



LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL
LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
THE RT. HON. JACOB REES-MOGG M.P.



The Rt. Hon. Sir Stephen Irwin,
Chairman, Independent Expert Panel
Houses of Parliament
London
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Thank you very much for meeting me last month and for your subsequent correspondence of 25 February. I am delighted that you have assumed the role of Chairman of the Independent Expert Panel and are making progress to establish the Panel in earnest.

Sanctions

As you mention, I have also corresponded with the Chairman of the Committee on Standards on many of the matters you raised. I welcomed your proposed categorisation of sanctions in terms of their effect on the capacity of MPs to carry out their duties. Thank you for your sensible suggestion, I agree with this approach.

It is constitutionally essential that services that are core to a Member's parliamentary duties should only be able to be withdrawn by a decision of the House. Therefore, may I reiterate the view I set out to the Committee that the Panel should err on the side of caution and listen to advice from senior clerks about which sanctions would interfere with a Member's core functions and thus should only be imposed by the House.

Confidentiality

Thank you for setting out your views of the confidentiality system and your thoughts on how it might be improved. It is vital to ensure confidentiality in the ICGS system, given the sensitive nature of the cases with which it deals. In light of this, I believe it important that the Panel be further established before any changes to its confidentiality arrangements are considered or additional powers are afforded to the Panel to make public statements about cases.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that the current confidentiality system may not have the balance right in ensuring confidentiality whilst also demonstrating that cases are being resolved, which will increase confidence in the scheme. I am grateful to Alison Stanley for her thorough review of the ICGS published last month and her consideration of this issue. In particular, she recommended that the employers of both Houses agree to a method of communicating that there have been consequences of upheld ICGS complaints in disciplinary proceedings, without breaching confidentiality. I look forward to Ms Stanley's recommendations being considered by the Houses.

Tabling motions to impose sanctions

I appreciate the importance of reports from the Panel recommending a sanction for approval being put before the House without delay. However, I am of the view that a formal mechanism would unduly limit the House's arrangements which are deliberately flexible in order to respond to the exigencies and priorities of the day.

I am willing to commit that I, as Leader of the House of Commons, will bring forward such motions to the House without delay in all normal circumstances. It is only right that such serious matters should be dealt with expeditiously. I hope that this commitment will alleviate your concerns about this matter.

Guidance

Lastly, I would like to thank you for producing useful guidance on how the Panel will conduct its investigations. I particularly welcome the section setting out the advice and support that parties involved in cases referred to the Panel can receive. It is important that those involved in the Panel's cases are aware of the support that they can seek from family members, friends or colleagues.

Thank you for your time and rapid work to set up the Panel. It is reassuring that the Panel has already made such progress, including starting to resolve cases and producing the guidance. I am also grateful for your clarifications concerning the sanctions available to the Panel and hope that I have been able to provide you with comfort on the matters of confidentiality and tabling motions to impose sanctions.

The work of the Panel is of the utmost importance and I look forward to continuing to work with you.

With every good wish,

*Yus Anwar,
Jack Lewin*