



HOUSE OF LORDS

Conduct Committee

1st Report of Session 2022–23

The conduct of Lord Lea of Crondall

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The Conduct Committee reviews and oversees the Codes of Conduct and the work of the House of Lords Commissioners for Standards. Recommended changes to the Codes are reported to the House and take effect when agreed by the House.

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The conduct of Lord Lea of Crondall

REPORT FROM THE CONDUCT COMMITTEE

1. The Committee has considered the annexed report from the Commissioner for Standards on the conduct of Lord Lea of Crondall.
2. The report relates to four complaints against Lord Lea, three of harassment and one of bullying. The Commissioner has upheld two of the complaints of harassment, dismissing the other, and has also upheld the complaint of bullying.
3. The complaints were received in late February, and the investigation launched shortly thereafter. Lord Lea then gave notice of his intention to retire from the House in accordance with section 1 of the House of Lords Reform Act 2014. His retirement took effect on 7 April 2022. The investigation was completed notwithstanding Lord Lea's retirement, in accordance with paragraph 5 of the *Code of Conduct*, which provides that "all current and retired members are subject to the provisions on (i) bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct and (ii) the use of facilities and services, regardless of their membership status".
4. Once the report was finalised, copies were sent to the parties, and Lord Lea and the complainant whose complaint was dismissed were given two weeks in which to appeal. Neither has appealed.
5. Since no appeal was lodged, the Committee's role was that described in paragraph 193 of the *Guide to the Code of Conduct*: "If there is no appeal to the Conduct Committee in the event of a complaint being upheld, the Committee initially considers the sanction recommended by the Commissioner."
6. Lord Lea's resignation means that the sanctions described in the *Guide to the Code of Conduct*, which all relate to members of the House, are not directly applicable in this case. The Commissioner concludes that if Lord Lea had still been a member of the House, he would have recommended "a long suspension". Instead, given the factors set out in paragraphs 113 to 123 of the report, he recommends "permanently revoking his access privileges as a retired member".
7. **We endorse the Commissioner's recommendation that Lord Lea of Crondall's access privileges, as a retired member of the House, should be permanently revoked.**
8. Access privileges for retired members are matters not for the Conduct Committee, but for the House of Lords Commission.¹ Our Chair has therefore written to the Lord Speaker, as Chair of the Commission, to invite him to seek the Commission's agreement to the permanent revocation of Lord Lea's access privileges.

¹ *Companion to the Standing Orders*, paragraph 1.45

Annex A: Report from the House of Lords Commissioner for Standards on the conduct of Lord Lea of Crondall

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. This report deals with four complaints made about Lord Lea of Crondall by four members of the parliamentary community. The complaints, which relate to Lord Lea's conduct before he retired from the House on 7 April 2022, were made under the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Members of the House of Lords dealing with bullying and harassment. This states that members are required to treat those with whom they come into contact in the course of their parliamentary duties and activities with respect and courtesy. Behaviour that amounts to bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct is a breach of the Code of Conduct.
2. In considering these complaints, I¹ have been supported by Claire Stevens, Independent Investigator, and Donna Davidson and Michael Torrance, the Clerks who assist me in my work. I wish to place on record my thanks to them for all their help, while also acknowledging that I am solely responsible for the conclusions reached and the decisions made in this investigation.
3. I also wish to thank the complainants for their engagement in the process. I appreciate that making complaints against members of the House takes courage and I am grateful to them for doing so.
4. The complainants have opted to retain their anonymity. Much of the evidence quoted is therefore redacted or summarised to ensure they cannot be identified. However, personal characteristics, such as gendered pronouns, have been retained as they are pertinent to the first three complaints.
5. By its nature, any report into allegations of bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct will include content that some readers may find upsetting or offensive. My aim is to reflect fairly and fully the evidence I gather in the course of an investigation and not to censor or in any way minimise views expressed or material uncovered. I believe this transparency is essential to helping the House of Lords to be a workplace where everyone is valued and respected, and where it is clear that bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct are not tolerated. This means that reports into allegations of bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct will often make for difficult reading.
6. **The findings and discussions in this case relate to harassment and bullying.**

1 This investigation and report was completed by Martin Jelley QPM.

CHAPTER 2: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Complaint by AB

7. AB, a member of the parliamentary community, submitted a complaint about Lord Lea's behaviour on 24 February 2022. She alleged that Lord Lea had made several approaches to her over a number of years, including the offer of a drink and "possibly three or four over-friendly and unsolicited handwritten notes". She said that she had "no personal or professional relationship with" Lord Lea. On 8 February, Lord Lea sent her a letter inviting her to accompany him to Westminster Abbey. AB subsequently told me about an encounter she had with Lord Lea on 1 March when he had invaded her personal space and "demanded" that she take his business card.
8. AB told me the incidents she described in her complaint left her feeling "disgusted", "very on edge" and "incredibly uptight and very anxious". She told me that she generally tried to avoid engaging with him, including in the corridors and dining facilities, because of the unpredictable nature of his behaviour.

Lord Lea's response

9. In his initial response Lord Lea emphasised that he did not wish to challenge the accuracy of AB's complaint and wished to apologise unreservedly for any distress he had caused her. He said that he had made a "major misjudgement".
10. However, during his interview, Lord Lea did not recall inviting AB to go for a drink and was unclear about what response he was seeking to his letter of 8 February. Lord Lea also considered AB's reaction to receiving one of his notes to be "thin-skinned" as it was a "tongue in cheek friendly conversation". He also disputed one aspect of AB's account of their encounter on 1 March.

