



Independent Adviser on Ministerial Standards
Sir Laurie Magnus CBE

Alex Burghart MP
Shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

By email

13 March 2026

Dear Mr Burghart,

Thank you for your letter of 12 March requesting that I undertake an investigation of the Prime Minister in relation to the appointment of Peter Mandelson as His Majesty's Ambassador to the United States.

You raise two statements made by the Prime Minister.

- a) 4 February 2026: *"If I knew then what I know now, he would never have been anywhere near Government"*

The Prime Minister has stated, both in the media and in Parliament, that he was aware that Peter Mandelson had had a relationship with Jeffrey Epstein at the time of his appointment as ambassador. For example, on 4 February, the Rt Hon Kemi Badenoch MP asked: *"Can the Prime Minister tell us: did the official security vetting that he received mention Mandelson's ongoing relationship with the paedophile Jeffrey Epstein?"*, to which the Prime Minister replied with reference to the due diligence document which has been disclosed by the Government in response to the Humble Address concerning Peter Mandelson: *"Yes, it did. As a result, various questions were put to him..."*

I consider that the Prime Minister's statement, "If I knew ...", refers, inter alia, to the additional information about Peter Mandelson that came to light in the form of emails released by Bloomberg in September 2025. The Prime Minister stated in the media in September 2025 and subsequently that had he been aware of this information before the appointment was confirmed, it would not have gone ahead.

b) 10 September 2025: “... *full due process was followed during this appointment, as it is with all ambassadors.*”

It is my understanding that, as Peter Mandelson was a political rather than official appointee, the process followed was that of a Direct Ministerial Appointment in line with the provisions in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 (Section 10(3)) which provides that certain senior diplomatic appointments can be excepted from the general requirement to be made “on merit on the basis of fair and open competition”.

I note that the details of this process were set out in the advice of 11 November 2024 from the Cabinet Secretary to the Prime Minister, which has been disclosed by the Government in response to the Humble Address. That advice states:

“If this is the route that you wish to take you should give us the name of the person you would like to appoint and we will develop a plan for them to acquire the necessary security clearances and do due diligence on any potential conflicts of interest or other issues of which you should be aware before confirming your choice. A letter is then needed from the Foreign Secretary to the PUS to FCDO formalising the decision to make a political appointment.”

I consider that the documentation that has been made public indicates that the relevant process for a political appointee was followed.

My terms of reference relate to the individual conduct of ministers in the handling of specific matters with which they have been directly involved. It is not within my remit to investigate the actions or decisions taken by particular departments, or by the Government more broadly. Ministers are rightly accountable to Parliament for government’s actions taken within their areas of responsibility. Accordingly, I am unable and, therefore, do not address your comments about the Government’s handling of the Humble Address.

I do not, in the light of the foregoing, see grounds for the investigation you request in relation to the statements made by the Prime Minister. Given the public interest in this matter concerning the Prime Minister, I am publishing this letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Laurie Magnus". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Sir Laurie Magnus CBE

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