuperscript{th} 2008, where the former Permanent Under Secretary at the Ministry of Defence meets with his successor. And if I look at the minutes, what’s interesting is that it seems that Sir Kevin Tebbit - to quote - ‘unexpectedly arrived with Graham Cole, the Managing Director of Augusta Westland,’ and so much so that the then Permanent Under Secretary in fact - quote - ’stated from the outset that he would be unable to discuss Future Lynx in any detail, but was prepared to listen to their concerns.’ I think a lot of this is civil-servant-speak for surprise and shock at being lobbied in this way.

But then wasn’t it two and a half years since Sir Kevin had left the Department, and wasn’t he really within the letter and spirit of the guidelines that are laid down by the relevant committee?
CARSWELL: I am absolutely 100% sure that Sir Kevin Tebbit was 100% within the rules, but then the question is, is it right, not is it allowed under the rules.

O’HALLORAN: And why might it not be right?

CARSWELL: Well, I think that if you have been a senior official in a Government Department, it’s wrong to go back to that Department while on, in the pay of a big corporate contractor, and lobby senior officials in the interests of your paymaster. I think that’s wrong and I think it means that we as taxpayers get bad value for money.

O’HALLORAN: But are you saying that no former official at Defence should ever get a job with a contracting company?

CARSWELL: Absolutely not. The problem is transparency and accountability. We need to know who’s having these meetings and we need to know what’s being discussed. Sunlight is the great disinfectant.

O’HALLORAN: Sir Kevin Tebbit, who is still Chairman of Finmeccanica UK, rejected our request for an interview. But the company itself did issue a statement.

READER IN STUDIO: The appointment of Sir Kevin Tebbit was approved by the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments. Sir Kevin did not join Finmeccanica until some twenty months after leaving public service, during which time he was engaged on non-defence related activity. Finmeccanica strictly adheres to all Government guidelines when recruiting public sector talent.

O’HALLORAN: MP Douglas Carswell is not the only person who’s been trying to trawl through Finmeccanica’s dealings with the Ministry of Defence.

ROWELL: I’ve got a pile of papers here where there’s liberal use of a black pen, and what we need is far greater transparency so we can really see what went on between ministers and these companies.
O’HALLORAN: From freedom of information requests and news reports, Andy Rowell of the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency, says he’s found out that amongst senior people who are in Government, Sir Kevin Tebbit has been by no means alone in being recruited by Finmeccanica.

ROWELL: We found that there were other senior civil servants who had moved from the MoD and also the Home Office, so you have someone called David Omand, who was the Permanent Secretary of the Home Office, who in 2008 became a Non Executive Director of Finmeccanica. You have Keith O’Nyons, who was the Chief Scientific Advisor at the MoD till 2004, and in 2008 he became a Non Executive Director at Finmeccanica as well. We have David Gould who is the Chief Operating Officer for Equipment & Support at the MoD, who became a consultant at Selex Sensors, which is a part of Finmeccanica, so that’s civil servants and then we also have the politicians. We have Lord Bach, who was the Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for Defence Procurement at the MoD, who then later moved to Selex Sensors, which again is part of Finmeccanica.

O’HALLORAN: So that’s a former Defence Procurement Minister. Does it end there?

ROWELL: No, I mean, we now have the case of Geoff Hoon, the ex Defence Secretary who in May this year joined Augusta Westland as a Consultant. So we now have two ex ministers and four ex senior civil servants all working for the same company.

O’HALLORAN: Finmeccanica pointed out that Lord Bach and Keith O’Nyons left the group some time ago. However it said Geoff Hoon and David Gould have gone to more senior jobs in the group. Finmeccanica insisted all these appointments have fully complied with all relevant legislation and regulations. And the company said in a statement:

READER IN STUDIO: Finmeccanica is always seeking to engage top talent across a range of areas of expertise, including people with expertise in the defence customer and the international environment. Their experience and understanding of the customer...
READER IN STUDIO cont: processes and requirements help to ensure that we can be more effective in our response, whether for equipment or for support, to meet the need of the military user.

O’HALLORAN: MPs inquiring into arms procurement deals have sometimes been alarmed by the contracts that defence companies have been able to secure from Whitehall. When a multi-billion pound contract was signed for two gigantic new aircraft carriers in 2008, the event was marked on board an existing carrier. And a Labour Defence Minister, Ann Taylor, explained how it would benefit British workers.

TAYLOR: At the peak there’ll be ten thousand jobs that are provided by this contract in a whole range of places - in Glasgow, in Edinburgh, in Barrow, in Portsmouth, in Bristol. The range is very wide.

O’HALLORAN: Ann Taylor was a procurement minister from 2007-2008 before moving to another defence-related ministerial job until the election last year. By then the aircraft carrier project had been hit badly by changes of policy, a major defence review, and massive curbs on public spending. The cost went up and delays and complications mounted. While much criticism was heaped on the MoD, the defence companies involved, including the French arms giant Thales, have also taken some flak.