Finding

11. On consideration of all the evidence, I concluded that Lord Lea's behaviour met the criteria for harassment and was a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Complaint by CD

12. CD, a member of the parliamentary community, submitted a complaint about Lord Lea's behaviour on 24 February. She described his behaviour as "bizarre" including leaving her a voicemail which suggested they "meet by the flagpole on Victoria Tower". She said that Lord Lea had then left a letter on her desk requesting a private meeting to discuss a communication he had sent to a minister in the House of Commons.
13. While CD had found Lord Lea's conduct "unsettling" and a "a bit weird" she told us that she was not upset by it, considering his behaviour to be nothing more than "peculiar" and "lacking judgment" rather than "unacceptable".

Lord Lea's response

14. In his initial response Lord Lea emphasised that he did not wish to challenge the accuracy of CD's complaint and wished to apologise unreservedly for any distress he had caused her. He said that he had made a "major misjudgement".
15. However, during his interview, Lord Lea did not recall leaving CD the voicemail message but said it sounded "crazy enough" for him to have said it

and that it was “obviously a joke”. He also made it clear that, in his view, his contact with CD regarding the letter to the Commons minister was justified.

Finding

16. On consideration of all the evidence, I concluded that Lord Lea’s behaviour did not meet the criteria for harassment and therefore this complaint was dismissed.

Complaint by EF

17. EF, a member of the parliamentary community, submitted a complaint about Lord Lea’s behaviour on 26 February. She referred to “unwelcome” attention she had received from Lord Lea over a number of years, including persistent attempts by him to encourage her to have dinner with him. EF described this behaviour as “creepy” and found his inability to take ‘no’ for an answer to be unacceptable behaviour in a workplace.
18. EF told us it had taken her several years to make a complaint and she found it very uncomfortable and difficult to do so. She had sought to avoid encountering Lord Lea in the House over the years, including by taking alternative routes, and said that despite being a “strong person” seeing him made her “freeze” which was a “horrible feeling”.

Lord Lea’s response

19. In his initial response Lord Lea emphasised that he did not wish to challenge the accuracy of EF’s complaint and wished to apologise unreservedly for any distress he had caused her. He said that he had made a “major misjudgement”.
20. However, during his interview, Lord Lea described his general interactions with EF in the corridor as “friendly” and “informal”. He told us he had no recollection of inviting EF to dinner but had perhaps invited her to have a cup of tea. He did not recognise EF’s description of him making regular approaches to her and rejected any suggestion that he had been “stalking” her in any way.

Finding

21. On consideration of all the evidence, I concluded that Lord Lea’s behaviour met the criteria for harassment and was a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Complaint by GH

22. GH, an employee in the Parliamentary Digital Service, submitted a complaint about Lord Lea’s behaviour on 2 March. Lord Lea had called GH at the support desk twice on 14 February to request help with calling a number to pay a parking fine. When GH explained that this was not Parliament-related work and they were unable to help Lord Lea, he became angry and threatening. GH explained that Lord Lea frequently made calls to the support desk and was well-known among the team for being difficult to deal with and unpleasant when he did not get his way.
23. While GH told us they were a confident person and had not been seriously affected by Lord Lea’s behaviour during the calls, they were concerned about the impact of Lord Lea’s behaviour on their team more generally.

Lord Lea's response

24. Lord Lea acknowledged that he was “quite a big customer” of the support desk. However, Lord Lea insisted that his calls on 14 February were to seek help for a genuine “telephone issue” rather than to pay his parking ticket. Lord Lea acknowledged things got “heated” during the calls but said this was a result of GH “upping the ante” by refusing to help him.

Finding

25. On consideration of all the evidence, I concluded that Lord Lea's behaviour met the criteria for bullying and was a breach of the Code of Conduct.

Outcome

26. In response to the complaints made by AB, EF and GH, I considered all the options available to me to identify an appropriate sanction by reference to all the circumstances of the case, including the effect of the breach on the complainants. I concluded that these cases could not be resolved via remedial action.
27. As Lord Lea retired from the House on 7 April my options in terms of sanctions are limited accordingly. Were Lord Lea still a member of the House, I believe his breaches of the Code, coupled with the fact that he has previously been found in breach of the Code and given the opportunity to reform his behaviour, were serious enough to merit a long suspension.
28. As a retired member, Lord Lea is no longer eligible to receive support from the Parliamentary Digital Service.
29. **In the light of the findings and the fact that Lord Lea is no longer a member of the House of Lords, I recommend that Lord Lea's access privileges as a retired member should be permanently revoked.**

CHAPTER 3: COMPLAINT BY AB: ACCOUNT OF THE KEY FACTS AND EVIDENCE

AB's complaint

30. I was contacted by AB on 24 February 2022. AB wished to make a complaint relating to the behaviour of Lord Lea. She said:

“I have, for many years, disregarded his approaches. It started with an offer of a drink when I first arrived at the House of Lords [redacted]; nothing untoward in that per se but it was odd in that I had never spoken to him at all prior to the invitation. It has continued with possibly three or four over-friendly and unsolicited handwritten notes; these from a person that I have no personal or professional relationship with, other than both [working in Parliament]. The straw that broke the camel's back is attached—a letter from ‘David’, who may well be Lord Lea of Crondall, which arrived around Valentines’ Day. I have also received a Valentines card on two occasions but cannot be certain they are from him.

I do not feel his behaviour is appropriate and it needs to stop, if only to protect more vulnerable individuals who may be too afraid to speak up.”

