

# Using the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS): guide for complainants

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This guide is intended to help you find the support and advisory services available to you if you feel you have experienced bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct. It will also explain how you can report it and what you can expect to happen throughout the process.

## The Behaviour Code sets out how everyone who works in Parliament should be treated and how we should treat others.

The Code, the [Sexual Misconduct](#) and the [Bullying and Harassment](#) policies and procedures, work together as part of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme to provide a framework for us to create a respectful and courteous working environment and to respond to any allegations of unacceptable behaviour promptly, fairly and effectively.

The Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme is Parliament's mechanism for handling complaints of bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct. This guide for complainants provides a step-by-step breakdown of how the complaints process works, and what you can expect at each stage.

This guide is intended to help you find the support and advice services available to you if you feel you have experienced bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct. The Scheme provides advice and support to all members of the parliamentary community, and you can make use of the Scheme whether you choose to make a formal complaint or not. The Scheme will support you should you wish to pursue an informal resolution of your complaint at any stage of the process or simply to discuss your experiences with an independent, confidential advisor.

## Behaviour Code

**Whether you are a visitor or working in Parliament at Westminster or elsewhere, there are clear guidelines in place on how you should be treated, and how you should treat others:**

### Respect and value everyone – bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct are not tolerated

If you have experienced bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it and/or seek support by contacting the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) Helpline on:

0808 168 9281 (*freephone*)  
Support@ICGShelpline.org.uk

### Recognise your power, influence or authority and don't abuse them

### Think about how your behaviour affects others and strive to understand their perspective

### Act professionally towards others

### Ensure Parliament meets the highest ethical standards of integrity, courtesy and mutual respect

### Speak up about any unacceptable behaviour you see

**Unacceptable behaviour will be dealt with seriously, independently and with effective sanctions**

## Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme Helpline

### Bullying and Harassment

The confidential Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme helpline provides advice, support or signposting to those who feel they have experienced or have concerns about bullying and harassment while on the Parliamentary Estate, in constituency offices or while undertaking parliamentary work.

You may remain anonymous when accessing advice if preferred, but if you wish to progress a complaint you will need to provide your name. If you choose to make a complaint, the helpline will take the details and pass it on for investigation.

### Sexual Misconduct

The confidential Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme helpline provides advice, support and signposting to those who feel they have experienced or have concerns about sexual misconduct while on the Parliamentary Estate, in constituency offices or while undertaking parliamentary work.

You may remain anonymous when accessing advice if preferred, but if you wish to progress a complaint you will need to provide your name. A trained Independent Sexual Misconduct Advisor (ISMA) is available to provide personal support through the helpline. If you choose to make a complaint, the helpline will take the details and pass it on for investigation.

### Other sources of support

There are other sources of help, including:

- The Employee Assistance Programme – 0800 030 5182, or [healthassuredeap.co.uk](http://healthassuredeap.co.uk) (user name House, password: Parliament)
- Your line manager
- [Trade Unions in the House of Commons and Parliamentary Digital Service](#)
- [Trade Unions in the House of Lords](#)
- [Trade Unions for Members' staff](#)
- [The Workplace Equality Networks](#)
- [MAPSA](#)
- [UNITE](#)
- [House of Lords HR service](#)
- [House of Commons HR service](#)
- [PDS HR Support](#)

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Telephone Number    **0808 168 9281**  
Email Address        **support@icgshelpline.org.uk**

Opening Hours        **9am–6pm Monday to Friday**  
Outside of these hours you can leave a message and an Independent Support and Information Advisor will return your call the next working day.

**I wish to complain  
about House of  
Commons, PDS or  
Lords staff**

**I wish to complain  
about an MP**

**I wish to complain  
about a member  
of the House of  
Lords**

**I wish to complain  
about someone  
who works for an  
MP**

**I wish to complain  
about someone  
who works for a  
member of the  
House of Lords**

**I wish to complain  
about another  
passholder**

**I wish to complain about House of Commons, PDS or Lords staff**

**I wish to complain about an MP**

**I wish to complain about a member of the House of Lords**

**I wish to complain about someone who works for an MP**

**I wish to complain about someone who works for a member of the House of Lords**

**I wish to complain about another passholder**

**Step 1**

The helpline will ask you about your complaint and will capture the main elements of it. This information will be passed to the ICGS Investigation Liaison Lead who will allocate an external independent investigator.

**Step 2**

The investigator will contact you to discuss the details of your complaint. This will include an initial assessment to establish whether your complaint is eligible to be considered under either policy, the details of your complaint, and identifying any witnesses you wish to put forward.

They will also ask you what you would like to achieve at the end of the process and, where appropriate, explore options for an informal resolution.

