

RT HON NICK THOMAS-SYMONDS MP
SHADOW HOME SECRETARY



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Lord Evans
Committee on Standards in Public Life
Room G07
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ
[By Email]

4 November 2021

Dear Lord Evans,

I write following the publication of your recent review into standards in public life, and the deeply concerning move by the Conservatives to change the rules governing MPs conduct and block the suspension of one of its own former ministers.

I note, that in an interview you have gave to the Institute for Government you stated that *“The Seven Principles of Public Life, that all governments have espoused for over twenty five years, require that Ministers and MPs should show leadership in upholding ethical standards in public life. I find it hard to see how yesterday’s actions in any way meet that test.”*

Yesterday’s event’s do not show leadership in upholding ethical standards in public life but this also applies to the events surrounding the bullying allegations made against the Home Secretary leading to the colossal amount of taxpayers’ money used as compensation for Sir Philip Rutnam.

I wrote to you about this subject on 19 November last year, urging your Committee on Standards in Public life to investigate the delay into the publication of the Home Secretary’s bullying allegations investigated by the former Prime Minister’s Independent Adviser on Minister’s Interests.

I was grateful for your response where you outlined your own concerns *“about the need for allegations of ministerial impropriety to be dealt with independently and transparently, to allow the public to have confidence in the way standards issues at the top of the government are handled.”*

I welcomed your announcement of a wider inquiry into the conduct of Ministers and the mechanisms needed to uphold transparency and standards in public life. In particular, I am pleased that your report further supports the call for an entirely independent adviser on ministerial standards able to launch investigations of their own accord. After recent moves by the Government to interfere with the independent standards process, the recommendations in your report carry even more urgency.

Since my time of writing, the Prime Minister has ignored your committee’s finding that the Home Secretary had broken the Ministerial Code, leading to the resignation of Whitehall’s independent

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adviser on ministerial standards, Sir Alex Allan. Subsequently, Sir Philip Rutnam received a pay-out of £370,000 including his legal costs, to settle his case outside of the courts.

Your report creates a new urgency for an investigation by the Committee on Standards to open an inquiry into this misconduct which led to the use of such a large amount of taxpayers' money, which is a glaring example of the need to toughen up the rules governing the conduct of ministers. Indeed, this report must not be ignored and makes an urgent case for independent review of cases of misconduct, including the egregious case of Home Secretary breaking the Ministerial code through bullying. Priti Patel has not faced any consequences for these actions.

I would be grateful if you could outline what actions should be taken to ensure that in future, Ministerial misconduct does not result in the taxpayer to having to pick up the bill for such unacceptable behaviour.

I also note that your report makes a clear recommendation to the articulation of the Seven Nolan Principles that govern standards in public life, following the uncovering of unacceptable levels of bullying and harassment in Parliament. As Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, how do you envisage this recommended change being enforced?

As you mentioned commenting on the report, the UK's success in advocating against corruption abroad depends on its reputation for ethical conduct at home. For this reason, I hope further investigation into this incident will be taken forward.

I look forward to your urgent response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Thomas-Symonds'.

Rt Hon Nick Thomas-Symonds MP
Shadow Secretary of State for the Home Department