31. The letter to which AB refers, which is dated 8 February, said:²

“I have a suggestion - no hurry but no doubt you will let me know when you have had time to think about it: viz, how about us bumping into each other in Westminster Abbey sometime - perhaps in the vicinity of the choir which is quite near the Abbey's North Entrance

And then for half an hour or so we could check out - like a pair of culture vultures - how much we know about the adjacent statuary

It won't be a competitive quiz because I would almost certainly lose

You can use your parliamentary pass to to [sic] enter the Abbey without charge - I have done that once or twice: and you don't need a scooter to get there - certainly not on the pavement!

One uses the North Entrance—ie you will walk in with the west door of St Margaret's on your left

On dates, given that your diary will have more commitments in it than mine—and unless you think I am totally misreading where we are more generally could you make a suggestion - or two alternatives - perhaps for a Tuesday or Wednesday morning soon after the break - or indeed during the break if that makes more sense for you

Please use text if you are comfortable with that mode of communication

Mine is [redacted]

Ciao, David”

2 The text of the letter is reproduced faithfully, including the absence of full stops at the end of each sentence.

32. AB contacted me again on 2 March to say:

“I would also like to place on record that I had an encounter with Lord Lea yesterday. [redacted] he approached me and tried to give me his business card, and suggested I get in touch. I explained I did not want/need it [redacted]. He said something about talking to me when I was talking to Lord Monks whilst waiting for a visitor. If this sounds garbled, it is because it made no sense to me either. I don’t recall talking to Lord Monks. I was then rescued by [redacted], already aware of his behaviour. I am still trying to make sense of it all.”

33. Claire Stevens and I interviewed AB on 30 March, accompanied by Donna Davidson. Following that interview, AB sent my office the two Valentines cards and one of the notes referred to in her complaint. The note said:

“Dear [AB]. I hope you will forgive me for writing to you in this way, but I was very tickled by [redacted], I’m writing some vignettes about experiences in Parliament. May I include this one of yours? With my regards, David Lea”.

Preliminary assessment

34. I carried out a preliminary assessment and concluded that it would be appropriate to investigate whether Lord Lea’s conduct constituted a breach of the Code of Conduct. I wrote to AB with information about my next steps. I also wrote to Lord Lea on 2 March, enclosing the complaint from AB, alongside the complaints from CD and EF which had been received at around the same time. I explained that, as a result of my preliminary assessment, I had concluded that an investigation was required.
35. I invited Lord Lea to send me a full written response to the complaints from AB, CD and EF by 15 March. On 4 March I wrote him a further, similar, letter concerning the complaint from GH, inviting a written response by 17 March.
36. Lord Lea responded to my first letter on 8 March. He did not respond to any of the allegations, as requested. Instead, he said:

“I am conscious of the procedural difficulties that I am in because many points have been put to me by the Whips of different parties not at my behest, but I have today written to the Clerk of the Parliaments to say that I will be tending my resignation to take place at the House’s rise for Easter on April 7. I very much regret how this has all come about. In the light of my forthcoming resignation, perhaps the question is whether there are implications as to how this should now be handled.”

37. On 14 March I informed all the complainants that Lord Lea had given notice of his retirement.
38. I wrote to Lord Lea on 24 March to provide him with another opportunity to respond to the complaints in writing, by 30 March, as well as inviting him to an interview, in person, on 31 March or 1 April.

AB’s oral evidence

39. During my interview with AB, she told me that Lord Lea’s invitation to visit Westminster Abbey had made her feel “disgusted”, particularly the line:

“Unless you think I am totally misreading where we are more generally”. She did not understand this reference but felt it suggested that he would like a closer, more personal, relationship with her.

40. We also discussed the incident she reported had taken place on 1 March. AB said: “He came barrelling up to me, waving his business card”, telling me to take it. AB found this odd, his manner “quite aggressive” and said he had not respected her personal space; coming very close to her. She declined his offer of the business card, but the incident had made her feel “very on edge” and “incredibly uptight and very anxious”. Apart from on that occasion, AB had not “felt particularly affected. I don’t feel in any way uncomfortable or defensive, or sort of in danger, or anything like that. I just don’t think that it’s the right behaviour.”
41. However, AB said she generally tried to avoid engaging with him, including in dining facilities, because of the unpredictable nature of what he might say. She said: “If I was walking down and I had an option to go down one corridor or another alongside the Chamber to get to the other end and I saw Lord Lea of Crondall in one corridor, I wouldn’t walk down it; I would go down the other one.”
42. I discussed possible outcomes with AB. She was more concerned about impact on other people by Lord Lea’s behaviour rather than on herself. She observed that Lord Lea had been given previous opportunities to change his behaviour and had not done so. As a result, she felt he should not be permitted access to the Palace of Westminster because of the continued risks arising from his behaviour.

Lord Lea’s response

43. Lord Lea responded to my letter of 24 March on the same day. Regarding the complaints made by AB, CD and EF he said:

“On the substance of the [complaints], I offer no challenge to their accuracy. I am concerned that these invitations to [redacted] have caused upset and I apologise unreservedly to them for the distress that has resulted. I had no idea that my words would prove so unwelcome, and I made a major misjudgement.”
44. Claire Stevens and I interviewed Lord Lea on 31 March, and he was accompanied by Lord Monks at his request. Donna Davidson, Standards Clerk, was also in attendance.
45. He did not recall inviting AB to go for a drink. When we asked if he thought it was odd to invite a woman that he did not know to go for a drink his response was “no comment”.
46. When we told Lord Lea AB had found his note “overfamiliar and unwanted contact” he responded: “Well, she’s being very thin-skinned, if that’s the case. It was a joke; it was amusing; it was the fact that it was—Well, people were laughing at her expense, I suppose is why she may be a bit over-sensitive about it.”
47. When we asked what he was hoping to achieve from his letter of 8 February Lord Lea said he could not remember. I also asked him what he meant by the line in the letter: “unless you think I am totally misreading where we are

more generally”. Lord Lea’s response was: “Well, I was aware that I might have been misreading the fact that, although I think she waved to me, or something like that, that I should—would be making a mistake in following it up, saying, “Would you like to meet sometime?””.