**Step 3**

The investigator will discuss any additional information with you, including any evidence you may have, such as emails, or notes you may have taken in relation to your complaint. The investigator will interview the person who the complaint is about and may speak to any witnesses.

**Step 4**

After reviewing all the evidence, the investigator will produce a report detailing their findings and whether the complaint should be upheld or not upheld. You, the person the complaint is about, and the relevant HR Team will all receive copies of the report.

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The Commissioner is Kathryn Stone.

#### Step 3

The investigator will discuss any additional information with you, including any evidence you may have, such as emails, or notes you may have taken in relation to your complaint. The investigator will interview the person who the complaint is about and may speak to any witnesses.

After reviewing all the evidence, the investigator will produce a report detailing their findings.

#### Step 4

The Commissioner will check that the complaint has been thoroughly investigated, and she will decide whether the complaint should be upheld. She will write to you and to the person the complaint is about to advise of her decision, including a copy of the external investigator's report. There are four possible outcomes of an investigation:

- No breach of the Code of Conduct;
- A resolution is agreed with the complainant and respondent during the investigation process. The investigation is concluded without a formal finding;
- The Commissioner finds a breach of the Code of Conduct and, at the end of the investigation, identifies appropriate remedial action, for example, an apology or training;
- The Commissioner finds a breach of the Code of Conduct and remedial action cannot be agreed or would not be appropriate. The Commissioner makes a formal report to the Committee on Standards.

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I wish to complain about another passholder

#### Step 1

The helpline will ask you about your complaint and will capture the main elements of it. This information will be passed to the office of the independent House of Lords Commissioner – Lucy Scott-Moncrieff – to review.

You can also choose to complain directly to the House of Lords Commissioner via [lordsstandards@parliament.uk](mailto:lordsstandards@parliament.uk)

#### Step 2

The Commissioner will complete a preliminary assessment to decide whether your complaint should go forward to a full investigation. This will include an assessment to establish whether your complaint is eligible to be considered under the Code of Conduct, the details of your complaint, and identifying any witnesses you wish to put forward.

She will also ask you what you would like to achieve at the end of the process and, where appropriate, explore options for an informal resolution.

#### Step 3

The Commissioner will discuss your complaint further with you and potentially ask for any additional evidence you may have e.g. emails or notes you may have taken in relation to your complaint. She may also ask to meet formally with you. She will also speak to the person the complaint is about and any witnesses necessary to complete the investigation.

At both the preliminary assessment and investigation stages, the Commissioner may be supported by an external independent investigator.

#### Step 4

After investigation, the Commissioner will decide whether the complaint should be upheld. She will write to you and to the person the complaint is about to advise of her decision. There are four possible outcomes of an investigation:

- i. Complaint dismissed: after investigation the Commissioner finds no breach of the Code of Conduct;
- ii. Agreed resolution: in the course of an investigation but prior to making a finding the Commissioner agrees a resolution with the complainant and respondent;
- iii. Remedial action: after investigation the Commissioner finds a breach of the Code of Conduct but agrees remedial action, for example an apology or training, with the respondent;
- iv. Sanction: after investigation the Commissioner finds a breach but remedial action cannot be agreed or would be inappropriate. She reports her findings, with a recommended sanction, to the Conduct Committee.

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**Step 4**

After reviewing all the evidence, the investigator will produce a report detailing their findings and whether the complaint should be upheld or not upheld. You, the person the complaint is about, and the MP who employs them will all receive copies of the report.

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**Step 4**

After considering all the evidence, the investigator will produce a report detailing their findings and recommending whether the complaint should be upheld or not upheld. You, the person the complaint is about, and the nominated individual within the relevant HR department of the passholder's employer will all receive copies of the report.

**They work for the House of Commons, Parliamentary Digital Service or House of Lords Administration**

**They are an MP**

**They are a member of the House of Lords**

**They work for an MP**

**They work for a member of the House of Lords**

**They are a passholder who isn't employed by Parliament, for example a contractor**

You can ask for a review of a decision made under the Scheme if an initial assessment of your complaint finds no case to answer, or your complaint is not upheld after a formal assessment. A review can only be requested on the following grounds:

- Whether the correct procedure for assessment was followed;
- Whether substantial new evidence has since become available.

You will be given information about the review process when you are informed of the decision.

When the investigation process has completed, and in the event your complaint is upheld, then any further steps will be taken in accordance with the policy of the decision-making body responsible for the person the complaint is about.

**1. Can I use the helpline?**

You can call the helpline for advice, support, or to make a formal complaint, if you think you may have been subject to bullying and harassment or sexual misconduct by a colleague within the House of Lords, the Parliamentary Digital Service or the House of Commons Service; a member of the House of Lords or their staff; an MP; an MP's staff member; or a contractor. Visitors to Parliament can also make a complaint using ICGS. The helpline is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm.

