

Committee on Standards in Public Life
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**Committee on
Standards in
Public Life**

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Minister for Intergovernmental Relations
Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

Sent by email

21 April 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

Following William Wragg's letter to you of 12 April (published on 20 April) about the Elections Bill, I am writing to express my Committee's continued serious concern about the provisions in the Bill that would give the Government the power to set the strategic direction for the work of the Electoral Commission.


The Committee on Standards in Public Life recommended the establishment of an independent Electoral Commission in 1998 and reviewed the Commission's mandate in 2007. Last year we published a report, *Regulating Election Finance*, which, as you know, set out a comprehensive package of practical proposals to modernise and reform the regulation of campaign expenditure and donations. While we recognised that there was some room for improvement in the way the Commission approaches its role, our recommendations were built on the foundation of a robustly independent Commission, insulated from political influence.

The fundamental principle that the regulator of elections in the UK should be fully independent of government came through clearly in the wide-ranging evidence we heard. The Commission is an important safeguard against political interference in the electoral system and thus occupies a unique position as a regulator - it is not a body that exists to deliver government policy, but the arbiter of electoral fairness. As such, it must be operationally independent and be seen to be so.

When I gave evidence to PACAC's enquiry in November, I shared my Committee's concern about the risk to the independence of the Commission presented by the Strategy and Policy Statement.

My Committee discussed this matter again this morning and we remain deeply troubled by the long-term risk to our democratic system that is inherent in provisions which give the government of the day, whatever its political complexion, the opportunity to exert influence on the way the Commission operates.

I am copying this letter to William Wragg MP, Chair, PACAC and Lord True CBE, Minister for the Cabinet Office and will be placing a copy on the Committee's website.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Lord Evans', with a small flourish at the end.

Lord Evans of Weardale KCB DL
Chair, Committee on Standards in Public Life