



House of Commons  
Committee on Standards

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# All-Party Parliamentary Groups: final proposals

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**Eighth Report of Session 2022–23**

*Report, together with formal minutes relating  
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 28 March 2023*

## Committee on Standards

The Committee on Standards is appointed by the House of Commons to oversee the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, except in relation to the conduct of individual cases under the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme; to examine the arrangements proposed by the Commissioner for the compilation, maintenance and accessibility of the Register of Members' Financial Interests and any other registers of interest established by the House; to review from time to time the form and content of those registers; to consider any specific complaints made in relation to the registering or declaring of interests referred to it by the Commissioner; to consider any matter relating to the conduct of Members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged breaches in the Code of Conduct which have been drawn to the Committee's attention by the Commissioner; and to recommend any modifications to the Code of Conduct as may from time to time appear to be necessary.

### Current membership

[Sir Chris Bryant MP](#) (*Labour, Rhondda*) (Chair)

[Tammy Banks](#) (*Lay member*)

[Andy Carter MP](#) (*Conservative, Warrington South*)

[Alberto Costa MP](#) (*Conservative, South Leicestershire*)

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[Allan Dorans MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock*)

[Yvonne Fovargue MP](#) (*Labour, Makerfield*)

[Sir Francis Habgood](#) (*Lay member*)

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[Sir Charles Walker MP](#) (*Conservative, Broxbourne*)

### Powers

The constitution and powers of the Committee are set out in Standing Order No.149. In particular, the Committee has power to order the attendance of any Member of Parliament before the Committee and to require that specific documents or records in the possession of a Member relating to its inquiries, or to the inquiries of the Commissioner, be laid before the Committee. The Committee has power to refuse to allow its public proceedings to be broadcast. The Law Officers, if they are Members of Parliament, may attend and take part in the Committee's proceedings, but may not vote.

### Publications

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Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/standards](http://www.parliament.uk/standards) and in print by Order of the House.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Paul Connolly (Media Relations Manager), Arvind Gunnoo (Committee Operations Officer), Dr Robin James (Head of staff team), Stuart Ramsay (Acting Clerk), Silas Scott (Senior Media Relations Officer), and Wafia Zia (Second Clerk).

### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Committee at the Committee's email address, [standards@parliament.uk](mailto:standards@parliament.uk). The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6615.

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# 1 APPGs and our inquiry

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## All-Party Parliamentary Groups

1. All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs) are informal, bicameral, cross-party groups on topics of mutual interest. They are not official parliamentary bodies. APPGs are bicameral, so members of the House of Lords may be members and officers (except the chair) of an APPG, but the House of Commons has always taken the lead in the regulation and registration of APPGs.

2. Rules relating to the registration of APPGs were first made by Resolution of the House in December 1985 and the current rules for APPGs were agreed by a resolution of the House on 13 May 2014. This resolution also gave this Committee the power to “update the Guide to the Rules for All Party Parliamentary Groups from time to time and to make such minor changes to the Rules for All-Party Parliamentary Groups as are necessary to ensure the effective operation of the Register of APPGs and the regulatory regime applying to such groups”.

## Our inquiry

3. We launched our inquiry in October 2020. We received a range of written evidence from APPGs, members of both Houses, and outside organisations. We took oral evidence from Harriett Baldwin MP, Chair of the British Group - Interparliamentary Union, Transparency International UK, the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists, the Public Relations and Communications Association and the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, a number of APPG secretariats, the Director of Security for Parliament, and from Mr Speaker and the Lord Speaker.

4. We published our initial report on 29 April 2022.<sup>1</sup> Our report did not make firm recommendations at that time, but set out a range of possible proposals for consultation and “invite[d] comments from across the House and the House of Lords, and particularly from Members closely involved in APPGs, on the possible measures and the desirability or otherwise and practical implications of their implementation”.<sup>2</sup> Written evidence received as part of this consultation is published on our webpages.

