



HOUSE OF LORDS

Report from the Commissioner for Standards

The conduct of Lord Mountevans

Commissioner for Standards

The independent Commissioner for Standards is responsible for considering any alleged breaches of the Codes of Conduct.

Address: The Commissioner for Standards, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW

Email: lordsstandards@parliament.uk

Telephone: 020 7219 7152

Website: www.parliament.uk/hl-standards

Registrar of Lords' Interests

The Registrar of Lords' Interests advises members of the House and their staff on their obligations under the Codes of Conduct.

Address: Registrar of Lords' Interests, House of Lords, London SW1A 0PW

Email: lordsregistrar@parliament.uk

Telephone: 020 7219 3112/3120

Registers of Interests

A list of interests of members and their staff can be found online: www.parliament.uk/hlregister

Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme helpline

Telephone: 0808 168 9281 (freephone)

Email: Support@ICGShelpline.org.uk

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The conduct of Lord Mountevans

Summary of complaint

1. On 23 December 2021, my office received a complaint from a member of the public, Mr Graham Simms, regarding the conduct of Lord Mountevans.¹
2. In his complaint, Mr Simms stated that he and his wife were in a protracted dispute over planning permission for the development of their property, which lies in the vicinity of Lord Mountevans' sister-in-law's house. The complainant alleged that Lord Mountevans' wife had written a letter to the Prime Minister on House of Lords headed paper, which she also allegedly circulated to the neighbours in the area, including Mr Simms and his wife.

Relevant aspects of the Code

3. Paragraph 12(c) of the Code of Conduct states that members shall “act in accordance with any rules agreed by the House in respect of ... the facilities of the House.”
4. Paragraph 122 of the Guide to the Code states that facilities and services provided by the House “are provided primarily to support members in their parliamentary work”. It further states that “The domestic committees are responsible for proposing rules on the use of facilities by members, and the key ones are reported to and agreed by the House.”
5. The rules on the use of facilities which have been agreed by the House are set out in two House Committee reports. The relevant report in this instance was the House Committee report on Rules Governing the Use of Facilities which states, in relation to stationery:

“4. House of Lords headed paper and envelopes may be used for all correspondence relating to the work of the House, including the work of all-party groups, and for personal correspondence in modest quantities but not for circulars, general correspondence (except that of an essentially Parliamentary nature) or business letters.”²

Preliminary assessment

6. Members' spouses are not entitled to use House of Lords paper and I considered there was enough evidence to suggest that Lord Mountevans may have breached the Code of Conduct by supplying his wife with the stationery.
7. I decided that it would be appropriate to launch an investigation to determine if Lord Mountevans was in breach of the Code of Conduct.

Summary of investigation

8. I wrote to Lord Mountevans on 6 January 2022 to provide him with a copy of the complaint and inform him that I had launched an investigation. I invited him to submit a full written response to the allegations.
9. I asked him to address the following questions in his response:

1 The investigation and report were completed by Martin Jelley QPM.

2 House Committee, *Rules Governing the Use of Facilities* (2nd Report, Session 2009–10, HL Paper 47)

- “Were you aware that your wife was sending this letter?”
 - Did you provide her with the House of Lords paper on which she wrote the letter?
 - Did you provide your wife with House of Lords envelopes (postage-paid or otherwise)
 - How many copies of the letter were sent out, who were the other recipients, and were they all sent on House of Lords paper?”
10. Lord Mountevans responded to my letter on 17 January 2022. He told me that he did not know that his wife had written the letter, and had not provided her with any House of Lords stationery.
 11. After speaking with his wife, Lord Mountevans explained that his wife had obtained the House of Lords paper from the house of his sister-in-law whose late husband was Lord Mountevans’ brother and a former member of the House of Lords. The letter had been written whilst Lord Mountevans and his wife were staying with his sister-in-law.
 12. Lord Mountevans also informed me that the letter had been sent to neighbours in the area affected by the planning dispute, the Prime Minister and the Rt Hon George Eustice, their local MP. His wife could not remember if she had used House of Lords pre-paid envelopes.

Finding

13. **Following my investigation, I accept the explanation provided by Lord Mountevans that he was not aware of the letters and did not provide the stationery to his wife. I cannot hold him responsible for the misuse of House of Lords stationery in this case.**
14. **I conclude that Lord Mountevans is not in breach of the Code of Conduct, and the complaint is therefore dismissed.**
15. I have asked Lord Mountevans to ensure that the remaining House of Lords paper at his sister-in-law’s house be disposed of so that it cannot be misused in the future.
16. I am grateful to Lord Mountevans for his cooperation in this matter and for his prompt response.

APPENDIX 1: LETTER FROM LORD MOUNTEVANS TO THE COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS

Dear Commissioner,

I respond to your letter of 6th January which was forwarded by email.

This is a regrettable issue and it may be helpful first to set out some background on when my wife, Lady (Juliet) Mountevans wrote the letter. I believe that the letter was written in mid May 2021, when we were staying with my sister-in-law, Johanna Lady Mountevans, at her home in Hampshire. Johanna is my brother's widow. They had no children. Johanna being Dutch and a widow since 2014, we take considerate interest in her well-being [REDACTED].

The letter was written when we were staying with Johanna for her 80th birthday. [REDACTED]. She has been very cast-down concerning Mr Simms' planning application to build four homes where there is currently one. The location might be termed 'idyllic', with her home and two other houses (including Mr Simms's) reached down an unmade-up track. Johanna and other neighbours protested, not only on grounds of density in an unspoiled corner, but also against the prospect of trucks, cement carriers and other heavy vehicles etc using the unmade-up track.

This background may help to explain why my wife felt very strongly for Johanna and the other neighbours. Feelings and emotions, as can be the case with planning applications, were very high. [REDACTED]

In answer to your four questions, I have spoken with my wife, who very much regrets sending the letter on House of Lords paper and is very sorry. Speaking for myself,

1. I was not aware that my wife was sending the letter. The first I knew of it was when I read your notice of the complaint from Mr Simms.
2. I did not provide the House of Lords paper; it was in Johanna's house, a relic from when my brother was alive.
3. Nor did I provide my wife with House of Lords envelopes. In fact my wife is unable to recall if she used such an envelope.
4. My wife advises that the letter was sent to the Prime Minister, with photocopies to the Rt Hon George Eustice MP, and the two neighbours who were most affected by the planning application.

My wife is extremely sorry to have caused this trouble; she has not used House of Lords paper before or since, and will not do so in future.

I am at your disposal should you require further information from me.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Mountevans