It can be difficult to talk about your experience and to make a complaint. It is important that you know you have access to support and advice. The helpline operators are impartial and will treat each call independently.

**2. Can I talk to the helpline to get some initial advice?**

Yes. There is no obligation to start a formal complaint. The helpline provides information and support to help you to make your own decision.

**3. How do I know the helpline is independent?**

The helpline is run and staffed entirely independently of Parliament. No MPs, Lords or staff of either House are involved in the operation of the helpline.

**4. Who does ICGS and the Behaviour Code apply to and who can use it?**

The ICGS applies across the parliamentary community and covers staff of the House of Commons, Parliamentary Digital Services, staff of the House of Lords Administration, Members of both Houses, their staff and contractors. Visitors to Parliament can also make a complaint using the ICGS.

**5. Can I complain about a Member of the House of Lords if I work in the House of Commons? (or vice versa)**

Yes. The ICGS is open to everyone in the parliamentary community.

**6. Can I complain if I work in an MP's Westminster office?**

Yes. The ICGS is open to everyone in the parliamentary community.

**7. Can I complain if I work in an MP's constituency office?**

Yes. The ICGS is open to everyone in the parliamentary community.

**8. Can I complain if my complaint is about events that took place outside of a parliamentary location, such as the Westminster estate or a constituency office?**

Yes. The work of the parliamentary community is broad, and can involve office work, public facing work, travel and social events, as well as non-standard working hours. As a result, the ICGS applies to behaviour by members of the parliamentary community anywhere where they would be for the purposes of their employment or parliamentary work. This includes on the Parliamentary Estate, at constituency offices or other places of work, or in the course of parliamentary duties and activities (e.g. UK or overseas travel or social events related to parliamentary business).

**9. What about people who used to work in the parliamentary community?**

The ICGS can be used by those who are no longer part of the parliamentary community.

**10. What happens if I want to withdraw my complaint once it has been made?**

The complainant may withdraw the complaint at any point during the investigation. In most cases this will bring the process to an end. However, there may be circumstances where, in accordance with the policies, information may need to be shared or the investigation continue; for example, for safety, duty of care, legal, or safeguarding reasons.

**11. What happens if I do not want to be identified to the person I am making the complaint against?**

You can call the helpline for confidential support and advice at any time. No information about those calls is shared with the person complained about (unless and until a formal investigation is launched). However, a formal complaint cannot be investigated without telling the person concerned.

**12. What if I want to make a complaint about a breach of Parliament's Behaviour Code that is not bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct?**

Those working in both the Lords and Commons Services may use each House's Grievance Process to raise matters that are not covered by the ICGS. Those working for MPs may be able to use any complaints process available within the relevant political party or contract of employment.

**13. What if I do not want to make a formal complaint, but want an informal acknowledgement?**

The helpline will be able to discuss all the options available to you, including pursuing an informal resolution of your complaint.

**14. How long does it take to make a complaint using ICGS?**

Every complaint is different and progress will depend on the availability of all those involved and the complexity of the investigation. In order for a complaint to be concluded in a timely manner, all parties should aim to meet the deadlines set by the investigators for production of documents, attendance at meetings etc.

**15. Can I be accompanied at any meeting/hearing?**

You can be accompanied to any formal meeting by a Trade Union representative or a workplace colleague. If those are not options for you, you can ask the investigator, who will be able to advise you on alternatives.

**16. Is the process confidential?**

The ICGS operates on the basis of confidentiality. Information about a complaint is restricted to those involved in investigating and resolving it – these individuals will be different depending on who the respondent is. All parties to a complaint are required to treat the matter as strictly confidential.

As a matter of course, neither the ICGS team nor the decision making body will inform your line manager of the complaint.

Party Whips in the Lords and the Commons will not be informed of complaints about Members.

**17. If I work for an MP, will they be informed if a complaint is made about me?**

Yes; if you work for an MP they would usually be the relevant decision making body and would routinely be informed.

**18. What are the decision making bodies (DMB)?**

The policies use the term “decision making bodies” (DMB). These are the organisations within the parliamentary community which have responsibility for the complainant or respondent. Different people within the parliamentary community have different decision making bodies. See the following table:

Responder type	Decision Making Body	Role
Member of Parliament	Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards	Oversight of the investigation; application of lower level sanctions; recommendation to Committee of higher level sanctions
Members’ staff	Member of Parliament	Takes any management or disciplinary action that is warranted by the case
Members of the Lords	Lords Commissioner for Standards	Oversight and management of all complaints, investigations and recommending sanctions
Lords Members’ staff	Lords Commissioner for Standards	Oversight and management of all complaints, investigations and recommending sanctions
Commons, Lords Staff and Parliamentary Digital Services staff	House authorities through the appropriate management chains	Their role is not to make decisions, but to support the line manager in taking any management or disciplinary action that is warranted by the case

**19. What will happen if the complaint is found to be vexatious?**

If an investigator concludes that the complaint is vexatious, the DMBs relevant policies and procedures may be invoked.