FLYNN: It does look very bad when a very controversial decision was made to award a contract of £5 billion to companies that couldn’t be cancelled. It’s an extraordinary contract and it’s understood now that one of the aircraft carriers will never be used and that the costs are now escalating up to £7 billion.

O’HALLORAN: Paul Flynn MP, a member of the Commons Public Administration Committee, says he was concerned to learn in February this year that the former Defence Minister Ann Taylor, now Baroness Taylor of Bolton, had been recruited by Thales to its advisory board. ACoBA records show that she referred her new job to it. It advised her not to lobby Government on behalf of Thales until May next year, which will be two years since she left office. But Paul Flynn is still unhappy.
FLYNN: I think it’s very unwise for a minister who was in office when that contract was being considered to take a job with one of the major beneficiaries up to £1.5 billion and that’s Thales.

O’HALLORAN: But isn’t it fair to say that the contract for these two aircraft carriers has been in the pipeline really for years and years? I mean, this goes back to the early 2000s, doesn’t it?

FLYNN: Oh it does yes, but I think anyone who’s deciding to take up a job with a company that has done so well out of a contract of this very controversial nature, it should not have been a person who was involved in Government at the time in defence.

O’HALLORAN: But Lady Taylor has been told by the advisory committee that she may not lobby ministers or civil servants on behalf of Thales, her company, until May next year.

FLYNN: We’d be far better off saying, for goodness sake, if someone’s involved to a great extent, you know, a controversial contract involving billions of pounds, they should stay away from those companies when they do retirement jobs.

O’HALLORAN: Baroness Taylor rejected our request for an interview and said she had no comment on the criticism from Paul Flynn. However, defence analyst Paul Beaver argues her employment by Thales will be good for Britain as well as for the company.

BEAVER: What Ann Taylor I think would bring to Thales is her expert knowledge in exports. That’s the area that Thales wants, it wants to export from the UK and it owns a number of UK businesses.

O’HALLORAN: The advice to Baroness Taylor from the ACoBA committee was that she must not lobby Government until May of next year. Was that sufficiently strong, that condition, do you think, on her employment?
BEAVER: I think its fine and I think she will not lobby the Government. But to me, what she brings to the party - and that’s the taxpayer party - is the fact that if she can get exports for Thales UK, that’s jobs and that’s taxpayers’ benefit in terms of revenue.

O’HALLORAN: But the anti-corruption body, Transparency International UK, has said in a recent report that the revolving door lacks regulation and that urgent reforms are needed. One of the changes called for is longer delays before civil servants in sensitive areas can take up private sector jobs linked to their old policy roles. The report was written by Liz David-Barrett of Oxford University.

DAVID-BARRETT: Well, Transparency International UK thinks there should be differentiation according to the type of responsibility that a civil servant has had and the sector in which they’ve worked. So for example, if they have had responsibility for procurement decisions then the ban on lobbying should be extended to three years from the current two. If they have worked in very high risk Departments like Defence and perhaps in exceptional situations, maybe even a lifelong ban on employment in the associated industry.

O’HALLORAN: And is that what Transparency is advocating?

DAVID-BARRETT: Transparency International is advocating that there should be a longer ban for some sectors.

O’HALLORAN: Other groups have called for delays of five years. But the Chairman of ACoBA, Lord Lang, says such demands are unrealistic.

LANG: I think perhaps there are some people who think that no former Government Minister and no former senior civil servant should be allowed to take on any outside employment after they cease to have those positions. That is not realistic, in my view. I think we have to look realistically within the area of powers that we are able to exercise and operate within them. And that’s what we try to do.

O’HALLORAN: There are some critics who see ACoBA as basically being a bit weak and pointless. How do you answer them?
LANG: Well if they want an enforcement agency, a policing body, a regulatory body, a statutorily based body, let them lobby Government for it. Governments, since this committee was set up, have taken the view that an advisory committee is what is required.

O’HALLORAN: But the world of life after Whitehall and Westminster is not changing fast enough for the Transparency campaigners. And the recent revelations about the links between the Murdoch media empire and both Government and police have, according to Tamasin Cave, only highlighted the need for greater clarity and openness about how the revolving door is working.

CAVE: So we’ve had this massive scandal, this row with News International and we have seen the real influence of the Murdoch family and the Murdoch press, and there has been a recognition now amongst our politicians that we need transparency around these meetings that they’re having with media executives. What we need now is a similar firm commitment from them on transparency around the revolving door. We have a very very well oiled revolving door in the UK and we need similar transparency at every level of the civil service, not just the very senior level, at every level, so we can have public scrutiny really of how they’re using their contacts and their understanding of Government to benefit their private sector employers.

O’HALLORAN: The lack of powers of ACoBA - its inability to police, to investigate or to impose sanctions - makes the process look vulnerable. And while trust in Government has been eroded in recent times, the public are asked to take on trust that in parallel to the advisory committee, an invisible process to prevent conflict of interest is being operated within Government Departments for all but the top mandarins. Some ministers have signalled unease with the current system, but there is as yet no sign of a plan to make it more robust. However, the current furor over the influence of the Murdoch media empire on Government over many years could well intensify demands for reform of the revolving door.

SIGNATURE TUNE