



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Lord Evans of Weardale KCB DL
Chair
Committee on Standards in Public Life
Room G07, 1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ
Via email

5th May 2020

Dear Lord Evans

We are writing to you in your role as Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life regarding ethics and honesty in public life.

We are sure you will agree that the need for honesty and truthfulness by MPs and Ministers is at the heart of our democracy. Indeed, they are outlined in the Nolan Principles of public life – Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership.

As you know, the Ministerial Code states: *“it is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent errors.”*

We are sure you will be aware of Mr Speaker’s statement on truthfulness and accuracy in the Commons on 11th March that *“All Members should correct the record if they make an inaccurate statement to the House.”*

However, it has been our experience that even when there are blatant breaches of the Ministerial code (attached), the record is not corrected and there is limited recourse to hold Ministers to account.

This is clearly unacceptable and contributes to the erosion of trust between the public and politicians.

That Ministers can mislead, or even lie, to Parliament with impunity is contributing to this. We believe this needs addressing as a matter of urgency.

If Ministers break the code, The Ministerial Code of Conduct is clear that:

1.4 It is not the role of the Cabinet Secretary or other officials to enforce the Code. If there is an allegation about a breach of the Code, and the Prime Minister, having consulted the Cabinet Secretary, feels that it warrants further investigation, he may ask the Cabinet Office to investigate the facts of the case and/or refer the matter to the independent adviser on Ministers’ interests.

Debbie Abrahams MP is proud to represent the people of
Alexandra, Lees, Saddleworth, Shaw & Crompton, St Mary’s, St James’ and Waterhead

Website: www.debbieabrahams.org.uk Twitter: @debbie_abrahams

Following correspondence with you last month, we note that the Prime Minister has now appointed Rt Hon Lord Geidt as his Independent Adviser on Ministerial Interests with authority to advise on the initiation of investigations.

However, the Prime Minister retains the ultimate responsibility for deciding on an investigation into allegations regarding Ministerial misconduct.

Given that this can lead to a conflict of interest, particularly when concerns are raised regarding the truthfulness of the Prime Minister's own statements, we are concerned that the "confusing tapestry of standards bodies, with a range of different remits"¹ as you recently described them, is not fit for purpose.

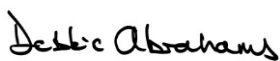
We agree with you that "changes to standards regimes can often get left in the 'too difficult' or 'not the right time' pile."²

Having effective and independent regulators in place to investigate and resolve standards issues as well as a clear delineation of how to ensure the standards currently laid out are upheld, is critical for public trust.


We note that the Committee is currently undertaking a review of the process as part of Standards Matter 2 and would urge you to ensure that this includes concrete proposals for ensuring that Ministers "*give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent errors*" and there is an independent process of redress if they do not.

We look forward to hearing from you on these points.

Yours sincerely



Debbie Abrahams MP
Oldham East and Saddleworth



Caroline Lucas MP
Brighton Pavilion



Layla Moran MP
Oxford West and Abingdon

¹ <https://cspl.blog.gov.uk/2021/04/21/who-is-ac12/>

² Ibid