5. The Government responded to our report by correspondence on 5 September 2022.<sup>3</sup> The Government said that it “particularly welcomes proposals that would enhance transparency around external funding and increase clarity of whose interests are being represented”.<sup>4</sup> It expressed concern about “measures to remove regular external

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1 Committee on Standards, All-Party Parliamentary Groups: improving governance and regulation, Seventh Report of Session 2021–22 (HC 717)

2 Committee on Standards, All-Party Parliamentary Groups: improving governance and regulation, Seventh Report of Session 2021–22 (HC 717), para 62

3 [Correspondence from the Leader of the House of Commons, containing the Government response to the Committee’s Seventh Report, dated 5 September 2022](#)

4 [Correspondence from the Leader of the House of Commons, containing the Government response to the Committee’s Seventh Report, dated 5 September 2022](#)

interaction - such as banning all external secretariats and removing the provision for external members” but welcomed proposed restrictions relating to foreign government funding and influence.<sup>5</sup>

6. To gauge the views of Members, we conducted an informal online survey (open to all MPs) about a number of proposals from our initial report. We are grateful to those Members who took part. We also received further written evidence from Mr Speaker and the Lord Speaker in January 2023, which is published on our webpages.<sup>6</sup>

## Our approach

7. In our initial report, we noted that APPGs are a vital part of how Parliament does its work. We set out at that time that APPGs:

[...] help foster debate on matters of public interest. They keep MPs and Peers informed on a wide range of important topics. They provide access to the political system for many organisations and individuals who might otherwise be excluded. They enable the development of better bilateral relationships with other countries and their parliamentarians. They can be an important campaigning tool for many MPs and peers with specific areas of interest that might not otherwise get considered by Parliament. They enable groups of interested parliamentarians to work together on issues of common interest; and they provide a forum for the development of ideas on matters of public policy that can in turn influence the two Houses or the Government. They often show Parliament and its members working at their best.<sup>7</sup>

8. Our initial report also identified risks related to APPGs. We concluded that:

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of APPGs in recent years. This has made it more difficult to monitor groups’ adherence to the House’s rules, and created the conditions for inappropriate influence and access. There appears to be the real possibility of APPGs having been set up at the suggestion of, and as a result of lobbying by, a commercial interest. We are concerned that if left unchecked, APPGs could represent the next great parliamentary scandal, with commercial entities effectively buying access to and influence of parliamentarians and decision-makers.<sup>8</sup>

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5 [Correspondence from the Leader of the House of Commons, containing the Government response to the Committee’s Seventh Report, dated 5 September 2022](#)

6 [Correspondence from the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Lord Speaker dated 11 January 2023](#)

7 Committee on Standards, All-Party Parliamentary Groups: improving governance and regulation, Seventh Report of Session 2021–22 (HC 717)

8 Committee on Standards, All-Party Parliamentary Groups: improving governance and regulation, Seventh Report of Session 2021–22 (HC 717), para 51

And that:

The expert evidence we have received to our inquiry shows that the risk of improper access and influence by hostile foreign actors through APPGs is real, though difficult to measure. There is also evidence that this risk has already materialised.<sup>9</sup>

**9. We stand by these conclusions from our initial report: APPGs are a valuable part of how Parliament does its work; but there remains a significant risk of improper access and influence by commercial entities or by hostile foreign actors, through APPGs.**

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<sup>9</sup> Committee on Standards, All-Party Parliamentary Groups: improving governance and regulation, Seventh Report of Session 2021–22 (HC 717), para 50

## 2 Our proposals

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### Our proposed approach

10. We have considered carefully the responses we have received to the possible options set out in our initial report. We have heard concerns that some of the proposals in our initial report would be disproportionate if applied to all APPGs. For example, one APPG who submitted written evidence to our consultation urged “caution” about introducing “measures that might disproportionately affect those small APPGs with limited funding and resources, but can make a positive impact without presenting the kinds of risks on which the report is focused”.<sup>10</sup>

