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Committee on
Standards in
Public Life

Bernard Jenkin MP
Chair,
Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee,
House of Commons,
London
SW1A 0AA

29 March 2017

Dear Bernard

ACoBA AND INDEPENDENT ADVISER ON MINISTERS' INTERESTS INQUIRY

You will recall that I gave oral evidence to your committee with my committee member, Sheila Drew Smith, on 25 October last year. I thought it would be helpful to follow that up to confirm my committee's position with regard to the Independent Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACoBa) ahead of the publication of your report on the inquiry.

As holders of public office, ministers and civil servants sign up to the seven principles of public life. The principles set clear expectations of conduct. The government's business appointments rules are set out in both the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code. You will also recall that in the report which we published last year on regulatory bodies (*Striking the Balance*) we discussed 'revolving door' issues at length and recommended that: 'The process for departing board members and senior executives [of regulatory bodies] should be in line with arrangements for ministers and senior civil servants as determined by the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments'.

The Committee believes ACOBA has a vital role in advising on propriety issues when ministers and crown servants leave public office and move into another sector. The government's business appointments rules must be followed in both spirit and practice by all those who are covered by them. It is important that each case is considered individually on its merits and that individuals receive appropriate advice and restrictions where necessary in advance of accepting an appointment.

The current system relies on transparency and media scrutiny to ensure compliance with the government's rules and the Committee's advice, and on ACoBA being given the respect and time it needs to fulfil its role. If this does not happen, it is likely that there will be growing pressure for some form of statutory intervention.

*Yours, with every best wish,
Paul Bew*

Lord Bew
Chair, Committee on Standards in Public Life