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THE PRIME MINISTER

16 November 2021

Dear Mr Speaker,

As you know, concerns have been raised over recent days about the outside interests of MPs. I know you agree that the vast majority of MPs of all parties work tirelessly for their constituents. That is why it is imperative that we put beyond doubt the reputation of the House of Commons by ensuring the rules which apply to MPs are up to date, effective and appropriately rigorous.

I am writing to you to set out the Government's view that the Code of Conduct for MPs should now be updated so that the work of the House of Commons continues to command the confidence of the public. An MP's primary role is, and must be, to serve their constituents and to represent their interests in Parliament. Any MP who falls below the standards required can of course be investigated by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

In July 2018, the Committee on Standards in Public Life's report, *MPs' Outside Interests*, argued for a system of regulation based on the principle that "outside roles...should not prevent MPs from fully undertaking the range of duties expected of them in their primary role as an MP." The committee argued that outside interests can "enable MPs to remain in touch with the world outside Westminster" but warned that "there may be cases where outside interests can lead to undue influence on the political system".

Relevant specific recommendations of the 2018 report included:

- a. "Recommendation 1: The Code of Conduct for MPs should be updated to state that: Any outside activity undertaken by a MP, whether remunerated or unremunerated, should be within reasonable limits and should not prevent them from fully carrying out their range of duties".
- b. "Recommendation 10: The Code of Conduct for MPs and Guide to the Rules should be updated to state: MPs should not accept any paid work to provide services as a Parliamentary strategist, adviser or consultant, for example, advising on Parliamentary affairs or on how to influence

Parliament and its members. MPs should never accept any payment or offers of employment to act as political or Parliamentary consultants or advisers”.

As the Committee noted, “Outside employment which involves being paid to provide advice on Parliamentary affairs or how to influence Parliament is prohibited for Members of the House of Lords, Members of the Scottish Parliament and Members of the Welsh Assembly. Due to the possibility for undue influence on the political system, representatives in each of these institutions are banned from being paid to provide Parliamentary advice. We recommend that the House of Commons should be brought in line with this practice”.

Amending the Code of Conduct for MPs is rightly a matter for Parliament itself, rather than the Government. However, the Government believes that these two recommendations form the basis of viable approach which could command the confidence of parliamentarians and the public. It is a matter of regret that the House has not yet taken forward these specific recommendations given their relevance to recent events and the Government would like to see them adopted as a matter of urgency.

Adopting these specific recommendations would ensure that MPs who are neglecting their duties to their constituents and prioritising outside interests would be investigated, and appropriately punished by the existing disciplinary authorities. They would also ban MPs from exploiting their positions by acting as paid political consultants or lobbyists.

The House may also wish to consider the wider recommendations of the 2018 report, the broad intentions of which the Government supports.

The Government believes that all changes to the Code of Conduct and the system of standards must be done on the basis of a cross-party consensus of the whole House, and will support an appropriate process to find such a consensus.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'The Speaker', written in a cursive style.

The Right Honourable The Speaker