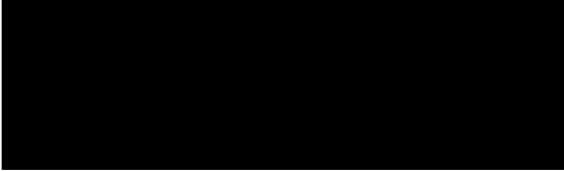


Lord Jonathan Evans
Chair of the Committee on Standards
in Public Life.
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Correspondence sent via email to



The Labour Party

Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP
Deputy Leader, Shadow First Secretary
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AngelaRaynerMP

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Tuesday 3rd August 2021

Dear Lord Evans,

I hope this letter finds you well, no doubt your work as the Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life is keeping you very busy at the moment. It was great to meet with you in June and hope we are able to meet again soon.

I am writing today to express very serious concerns about the process by which the decision to appoint Ewen Fergusson as a Member of the Committee was made. When this appointment was announced I publicly stated that Mr. Fergusson cannot be considered independent when he has reportedly been a personal friend of the Prime Minister's for decades, going back to their time in the Bullingdon Club at university.

Given the important and independent role of the Committee in advising the Prime Minister on standards in public life such appointments, I am sure you agree, must avoid any failure or any perception of a failure to be wholly independent. Public confidence in the genuine impartiality and independence of the important work of the Committee will otherwise be adversely affected.

I have sought answers on who approved or recommended this appointment and what advice was given in order to allow for it to be made. The Cabinet Office has confirmed that you were asked to chair the Advisory Assessment Panel which carefully considered all 173 applications for the roles. In response to my parliamentary question (ref: 35678), Cabinet Office Minister Chloe Smith confirmed that Mr Fergusson was "appointed by the Prime Minister" to this post on the Committee.

The process as outlined raises a number of questions and I hope you will be best placed to provide me with the answers:

- Why does the Prime Minister "appoint" the members of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, which is supposed to uphold ethical standards of conduct in our public life, conduct inquiries and collect evidence on public standards, including in relation to the behaviour of the Prime Minister and his Ministers?
- Can you explain the contradiction in the written answer provided by the Minister (ref: 35678) which states that members of the Committee were "appointed by the Prime Minister", compared to media reports following the appointments, presumably briefed out by the Government, that appointments to the Committee are made by the Cabinet Office following open competition? Are appointments made by the Cabinet Office or by the Prime Minister?



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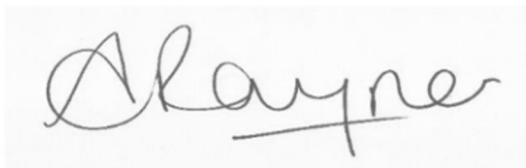
- Did any official, political adviser or Minister in Number 10 or any department approach either successful candidate to discuss these roles or suggest or encourage them to apply?
- Yesterday a government spokesperson said that Mr Fergusson was found to be a “suitable” candidate. Was Mr Fergusson the best candidate, or merely a suitable candidate? Were other candidates better?
- How many applicants did the Advisory Assessment Panel find to be 'appointable'?
- Was the Prime Minister or his office involved in the creation of the shortlist of candidates?
- Who did you sit alongside on the Advisory Assessment Panel, who appointed the members of the Advisory Assessment Panel, and were they approved by the Prime Minister or Number 10 Downing Street?
- Will you now publish the interview script used for the recruitment process by the Panel, and the scores received by each candidate shortlisted?
- Did you have any correspondence, official or personal, with the Prime Minister on how appropriate it would be to appoint his University friend to a Committee that's sole purpose is to provide advice on ethics and standards? Will you now publish all such correspondence?
- Why has Ewen Fergusson's Register of Interests not completed, given he is now a Member of the Committee? Will he be declaring his personal friendship with the Prime Minister on the Register?

When we met you emphasised the importance of ensuring high standards of ethics and integrity are maintained in public life. In this case, the appointment of the Prime Minister's friend as an 'independent' member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life risks bringing the work of the Committee into disrepute and undermines the independence of the Committee. The Committee will not be able to maintain high standards in public life, and advise the Prime Minister accordingly, based on a tainted process which produces a Bullingdon Club friend of the Prime Minister and compromises any appearance of independence on the part of the Committee.

This is why I take this incredibly seriously and why I look forward to your early response to the questions I have asked.

Noting the public interest in this appointment, I will be making this letter public.

Kind Regards



Rt Hon Angela Rayner MP
Shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster

