



HOUSE OF LORDS

House of Lords Commissioner for Standards  
Annual Report 2016–17



# Foreword

I took up my five-year term as Commissioner for Standards on 1 June 2016. This report covers my first year in post, to 31 May 2017.

During the year I received 31 complaints, of which I investigated eight. All were against members of the House.

I wish to place on record my thanks to the House of Lords staff who assisted me in my investigations, in particular Nicolas Besly, the clerk who assists me, and to the members of the House who welcomed me and engaged with me, in particular the Leaders of the House, the Privileges and Conduct Committee and the Sub-Committee on Lords' Conduct.

**Lucy Scott-Moncrieff CBE**  
**Commissioner for Standards**

# Review of the year

## Complaints investigated

I investigated eight complaints. Four were dismissed as I found there had been no breach of the Code of Conduct, and four were upheld. Of these, two were dealt with by way of remedial action and two were referred to the Sub-Committee on Lords' Conduct. In each of those two cases the sub-committee recommended that the member should make a formal written apology for the breaches, and the Privileges and Conduct Committee endorsed the recommendations.

## Complaints in general

The complaints made and dealt with between 1 June 2016 and 31 May 2017 are in the table below.

<b>Formal complaints received</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Complaints subject to investigation</b>	<b>8</b>
(a) complaints dismissed	4
(b) complaints upheld and resolved by remedial action	2
(c) complaints upheld and referred to the sub-committee for sanction	2
<b>Complaints not investigated</b>	<b>23</b>
(a) because fell outside remit	11
(b) because anonymous	0
(c) because repeating allegations of previous inquiry	3
(d) because trivial or vexatious	0
(e) because no <i>prima facie</i> evidence of breach established	9

## Correspondence from members of the public

All the correspondence I have received from members of the public showed a concern that members of the House of Lords should conduct themselves to a high standard, and I did not consider that any of them were frivolous or vexatious. Some correspondents found it difficult to accept that the conduct of which they complained was not covered by the Code of Conduct, as it did not involve conduct in the discharge of parliamentary duties.

### **Meetings with members of the House**

I attended one meeting of each of the Privileges and Conduct Committee and the Sub-Committee on Lords' Conduct to introduce myself and answer questions about my approach to the role.

I held introductory meetings with the Lord Speaker, the Leader of the House, the chairman of the Privileges and Conduct Committee in post when I arrived and the new chairman after his appointment, the chairman of the sub-committee, the Clerk of the Parliaments, the Registrar of Lords' Interests and the House of Commons Commissioner for Standards.

I attended each of the three party meetings, and a Crossbenchers' meeting, where we discussed my role in investigating complaints and theirs in upholding standards and reporting possible breaches of the Code.

### **Other meetings**

I attended a meeting of the G8 group of regulators and officials involved in standards/ethics.

### **Thoughts after a year in post**

I have met with both co-operation and courtesy from all those with whom I have been in contact, including those against whom complaints have been made.

My impression of the members of the House whom I have met is that they fully understand the need for high standards; seek to maintain them in their own conduct; and are critical of members who appear not to have the same rigorous approach.

The matters that I have investigated have all been initiated by external complaints from members of the public, although in one case an external complaint was followed by complaints from members of the House. In every case where I have found a breach of the Code of Conduct I have accepted the assurance of the member concerned that the breach was inadvertent. None of these breaches suggested that the member concerned had benefited from the breach.

I know, from publicly available information, that some members assert that other members deliberately breach or stretch the rules in the Code (including the rules on claiming financial support for members) for financial gain. I cannot investigate unsubstantiated assertions where the name of the alleged wrongdoer is not given, and no evidence is provided that can make an investigation by me possible.

It is possible that people may conclude that if I do not investigate an allegation, this means that it will not be looked into at all.

Although I have a specific role in investigating formal complaints that the Code of Conduct has been breached, the House of Lords is a self-regulating body and therefore its members all have a responsibility to ensure high ethical standards and compliance with the Code. This does not necessarily have to be done by way of complaint to me; informal and internal processes can be as effective. Of course were there to be evidence of possible criminal behaviour the allegations should be reported to the police, as has happened previously.

I reiterate my thanks to all those who have been so welcoming to me this last year. I look forward to continuing to play my part in furthering the culture of high ethical standards in the House of Lords.