48. When we presented him with the two Valentines cards AB had received, he denied sending these to her. However, he said: “I did send her a very small Valentine’s card as a joke when I was writing this other letter. It was about that big (indicating a much smaller size). But those two are not from me.”
49. Regarding the incident which occurred on 1 March Lord Lea only disputed one aspect of AB’s account, saying: “I think the last part of that was untrue. It’s not true. There was no one else that had to escort her away.” When we asked him why he tried to give her his business card he said: “Because it had my phone number on it. I had been—I had written her that letter. So I thought next time I bump into her it might be convenient if she had my business card.”

50. Following his interview, Lord Lea wrote to me on 6 April. Regarding the complaints made by AB, CD and EF he said:

“I want to stress that although the detailed points put to me at the hearing produced some defensive answers, at no stage was I challenging the [the complainants’] recollections or allegations ... I did not intend at any stage to argue with their perceptions and recollections of my conduct. I am withdrawing from the House, and I would be grateful if you would let the three [complainants] know of my apology/retirement/withdrawal. There were a number of other points on which I would like to comment. I did not have a clear recollection of all the points put to me from the three [complainants] and after reflection I write now to comment on them. I emphasise that in doing so I am not accusing any of them of gilding the lily but my own recollection of specific incidents that they have mentioned differs in certain important respects ...”

51. Regarding AB’s complaint, he again denied sending her the two Valentines cards. Regarding the note he had sent AB, he said: “My contact with [AB] was to compliment her on [redacted]. It was a tongue in cheek friendly conversation.”

CHAPTER 4: COMPLAINT BY CD: ACCOUNT OF THE KEY FACTS AND EVIDENCE

CD's complaint

52. I was contacted by CD on 24 February 2022. She attached a voicemail message she had received on 22 February and said:

“I would like to report the rather bizarre behaviour of Lord Lea of Crondall in sending this message to me. It was not in response to any communication from me indeed I do not have his mobile number.

He followed up with leaving a letter on my desk yesterday requesting a private meeting to discuss a communication he had sent to [a Commons minister].

He then ‘lurked’ as I was talking to [a member of the House] on [redacted] and followed me to Princes Chamber. At that point I just turned and said I could not help him in his discussions with [the Commons minister]. There has been no further contact. Possibly because he is not in the House today. I just have the uncomfortable feeling I haven’t heard the last from him!”

53. The voicemail to which CD refers said:³

“[CD] it’s David Lea on Tuesday lunchtime—ish. Umm, I hope we can bump into each other, sometime; I’m sorry I didn’t get your message yesterday until I was driving up the A3. Umm. I. Umm. You’ve got my mobile number, obviously, I don’t know whether you can leave another message. Umm. Meet by the flagpole on the top of Victoria Tower, maybe? You can get blown off from there though, can’t you? Leave it to your ingenuity and maybe I’ll try another time. Ciao.”

CD's oral evidence

54. Claire Stevens and I interviewed CD on 28 March, with Donna Davidson attending.
55. CD did not recall any direct contact with Lord Lea before receiving his voicemail which “came out of the blue”. She felt his subsequent letter, which was received on 23 February, had requested a private meeting that did not need to be private.
56. Regarding Lord Lea’s reference to meeting at the top of Victoria Tower, CD told me: “I wasn’t upset by it, but I found it unsettling and just a bit weird, particularly then when it was followed up.” She had found his behaviour to be nothing more than “peculiar” and “lacking judgment” rather than “unacceptable”. CD told us these experiences had not affected her behaviour, as she knew she could deal with it, but she was glad her complaint was being considered as there would be others who felt less capable of dealing with Lord Lea’s behaviour.
57. I discussed possible outcomes with CD. Noting Lord Lea’s decision to retire, CD told us her view was that he should not receive a retired members’ pass

3 This is a verbatim transcription of the voicemail.

“because the behaviour that he’s guilty of is not based in the Chamber, which is the one place he wouldn’t be able to go to if he retained his pass.”

Lord Lea’s response

58. Regarding complaints AB, CD and EF, Lord Lea’s response to my letter of 24 March said:

“On the substance of the [complaints], I offer no challenge to their accuracy. I am concerned that these invitations to [the complainants] have caused upset and I apologise unreservedly to them for the distress that has resulted. I had no idea that my words would prove so unwelcome, and I made a major misjudgement.”

59. During our interview with Lord Lea on 31 March, he told us that he did not remember leaving CD the voicemail. He said:

“I’m not trying to assert I didn’t make it. I can’t think what it would have been about. I think that about that time Lord Monks and I were having a drink and one of these ladies was sitting over there talking to somebody and waved or something, and I think I may have been following it up. I can’t remember.”

60. When we asked him if he could remember suggesting a meeting at the top of Victoria Tower he said:

“It sounds crazy enough for me to have said that, I suppose ... It was a joke, obviously a joke ... I do have a sense of humour, you know. Goodness gracious!”

61. When I asked Lord Lea about his subsequent letter and why he would want to meet with CD privately he became defensive and objected to the line of questioning. He said:

“I’m sorry, you’re putting me in a position, and have been for some minutes, of me being thought to have been acting unreasonably. I’m finding this a little bit relentless in you, as it were, putting me in the dock in this way. I was trying to be helpful ... Look, I’m under a lot of pressure, but I am trying to help you to say what I was doing trying to leave a letter on her desk. I thought it would be a good way of getting a letter to [a Commons minister].”

