

**Committee on Standards in Public Life
Room G07
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ**

chair@public-standards.gov.uk



**Committee on
Standards in
Public Life**

22 May 2024

OPEN LETTER TO PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES

Civil debate and the Principles of Public Life

I am addressing this letter to all candidates standing in the forthcoming general election.

I would like to thank you for standing and being prepared to play a part in public life, to serve your constituents and the democratic process, and take on the responsibilities of public office.

We are aware that politicians from all parties regularly experience abuse and intimidation, and we have a long-standing commitment to improving the quality of political life and to ensuring that everyone with the energy, commitment and desire to serve the public feels able to stand for public office. In that respect, the tone of political debate matters greatly, especially in electoral campaigns.

We do not underestimate the intense nature of election campaigns and we must recognise that robust debate is a vital and important part of the democratic process. However, it is vitally important that disagreement should be expressed in a civil manner. As a candidate, your actions and words will inevitably influence wider public discourse and political culture and have implications for the public's views on and trust in our democratic institutions. That is why we are writing to express our hope for a civil and respectful campaign during the forthcoming general election, to underscore the standards expected of all those in public life, and to encourage you to engage in constructive debate, which does not resort to personal attacks or divisive rhetoric which we have seen in recent years.

Parliamentary representatives bear a significant responsibility not only for representing constituents, but for upholding high standards of ethical conduct. MPs hold a unique position in our democracy with a responsibility to serve in the public's interest, within the requirements of the Seven Principles of Public Life, often called the Nolan Principles. These long-established principles of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership are a personal responsibility and reflect what the public rightly expects of all those in public life.

We recognise the pressures you will face during campaigning, but, as you set out your stall to the electorate, we encourage you to think about the standards that you will be required to uphold in public office if elected. Acting in accordance with the Seven Principles of Public Life sends a powerful message to the electorate about the importance you attach to acting in the public interest.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Doug Chalmers', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Doug Chalmers CB DSO OBE
Chair, Committee on Standards in Public Life