

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards Annual Report April 2019 – March 2020

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, Kathryn Stone OBE, today publishes her third annual report since taking up office on 1 January 2018. The Commissioner explains how she carried out her responsibilities during the 2019-20 business year, and how she managed the risks associated with her work. She also sets out her concerns about confidentiality and openness.

2019-20 will be remembered both for the General Election and for the Covid-19 epidemic. After the Election, the Commissioner and her office provided advice and information to all members of the 2019 Parliament, and offered individual meeting to all newly-elected MPs. In March 2020, after the Prime Minister imposed a lockdown due to the coronavirus epidemic, the Commissioner changed her ways of working order to avoid face to face contact, so that she could continue her work unimpeded.

During the year, the Commissioner opened 27 inquiries into individual MPs and concluded 24, including one of the longest running investigations of recent years. Throughout the year she continued to advise the Standards Committee, MPs and their staff as well as APPGs and their staff.

Notes for Editors

1. The Commissioner's Annual Report can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/publications/annual-reports/>
2. The current framework for Parliamentary Standards dates from 1995, when the first Commissioner was appointed. Kathryn Stone OBE is the sixth Commissioner. Commissioners are appointed for five years. The appointment is not renewable.
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 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 she thinks fit, specific matters which have come to her attention relating to the conduct of Members and to report on them to the Committee on Standards; and
 - to consider cases arising from the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme.
4. Under Standing Order no 150 the Commissioner is able to rectify cases without referring them to the Standards Committee by using the rectification process set out in Standing Order No 150. These can be found at

<http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/complaints-and-investigations/allegations-the-commissioner-has-rectified/>

5. Statistics on complaints can be found at: <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/complaints-and-investigations/complaints-statistics/>
6. In more serious cases the Commissioner must submit a formal report or memorandum to the Standards Committee for their decision. The Standards publishes these memoranda, appended to its own reports. The Committee published three reports on inquiries completed by the Commissioner between April 2019 and the end of the 2019 Parliament, and a further four in the 2019-21 session.¹ In each case the Committee also published the Commissioner's memoranda, and the evidence she considered.
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/standards/publications/>
7. Government Ministers are required to follow the Ministerial Code as well as the Code of Conduct for MPs.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/826920/August-2019-MINISTERIAL-CODE-FINAL-FORMATTED-2.pdf. The Prime Minister may ask his Adviser on Ministerial Interests to investigate alleged breaches of this Code. The Commissioner is unable to investigate what Ministers have done in their capacity as such.
8. 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/>
9. 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/>
10. A description of the process for investigating complaints can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/complaints-and-investigations/>
11. The latest edition of the Register of Members' Financial Interests can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/registers-of-interests/register-of-members-financial-interests/>
12. The Commissioner's office is available for media enquiries on 020 7219 4938.

¹The Commissioner concluded one further investigation in 2019-20. This was the subject of a report published by the Standards Committee in June 2020.