62. In response to this, I explained that it was important for us to receive his version of events.

63. Following his interview, Lord Lea wrote to me on 25 May to say that he believed that CD’s reaction to receiving the letter had been based on a “straightforward misunderstanding” and that his contact with her had been in no way “inappropriate or non-transparent”. Lord Lea said that CD had “misconstrued” his covering note as seeking a private meeting to discuss the letter when he only wanted her help in ensuring it reached the Commons minister. Lord Lea said after CD returned the letter to him, he was eventually successful in getting the letter to the Commons minister by alternative means.⁴

4 Lord Lea enclosed a copy of his correspondence with the Commons minister.

CHAPTER 5: COMPLAINT BY EF: ACCOUNT OF THE KEY FACTS AND EVIDENCE

EF's complaint

64. I was contacted by EF on 26 February. She wrote:

“I am writing to draw your attention to the unwelcome attention that I have received from [Lord Lea].

I can best describe this behaviour as ‘creepy’ and persistent over a number of years.

The persistent aspect is his attempts to entice me to have dinner with him, despite my obvious disinterest in the idea, with the comment ‘there might be a bottle of champagne in it for you’. I also often found him lurking around corridors in an attempt, it seemed, to encounter me and get me to have dinner with him.

My approach throughout has been to avoid him whenever and wherever possible, but despite an obvious cold shoulder from me, he seems not to have any ability to take ‘no’ for an answer. I find such behaviour unacceptable in a workplace.”

EF's oral evidence

65. Claire Stevens and I interviewed EF on 23 March, with Michael Torrance attending.
66. EF told us she had first become aware of feeling very uncomfortable in his presence when he began to:

“... hang around outside [redacted] to try and talk to me. He kept suggesting going for a cup of tea. I kept fobbing him off. And most people would just take the hint. He doesn't take the hint. Eventually I did find—I mean, I'm talking about two years later—find myself sitting in [redacted], and who walks in but Lord Lea of Crondall. So out of sort of politeness I invited him to sit down. But he's not subtle. And I kind of wonder why I did that, but I just felt really, you know, we're polite, aren't we? Then in the time between sitting down for a cup of tea with him he kept suggesting going out for dinner. Clearly, I avoided that like the plague ... Then he made what I would find a totally inappropriate comment, which is, “There might be a bottle of champagne in it for you” ... So obviously I never went out for dinner with him, but he just kept making the suggestions.”

67. EF told us her first encounter with Lord Lea was following [redacted] when he asked her to go for a cup of tea. This had made her feel “grossly uncomfortable” as he did not respect her personal space. Since that occasion she had regularly been “approached” by Lord Lea on up to a dozen occasions in total, but the frequency of contact had reduced when she took steps to start avoiding him. However, more recently, she felt that when she was in [redacted] “he makes sure, well I think he makes sure—I might be imagining it—that he makes absolute direct eye line contact with me. That's kind of weird. So, I'm so creeped out by him.”

68. EF felt that Lord Lea's conduct was "intimidatory, it's power play, and it's just a complete lack, I think, on his part of self-awareness, where the boundaries are." Her main motivation for making a complaint was her concern for other people who perhaps felt powerless to come forward.
69. EF told us she felt "really uncomfortable" about making the complaint and it had taken her some time—several years—to come forward about it because she found it difficult to do so. Initially she had thought she was the only person receiving contact from Lord Lea in this way and she had been worried she might have been "imagining things".
70. EF told us she sought to avoid Lord Lea by checking that he was not ahead of her and taking a different route if required. However, she said it was difficult to take alternative routes as Lord Lea's office was close to hers and occasionally, she got caught out because he was "standing around the corner". She had "actively gone up to other people and engaged in conversation" when she'd seen him coming towards her.
71. EF told us what it felt like when she encountered Lord Lea:

"I'm a strong person. I'm not someone easily cowed ... But I freeze when I see him, because I think, you know, he's going to make me feel uncomfortable again. And after certain events I have almost sort of kicked myself that I haven't actually told him where to go in no uncertain terms ... But it's just such a peculiar feeling when you feel kind of cornered by someone ... It's a horrible feeling."

72. When we discussed possible outcomes with EF, she made it clear that she hoped measures would be put in place to ensure that Lord Lea would not have access to the Palace of Westminster.

Lord Lea's response

73. Regarding complaints AB, CD and EF, Lord Lea's response to my letter of 24 March said:

"On the substance of the [complaints], I offer no challenge to their accuracy. I am concerned that these invitations to [the complainants] have caused upset and I apologise unreservedly to them for the distress that has resulted. I had no idea that my words would prove so unwelcome, and I made a major misjudgement."

74. During my interview with Lord Lea on 31 March, he described his general interactions with EF in the corridor as "friendly" and "informal". He told us he had no recollection of inviting EF to dinner, including the reference to champagne, but had perhaps invited her to have a cup of tea. He did not recognise EF's description of him making regular approaches to her and rejected any suggestion that he had been "stalking" her in any way.
75. Following his interview, Lord Lea wrote to me on 6 April and said: "My last contact with [EF] was to compliment her on the way she handles a heavy workload. I said she deserved a medal. She said, 'I deserve several!!'"

CHAPTER 6: COMPLAINT BY GH: ACCOUNT OF THE KEY FACTS AND EVIDENCE

GH's complaint

76. I was contacted by GH, an employee in the Parliamentary Digital Service, on 3 March. They wrote:

“I wish to raise a complaint against Lord Lea for his inappropriate behaviour when telephoning the PDS Support Desk on 14/02/21.

He called to get help paying a parking fine, and when challenged that this was not Parliamentary-related work he became angry and threatening (language used such as “I will call someone else or make a complaint about you, your name is?”). He ended the call abruptly, then re-dialled the Support Desk though came back through to me and again attempted to get assistance, being coy with information and continuing to claim that his issue was Parliamentary related, again using escalating language such as “If we’re not careful we will have a major dispute about this”. I explained that if he has a technical issue preventing parliamentary work we are ready to assist, but reaffirmed we will not help pay a parking ticket. He again abruptly ended the call.

As with all calls to the Support Desk, I have recordings of these calls if you would wish to review them as part of my complaint.”

GH's oral evidence

77. Claire Stevens and I interviewed GH via MS Teams on 15 March, with Donna Davidson attending.
78. GH told us there was historical context to the incident, saying that Lord Lea was “infamous” among their team “because his behaviour to the staff is less than amicable”. They explained that Lord Lea:

“frequently will call in spates ... we will generally find you’ll hear from him at the beginning of the shift because he has problem X and it’s basically a certainty that for the next three, four hours he will be ringing every half an hour, 40 minutes, or whatever it is, with another issue, another issue, another issue, until he finishes for the day.”

79. While GH had no issue with the frequency of calls, if there were genuine issues to be resolved, they were concerned by what they considered to be Lord Lea’s poor conduct when engaging with their team. In the past, they had acted as a point of escalation from other members of the team who had received calls from Lord Lea because he had not been happy with the service provided. GH said:

“There’s no one, stand-out characteristic, I would say. It, kind of, depends on his mood whether he’s just—sometimes it feels like he’s ringing to argue more than to actually get his problem fixed. Sometimes it will develop that way because he’s not getting his “way”. But the overall theme from calls that I’ve had experience with seems to be that he will construct arguments or comments in such a way that’s deliberately trying to get you to trip up so that he can hone in on that and use it as

- evidence to throw his weight around essentially, to bully. It is bullying ... to basically bully you into getting what he wants.”
80. Regarding their calls with Lord Lea on 14 February, GH described Lord Lea’s “increased tempo of voice, speaking louder, snappier, more aggressive”. They felt that Lord Lea’s request for their name was “an intimidation tactic”, and that Lord Lea had insinuated that “if I didn’t do what he was asking to do that there would be a complaint and it would be me who was worse off from the altercation than it would be him.”
81. I reviewed the transcripts of both the calls which took place on 14 February. During the first call, when GH first challenged Lord Lea about his inquiry not being related to parliamentary work, Lord Lea said “I’ll ring somebody else if you can’t help me. I think that’s outrageous ...” and “I’ve had a bloody parking charge, and I’ll get somebody else or make a complaint about you. Your name is what, please?” During the second call, after Lord Lea realised he was talking to GH again, he said “I’m ringing you again. I’m asking you to think again about what you said” and “if we’re not careful we’ll have a major dispute about this. I was simply asking you a telephone question.”
82. GH had decided to complain about Lord Lea’s behaviour because they personally felt “there were very clear violations of the behaviour ... that we expect of Members. There’s not a lot of ambiguity about it. He was asking us to perform something that was outside of our remit and became aggressive when challenged about it.”
83. I discussed potential outcomes with GH. They told me that the best outcome would be if:
- “... he just treated my staff with respect when he interacted with us. As I say, we are here to do a job. If he phones me one time or a thousand times in a night with issues that are affecting him doing his parliamentary duties and he’s pleasant throughout those calls, my team are happy to spend all 12 hours of our shift fixing his problems.”
84. As Lord Lea retired from the House on 7 April, he is no longer eligible to receive support from the Parliamentary Digital Service.
85. I asked GH about the impact of their conversations with Lord Lea. They told me they were quite a confident person when they knew someone was behaving inappropriately and while “You do have doubts in your mind” and think “Is this the right thing”, they felt empowered by their managers to stand up to Lord Lea in the way they chose to do; and also supported their team to do the same.
86. However, they acknowledged that the impact of Lord Lea’s behaviour on their team was different, as they were sometimes less confident about pushing back on his unreasonable requests as he was “quite an intimidating figure” and his conduct could be “dehumanising”. GH told us they hoped that their complaint, by casting light on Lord Lea’s behaviour, would have a positive impact on them and their team.

Lord Lea’s response

87. During my interview with Lord Lea on 31 March, he insisted that his call was to ask for help getting through to a telephone number rather than paying

the parking ticket. Lord Lea acknowledged things got “heated” but could not remember if he had raised his voice. Lord Lea also acknowledged that he was “quite a big customer” of the Digital Service and would ring more than once in one day.

88. Lord Lea told us that he did not remember making the second call but did not dispute the recording. When we suggested he had called back because he did not want to take no for an answer the first time, he said this was a “misrepresentation” and that he “rang back to try and pursue getting this parking organisation’s number, not to continue a row with [GH].”
89. When we put to him GH’s suggestion that he was someone that uses his power to bully and intimidate people to do what he wanted, Lord Lea rejected the allegation of bullying and said: “I would like to ask you to move on, because I think that such a generalisation is next to character assassination and I’m not going to comment.”
90. Lord Lea wrote to me on 6 April to request copies of the transcripts of his phone conversations with the complainant, so that he could comment on them “authoritatively”. My office provided him with copies of the transcripts. Lord Lea wrote to me again on 12 April with his comments.⁵ He affirmed his position that his calls related to a “telephone matter” rather than seeking help to pay a parking ticket and that GH had been responsible for “upping the ante”, rather than him, by saying “somewhat disingenuously - ‘I am not here to help you sort out a parking ticket’”. As a result, Lord Lea said that things had “escalated from there” and that “On the question of whether I was losing my cool, I have to say that the amount of time that I was ringing this company and getting no reply was obviously a matter of considerable frustration - as was the deliberately inaccurate, characterisation of my call by [GH].”