11. The Government also argued in its response that:

[...] the introduction of a disproportionate regulatory regime which fundamentally changed the nature of APPGs could offer an incentive for some APPGs to de-register. It is important to consider carefully whether enhanced transparency measures might adequately mitigate the risks identified by the Committee and the practical impact of these specific recommendations on the diversity and particular value of APPGs.<sup>11</sup>

**12. The risks we identified in our initial report primarily arise where APPGs receive external benefits in cash or in kind. We have concluded that there is little risk attached to APPGs who do not accept external financial benefits (or benefits in kind), and we agree that to impose significant additional requirements on such Groups would be disproportionate.**

**13. We therefore propose a two-tier approach: APPGs which do not receive external financial benefits would continue to have relatively light-touch requirements; but APPGs which receive external financial benefits or benefits in kind over a set threshold would have additional requirements to enhance transparency and ensure that such Groups, and their finances, are subject to appropriate governance and oversight.**

14. As it stands, the guidance for APPGs is spread across the Guide to the Rules and advice notes published by the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. If the House agrees to our proposals, we intend to issue an updated Guide which consolidates the existing guidance, is clearer for Members, and minimises any duplication. We also propose to make clear in the APPG rules the status of the Guide, namely, that it sets out the detailed requirements needed to meet the rules.

### Specific proposals

15. We therefore propose the following changes to apply to all APPGs, to enhance transparency and accountability:

- a) There is currently no limit on the number of APPGs for which a Member could be an officer. We propose to introduce a cap, where a Member can only be an

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10 APPG on Fair Business Banking ([APC0017](#))

11 [Correspondence from the Leader of the House of Commons, containing the Government response to the Committee's Seventh Report, dated 5 September 2022](#)

officer of up to six APPGs. This is to prevent Members from committing to several APPGs without the ability in practice to provide effective oversight and leadership.

- b) Currently an APPG must have a minimum of four officers, with no maximum. We propose that APPGs should have only four officers, to ensure clearer accountability.
- c) Where the rules require provision of information “on request”, we propose that there should be a specified time limit of 28 days for it to be provided.
- d) We propose that all APPGs should publish an annual income and expenditure statement (which should also be provided to a Group’s AGM), even if this is a nil return. This is to enhance transparency, and to ensure that Groups subject to further rules because they have received external benefits can be easily identified.

16. We propose that APPGs that receive registrable financial benefits should be subject to additional requirements to enhance accountability and good governance. We propose that the following additional rules apply to Groups who receive outside financial benefits totalling over £1,500 in a calendar year:

- a) These APPGs should produce an annual report at the end of the year outlining the work they have done. This is in line with a proposal from Mr Speaker and the Lord Speaker.<sup>12</sup> We also propose that this should include a statement from the four officers that the Group has complied with the rules, and a due diligence statement in relation to foreign governments (see paragraph 17 below).
- b) The AGMs of such Groups should be chaired ‘externally’, by one of a pool of Members appointed by the Speaker—who would not be a member of the Group whose AGM they chair. This again is in line with a proposal from Mr Speaker and the Lord Speaker, to ensure “the proper conduct of Annual General Meetings”.<sup>13</sup>
- c) We propose that at least 8 Members of either House must be present for an AGM to be quorate (as opposed to 5 for APPGs with no registrable benefits).
- d) We propose that the four officers should be held jointly and severally liable for compliance with the additional rules for these Groups. This is to create an incentive for APPG officers to ensure they actively oversee and contribute to the good governance of the Group where external financial benefits have been received. We recognise that Members of the House of Lords may be officers of APPGs: if the House of Lords chose to require their Members who are APPG officers to ensure compliance with the APPG rules, any potential liability for breaches could be adjudicated by their House. This would be a matter for the House of Lords. MP officers would be held jointly and severally liable for the Group’s compliance with the additional rules regardless of any decision of the House of Lords.