**20. What is the initial assessment the investigator does?**

The initial assessment is to establish whether the complaint is eligible to be considered under the ICGS.

**21. Will I be updated during the process?**

Yes, both you and the person who you have complained about will be updated regularly on progress.

**22. What is the role of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards in the ICGS?**

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards is responsible for the independent and impartial investigation of alleged breaches of the House of Commons' Code of Conduct for Members. This includes:

- overseeing the investigation of complaints from the parliamentary community about harassment, bullying or sexual harassment by MPs and deciding whether such complaints should be upheld; and
- responsibility for keeping the MPs' Code of Conduct under review.

**23. What is the Commons Committee on Standards?**

The Commons Select Committee on Standards is appointed by the House of Commons to consider matters relating to parliamentary standards. The Committee is made up of 7 Members of Parliament and 7 lay members, who are recruited to bring an independent and external perspective to the Committee's deliberations. Lay members of the Committee have full voting rights on all decisions. The Chair of the Committee, who is always an MP, has a casting vote only.

In relation to ICGS, the Committee's role is to:

- oversee the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards; and
- consider any matter relating to the conduct of Members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged breaches in the Code of Conduct which have been drawn to the Committee's attention by the Commissioner.

The Committee cannot independently launch an investigation into any MP's conduct.

**24. What is published by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards?**

The Commissioner does not routinely publish information about individual ICGS complaints. She publishes statistical information about ICGS complaints, and only publishes data that cannot result in the identification of individuals.

**25. What is the role of the House of Lords Commissioner for Standards?**

The House of Lords Commissioner for Standards is responsible for the independent and impartial investigation of alleged breaches of the House of Lords Codes of Conduct for Members and Members' Staff, including investigating breaches of the rules on:

- members' financial support;
- use of parliamentary facilities; and
- treatment of those with whom they come into contact in the course of their parliamentary duties and activities, including alleged breaches of the provisions on bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct.

**26. What is published by the House of Lords' Commissioner for Standards?**

If the Commissioner upholds a complaint, her report will usually be published. In all cases where there has been an appeal to the Conduct Committee, the Committee will publish a report either upholding or dismissing the appeal.

The Commissioner also contributes to the statistical information that is published about ICGS cases on a quarterly basis.

**27. Can information or details of complaints be released under Freedom of Information requests?**

Information about individual complaints is not released in response to Freedom of Information requests. Both Houses are committed to releasing statistical data about use of ICGS. This is published quarterly on Parliament's website. Great care is taken when collating this information to ensure that no data which could identify an individual is released.

## 28. What do I do if the press finds out?

All parties to a complaint are required to observe strict confidentiality and not to comment publicly. Both Houses would respond to media enquiries that they can neither confirm nor deny that an ICGS complaint had been made.

If you are contacted by a member of the press, you should not make any comment. You should contact the investigator involved in your case and let them know about the press interest. The investigator will contact the Investigation Liaison Lead in the ICGS team who will take any necessary action.

If you are not able to contact the investigator, you can contact the Investigation Liaison Lead ([pearsons@parliament.uk](mailto:pearsons@parliament.uk), tel: 07562 437 539) or if it related to a House of Lords investigation, the House of Lords Commissioner for Standards Office ([lordsstandards@parliament.uk](mailto:lordsstandards@parliament.uk), tel: 0207 219 7152).

For those working for a Member, should you need support if a complaint becomes public, we would recommend contacting one of the other services listed in this guide, such as your Trade Union, or the Employee Assistance Programme.

For those working for either House, if you are not able to make contact with the investigator, Investigation Liaison Lead or the House of Lords Commissioner for Standards, you can contact the House of Commons media relations team; 020 7219 0696 (Monday – Friday, 9am – 6pm), 020 7219 7395 (at all other times), or email [hocmediacorporate@parliament.uk](mailto:hocmediacorporate@parliament.uk).

Contact details for the House of Lords media team are: 0207 219 8550 (Monday - Friday, 9am-6pm) (diverted to an out-of-hours number at all other times) or email [lordspressoffice@parliament.uk](mailto:lordspressoffice@parliament.uk).

If the matter is urgent, please leave a voicemail or send an email and the media team will get back to you as soon as possible (both during or outside of office hours).

Health Assured (username: House, password: Parliament)



House of Lords hub on bullying and harassment



Our culture intranet hub



ICGS intranet site

