

PRESS NOTICE 28 (26 June 2012)

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards Annual Report April 2011 - March 2012

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, John Lyon, today publishes his annual report for 2011–12. This is the fifth and final report from this Commissioner whose five year term ends at the end of 2012.

The Report covers the work of the Commissioner during the year, including his review of the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament, his inquiries into individual Members' conduct and the preparation of the four registers of interests.

The report highlights the Commissioner's work on strengthening the systems for maintaining high standards among Members, in particular through his review of the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament which has resulted in the publication of a new Code. The Commissioner has continued his work on inquiries, considering 109 formal complaints against 93 Members and former Members, accepting eight cases for inquiry. The Commissioner resolved nine cases, and, with the agreement of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, closed a further three. He continued to ensure that confidential advice was available to Members and their staff, including through a programme of briefings about the registration requirements, and he paid particular attention this year to informing wider audiences about the work of the Commissioner and his office.

In his Foreword, Mr Lyon says:

“My aim in all this work has been to use my experience as Commissioner to support the House in having relevant, up-to-date and accessible rules of conduct. At the same time I have sought to ensure that the supporting rules and procedures give the best prospect of assisting Members in complying with the rules and of resolving problems fairly when they may not have done so. I aim, therefore, to pass on to my successor a system for Members' conduct which meets both the needs of Parliament and the expectations of the public.”

The Commissioner notes that the House amended the text of the Code of Conduct which had been recommended by the Committee on Standards and Privileges. The effect is to prevent the Commissioner from being able to investigate the conduct of a Member in their private and personal

lives which has caused significant damage to the reputation and integrity of the House or of its Members generally. He said:

“The result is that the Code—and the House—has accepted that Members’ conduct in their private and personal lives could exceptionally cause such damage, but the established means of resolving fairly and independently such matters cannot be invoked. In my judgement this leaves the Code in an unsatisfactory and unsettled position. In such wholly exceptional circumstances...the House would either be unable to act or would have to try to initiate some unprecedented procedure... I hope that before too long the House might find an opportunity to consider further this matter and the resolution proposed by the Chair of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, which would require the Commissioner to seek the agreement of the relevant Committee of the House before exceptionally instituting such an inquiry.”

In conclusion, Mr Lyon says:

“I and my office will be preparing in the latter part of the calendar year to welcome and to brief the new Commissioner...I will leave this office at the end of this calendar year very grateful to the House for the opportunity to serve it and the wider public in this important role.”

Notes for Editors

1. This Report covers the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012.
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmcomstan/311/311.pdf>
2. The current framework for Parliamentary Standards dates from 1995, when the first Commissioner was appointed. Mr Lyon is the fourth Commissioner. He was appointed for five years with effect from 1 January 2008. The appointment is not renewable. His term of office ends, therefore, on 31 December 2012. The process for appointing a new Commissioner started in May.
3. The Commissioner's main duties are:
 - to maintain the Register of Members' Financial Interests and the other registers of interests for Members' staff, journalists and All-Party Groups;
 - to provide advice confidentially on matters relating to the registration and declaration of interests;
 - to advise the Committee on Standards and Privileges on the interpretation of the Code of Conduct;
 - to monitor the operation of the Code of Conduct and registers and to make recommendations to the Committee thereon;
 - to investigate, if he thinks fit, specific matters which have come to his attention relating to the conduct of Members and to report on them to the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

The Commissioner's remit does not extend to the House of Lords. Information about the House of Lords Commissioner for Standards can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/the-commissioner-for-standards/>

Complaints about the misuse of the scheme for parliamentary expenses since May 2010 are a matter for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. Information about their Compliance Officer is available at <http://www.parliamentarycompliance.org.uk/>

4. The Commissioner's Annual Report can be found at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmcomstan.htm>

Memoranda on individual cases investigated by the Commissioner during the year are published as appendixes to Reports of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, and can be found at

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/standards-and-privileges-committee/publications/>

Details of cases concluded via the rectification process since 2008 can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/pcfs/publications/inquiries/matters-rectified/>

Details of cases not upheld without a memorandum to the Committee since 2008 can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/pcfs/publications/inquiries/matters-not-upheld/>

Information about the Commissioner's current caseload can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/pcfs/publications/inquiries/current-inquiries/>

Statistics on complaints can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-interests/pcfs/publications/inquiries/complaints-statistics/>

Description of the process for investigating complaints can be found at http://www.parliament.uk/documents/documents/Procedural_Note-April_2012.pdf

The latest edition of the Register of Members' Financial Interests can be found at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmregmem/contents.htm>

5. The Commissioner's office is available for media enquiries on 020 7219 1883.