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<sup>12</sup> Correspondence from the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Lord Speaker dated 11 January 2023

<sup>13</sup> Correspondence from the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Lord Speaker dated 11 January 2023

17. A number of those who submitted written evidence following our initial consultation said that external secretariats can play an important function in assisting with the running of an APPG, and provide invaluable support to APPG Chairs and officers.<sup>14</sup> We acknowledge that, in light of this, there is little support across both Houses for barring or significantly restricting external secretariats, and we do not propose to do so. However, by the same token, we consider it would be inappropriate for a foreign government to provide—or fund—these roles. We note that the Government’s response to our initial report welcomed proposed restrictions for foreign government secretariats.<sup>15</sup> We therefore propose:

- a) That Groups would not be permitted to have a secretariat either provided or funded by a foreign government.
- b) A Group’s officers must undertake due diligence as to whether a foreign government is the eventual funder of a secretariat or other benefit. If a Group receives a benefit (other than a secretariat) from a foreign government, this is permissible but must be registered.

18. To assist Members in discharging their responsibility to undertake due diligence, if the House agrees to our proposals in this area, we recommend that a simple, straightforward, and readily understandable due diligence “toolkit” is developed by the Director of Security for Parliament and the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

## Passes

19. We are aware that some APPGs may effectively grant a pass to their external secretariat via one of their officers. This is inappropriate. We note that the issuing of parliamentary passes is a matter for the Administration Committee. *We therefore recommend to the Administration Committee that it should be made explicit that nobody registered as an external secretariat to a Group should be granted a parliamentary pass. We also recommend that this should be more strictly enforced, with a review of existing passes issued.*

## Conclusion

20. **Proposed new rules for APPGs, to implement our proposed framework, are annexed to this Report. When the House is asked to agree to these proposals, we will publish a draft new Guide to the Rules for APPGs which will provide detailed guidance. The new Guide would also aim to consolidate existing advice into a single document, minimise duplication, and enhance clarity. We now look to the Government to bring forward relevant motions on these proposals, and for the House to consider them.**

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14 For example: Lord Cromwell ([APC0001](#)), APPG on Fair Business Banking ([APC0017](#)); and [Correspondence from the Leader of the House of Commons, containing the Government response to the Committee’s Seventh Report, dated 5 September 2022](#)

15 [Correspondence from the Leader of the House, dated 5 September 2022](#)

# Annex: Rules for All-Party Parliamentary Groups

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## Rules for All-Party Parliamentary Groups

These rules are supplemented by the Guide to the Rules for APPGs, which sets out the detailed requirements for Groups.

### Benefits of registration

All-Party Parliamentary Groups are groups of parliamentarians who share particular interests, and have chosen to abide by the rules relating to the registration of APPGs and declaration of their interests. The advantages of registration as an APPG are as follows:

- It is explicit that the Group is committed to abiding by the principles of transparency which underpin these rules;
- Members of the public can establish whether or not a group of Members has registered as an APPG;
- Registered APPGs are entitled to use the term “parliamentary” to describe their activities, and to use the APPG Portcullis badge;
- APPGs are able to book rooms on the Parliamentary estate.

### The following rules apply to all APPGs:

#### Membership and officers

- The Group must be open to all non-government Members of either House
- A Group must have four registered officers (and no more), including at least one from the government party (or parties) and at least one from the main opposition party. At least two officers must be from the Commons.
- The Group must have a Commons chair; Peers can be co-chairs.
- The Chair is responsible for the Group’s compliance with parliamentary rules (but see below for APPGs in receipt of registrable financial benefits) and must therefore be the group’s Registered Contact.
- A Member of the House of Commons may be an officer of a maximum of six Groups.
- An APPG must have at least 20 members and must maintain an accurate and up-to-date list of those members (which must be made available as set out in the Guide to the Rules).

## Meetings

- A formal meeting is one at which any decision is to be taken or a vote is to be held; or which includes an outside speaker.
- APPGs must hold a minimum of two formal meetings per year, of which one must be an AGM, at which officers will be elected.
- Groups must advertise all formal meetings (including elections) on the All-Party Notice, giving at least a week's notice, and such elections must take place when both Houses are sitting.
- The quorum for a formal meeting is five Members of either House of Parliament, save that at least one officer who is a Member of the House of Commons must be present at any meeting where an officer is elected.
- Sufficient minutes must be kept to demonstrate what meetings have been held, that any meetings were quorate and what decisions were made.