5 Lord Lea enclosed a copy of his parking ticket with this letter.

CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS AND OUTCOME

91. Paragraph 11 of the Code of Conduct for Members of the House of Lords provides that:

“Members of the House should observe the principles set out in the Parliamentary Behaviour Code of respect, professionalism, understanding others’ perspectives, courtesy, and acceptance of responsibility. These principles will be taken into consideration when any allegation of bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct is under investigation.”

92. Paragraph 18 of the Code of Conduct for Members of the House of Lords provides that:

“Members are required to treat those with whom they come into contact in the course of their parliamentary duties and activities (including parliamentary proceedings) with respect and courtesy. Behaviour that amounts to bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct is a breach of this Code.”

93. Therefore, while all members ought to adhere to the principles and standards of behaviour set out in the Parliamentary Behaviour Code, and a failure to do so will be taken into account in investigations, it is only behaviour that amounts to bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct that constitutes a breach of the Code of Conduct for Members of the House of Lords.

94. There are no allegations of sexual misconduct in this investigation. The following paragraphs assess the evidence gathered against the definitions of bullying and harassment set out in Appendix B to the Code of Conduct.

95. Paragraph 138 of the Code of Conduct says that ordinarily the Commissioner may not investigate a complaint about a former member of the House. If a member is under investigation when the member leaves the House the investigation terminates at that point. However, paragraph 5 of the Code of Conduct sets out an exception to this rule, saying that “when on the parliamentary estate or using the facilities or services of Parliament, all current and retired members are subject to the provisions on bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct.”

Findings

96. The Behaviour Code, incorporated into the House of Lords Code of Conduct, describes:

- (a) harassment as: “any unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct that has the purpose or effect of either violating a person’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them”, and
- (b) bullying as: “offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour involving an abuse or misuse of power that can make a person feel vulnerable, upset, undermined, humiliated, denigrated or threatened. Power does not always mean being in a position of authority and can include both personal strength and the power to coerce through fear or intimidation”.

97. In investigating and adjudicating allegations of non-compliance with the Code, I am bound to act in accordance with the principles of natural justice. It is also a requirement that the civil standard of proof (balance of probabilities) is adopted by me to find the allegation proven against a member.

Complaints by AB, CD and EF

98. It was clear from AB and EF's evidence that Lord Lea's behaviour towards them was unwelcome, regular and distressing. Neither AB nor EF gave Lord Lea any indication that his contacts with them were wanted, nor did they take him up on his invitations to meet.
99. Furthermore, their experiences clearly influenced their behaviour in the House over several years, including taking steps to avoiding encountering Lord Lea. I have no hesitation in believing that the effect of his behaviour was to create "an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them." That they should feel compelled to alter their behaviour in this manner, because of another individual's conduct, is not acceptable in any workplace.
100. While Lord Lea's contact with CD was clearly unusual, it appears to have been a more isolated incident that did not cause significant distress to CD.
101. I acknowledge that it took AB, CD and EF great courage to make their complaints against a member of the House and I am grateful to them for doing so.
102. While Lord Lea initially offered a full and unconditional apology for his behaviour in relation to these complaints, he later appeared to row back from this position, during his interview and subsequent correspondence, by taking issue with the seriousness or accuracy of some aspects of the complaints.
103. In relation to AB's complaint, having reviewed the two Valentines' cards in question, I accepted Lord Lea's explanation that he did not send these cards, especially as they are not in keeping with his other communications that I have reviewed.
104. **I conclude that, on the balance of probabilities, Lord Lea's behaviour towards AB and EF amounted to harassment and he has breached the Code of Conduct.**
105. **While Lord Lea's behaviour toward CD was certainly unusual, and unwelcome, on the balance of probabilities I conclude that it did not amount to harassment and dismiss this complaint.**

Complaint by GH

106. When GH refused to help Lord Lea with his request on 14 February, rather than "upping the ante" as Lord Lea suggested, they were instead enforcing a legitimate service boundary as per the terms of service of the Parliamentary Digital Service. This boundary should have been obvious to Lord Lea, had he chosen to apply the Parliamentary Behaviour Code's principles of "respect, professionalism, understanding others' perspectives, courtesy, and acceptance of responsibility", as he was bound to do at the time of this incident.

107. At no point during the investigation did Lord Lea express any remorse for the way he had handled the calls with GH. It was evident from GH's testimony and the transcripts of the calls that Lord Lea used intimidatory language towards GH and threatened them.
108. There was a clear power imbalance between GH, as a staff member in the Parliamentary Digital Service, and Lord Lea as member of the House of Lords. It is clear to me that Lord Lea chose to exploit this power imbalance by threatening them with negative consequences for their actions.
109. While they had initial doubts about making a complaint about Lord Lea's conduct, GH felt compelled to do so as they personally experienced the poor behaviour that they were already aware their wider team experienced on a regular basis. While their team's experiences did not form part of their complaint, they provided relevant context to it.
110. GH's decision to make a complaint about Lord Lea's conduct is to be welcomed and should send a clear message to other service providers in Parliament that such conduct does not need to be tolerated.
111. **I conclude that, on the balance of probabilities, Lord Lea's behaviour towards GH amounted to bullying and he has breached the Code of Conduct.**

Lord Lea of Crondall's response to the draft report and findings

112. In accordance with paragraphs 154 and 168 of the Guide to the Code of Conduct. Lord Lea and the complainants were provided with a copy of the draft factual report and my provisional findings and were offered the opportunity to provide comments. Lord Lea was also offered the opportunity to provide any material he wanted me to take into account when considering a recommended sanction.

Sanction

113. By way of mitigation, Lord Lea's letter to me of 24 March said he was "finding coping with my situation to be difficult and confusing, and I am not always thinking clearly and acting efficiently." During his interview on 31 March, he also referred to various health issues he had been experiencing over the last few years. In response to a question about whether his medical condition was relevant to the matters being investigated, he said: "Well, I think the short answer is yes, in that if you haven't been sleeping very well, if you've got constant splitting headaches there, and things down the neck here, you find it hard to stay cool when you've missed your train more so than otherwise you would."
114. Regarding his retirement he said:
- "... whilst there were other reasons relating to my age and health which have made me consider retirement, my main reason for retiring precipitately at this point was my anguish and upset of those cases and my genuine concern at the unintended distress it has caused the complainants. There can be no greater punishment for me than what has already happened."

115. I responded to his letter on 4 April 2022 and provided some assurances and additional information about the procedures but did not comment on possible sanctions.

Previous reports by the Commissioner for Standards

116. A previous report into the conduct of Lord Lea was published on 14 January 2020.⁶ It found his behaviour met the criteria for harassment and was a breach of the Code of Conduct. My predecessor proposed that Lord Lea should undertake bespoke training and behaviour change coaching provided by an external supplier, which was agreed to by the complainant and Lord Lea and completed. That matter was therefore concluded by remedial action.
117. A further report was published into Lord Lea's conduct on 10 August 2020, which found Lord Lea's behaviour met the criteria for bullying and was a breach of the Code of Conduct.⁷ The complaint concerned Lord Lea's behaviour to a member of staff in the Parliamentary Security Department when he was trying to meet his behaviour change coach, as recommended by the previous report, for the first time. This matter was also concluded by remedial action by way of an apology from Lord Lea to the complainant.
118. The previous reports both describe aspects of Lord Lea's behaviour which are also evident in the complaints considered in this report. This therefore suggests that, despite Lord Lea's earlier willingness to take steps to address his behaviour, no material changes in his behaviour have resulted.

Information from the Clerk of the Parliaments regarding Lord Lea

119. During my investigations, I was made aware that Lord Lea had been the subject of previous complaints, not to me or my office but through informal routes within the House of Lords Administration logged by the Clerk of the Parliaments' office. I therefore wrote to the Clerk of the Parliaments, Simon Burton, on 4 March 2022 to notify him about the four complaints I had received and, to assist my investigation, to ask him to provide any relevant information he held on any other complaints made about Lord Lea's conduct, including any steps that were taken in response.
120. Simon Burton responded to my letter on 23 March 2022. He confirmed that his office had logged previous complaints about Lord Lea's conduct including details of the service restrictions put in place as a result. The logged complaints did not concern the four complainants that are the subject of this report. Noting that his predecessor had received 18 complaints about Lord Lea in the period May 2011–July 2019, which were mentioned in the report published on 14 January 2020, he provided information about four complaints his office had logged since August 2019.
121. Simon Burton said that three of the complaints concerned rude and/or aggressive behaviour towards members of staff when Lord Lea was trying to make enquiries, access a service or when using facilities. Another complaint had been made on behalf of a department in response to difficulties the

6 House of Lords Commissioner for Standards, *The conduct of Lord Lea of Crondall* (14 January 2020): <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/lords-commissioner-for-standards/Report-on-Lord-Lea-of-Crondall.pdf>

7 House of Lords Commissioner for Standards, *The conduct of Lord Lea of Crondall* (10 August 2020): https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/lords-commissioner-for-standards/conduct_of_lord_lea_final_report.pdf

department had faced with Lord Lea and the unreasonable strain he had placed on that department, in terms of the volume of requests to access services and the unreasonable nature of the calls.

122. Simon Burton said two of the complainants had requested apologies from Lord Lea and he understood these had been forthcoming. The other two complaints did not request any further action beyond logging the details. Simon Burton also confirmed that he had been involved in or been made aware of service restrictions imposed against Lord Lea by several offices, one of which had been imposed following the report into Lord Lea's conduct in January 2020. He and his predecessor as Clerk of the Parliaments had been made aware that some of these restrictions had been breached, including as recently as February 2022. This had resulted in extensions being made to those restrictions.
123. Lastly, Simon Burton confirmed that he had met with Lord Lea, at his request, on 19 January 2022 when he asked him to review some of the service restrictions. However, he had decided to maintain these service restrictions as he had "seen no evidence of an improvement in [Lord Lea's] behaviour and also bearing in mind the history of complaints [in the previous reports by the Commissioner for Standards]".
124. **Despite upholding the complaints by AB, EF and GH, as Lord Lea has retired from the House, my recommendations to the Conduct Committee on what sanctions should be applied are limited. If Lord Lea had still been a member, I would have recommended a long suspension.**
125. **For the sake of some of the complainants, who would with good cause feel uncomfortable encountering Lord Lea on the Parliamentary estate, and because he has clearly not taken steps to improve his behaviour in the light of previous reports and the repeated breaches of various service restrictions, I recommend permanently revoking his access privileges as a retired member. It will be for the House of Lords Commission, which is ultimately responsible for retired members' access privileges, to decide whether to give effect to this recommendation.**