



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Lord Jonathan Evans KCB DL
Chair, Committee on Standards in Public Life
Committee on Standards in Public Life
1 Horse Guards Road
London, SW1A 2HQ

9th December 2020

Dear Lord Evans,

I am writing in relation to inaccurate tweets issued by Jacob Rees-Mogg, Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, and Nadine Dorries, Minister of State at the Department of Health, on 2nd December 2020.

In response to the announcement that the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has authorised the Pfizer/BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine, Mr Rees-Mogg wrote:

“We could only approve this vaccine so quickly because we have left the EU. Last month we changed the regulations so a vaccine did not need EU approval which is slower.”

Ms Dorries wrote:

“No one should be in any doubt about how it is that we can start rolling out the vaccine next week. A month ago, we changed the regulations to exempt us from requiring EU approval. We would still be waiting if we hadn’t. Thanks to #Brexit we can now move ahead swiftly and safely.”

These statements are untrue. Dr June Raine, Chief Executive of the MHRA, said that “We have been able to authorise the supply of this vaccine using provisions under European law, which exist until 1 January.”

In an article titled “Vaccine approval isn’t quicker because of Brexit”, the independent fact-checking organisation Full Fact examined the claim made by Mr Rees-Mogg, Ms Dorries and other Conservative MPs. Its verdict was: “This is not correct. Under European law, the UK was permitted to act independently to approve the vaccine in an emergency.”

However, neither Mr Rees-Mogg nor Ms Dorries have corrected their claims or deleted their tweets, which have been shared thousands of times.

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I would therefore like to ask what advice you have given the Prime Minister on ensuring that Ministers uphold their duty under the Ministerial Code to observe the Seven Principles of Public Life – including the principle of honesty.

I urge you to provide specific advice on the steps Ministers should take to ensure that their tweets and other social media posts are truthful, and to rectify posts that are not.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it is essential that Ministers do all they can to maintain public trust. False statements like these – especially in relation to a vaccine – badly undermine that trust.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ed Davey'.

Ed Davey MP
Leader of the Liberal Democrats