## Registering financial benefits

- APPGs' financial and material benefits must be registered. Financial benefits must include a value. Material benefits must include a description and an approximate financial value appended to them in bands of: £1,501-£3,000; £3,001-£4,500 and so on.
- Any APPG that receives registrable financial and material benefits (worth more than £1,500) in a calendar year will be subject to further transparency requirements as outlined below.
- Financial and material benefits must be registered within 28 days with information about the date of receipt by Group as well as date of registration.
- APPGs must register when an external organisation provides a secretariat and, if funding for this is provided from a third party, the source of that funding. Where a secretariat is provided by a consultancy, that consultancy must make information about their clients available and the Group must register the original funding source.
- Individual Members remain responsible for registering in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, any benefits they themselves receive as a result of APPG membership, should those benefits reach the registrable thresholds.
- APPG Secretariats must not hold APPG funds themselves, all funds must only be accessible by an officer (or officers) of the APPG.

## Rules relating to foreign governments

- A Group must not accept the provision of a secretariat by a foreign government, nor may they accept the services of a secretariat funded by a foreign government.
- A Group's officers must undertake due diligence as to whether a foreign government is the eventual funder of a secretariat or other benefit.

## Transparency

- APPGs must either publish on their website if they have one (or make available on request if they do not) the required information as set out in Guide to the Rules.
- Where the rules provide that information relating to a Group must be provided on request, this must be provided within 28 days.
- Website addresses must be included in a Group's Register entry.

## Communications

- APPGs must use only the APPG Portcullis in any communication, including electronic transmission such as twitter feeds and other social media.
- All APPG reports should display a rubric on the front cover which clearly states: "This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has not been approved by either House or its committees. All-Party Groups are informal groups of Members of both Houses with a common interest in particular issues. The views expressed in this Report are those of the group."

## Other registration requirements

- Any registrable change must be made in writing to the Commissioner's office within 28 days of the change.

## Declaration of interests

- Where an APPG report has been compiled or funded by an external organisation, the rubric must make this clear through wording such as "This Report was researched by xxx and funded by xxx".
- When communicating with Ministers, public officials, public officer holders or outside organisations, APPGs and their officers must declare their sources of funding.

## **The following additional rules apply to Groups who receive outside financial benefits (or benefits in kind) over £1,500 in a calendar year, applying from the point at which that threshold is reached:**

- The Group's subsequent AGM (and any Extraordinary General Meeting called to elect an officer) must be chaired by a Member of Parliament nominated by the Speaker who is not an officer or member of that Group.
- The quorum for the Group's AGM shall be eight members of either House (not including the externally appointed chair of the meeting).
- The Group shall publish an annual report explaining its work and a due diligence statement in relation to foreign government funding.
- The Group's four officers are jointly and severally liable for compliance with these additional rules.

# Formal minutes

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**Tuesday 28 March 2023**

## **Members present:**

Sir Chris Bryant, in the Chair

Tammy Banks

Andy Carter

Alberto Costa

Allan Dorans

Yvonne Fovargue

Sir Francis Habgood

Sir Bernard Jenkin

Dr Michael Maguire

Mehmuda Mian

Victoria Smith

Paul Thorogood

Sir Charles Walker

Draft report (*All-Party Parliamentary Groups: final proposals*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 20 read and agreed to.

Annex agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Eighth Report of the Committee to the House.

None of the lay members present wished to submit an opinion on the Report (Standing Order No. 149(8)).

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

## **Adjournment**

The Committee adjourned.

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

APC numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 APPG on Fair Business Banking ([APC0017](#))
- 2 Blunkett, Lord (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0010](#))
- 3 Bull, Baroness (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0006](#))
- 4 Consultative Panel on Parliamentary Security ([APC0016](#))
- 5 Cromwell, Lord (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0001](#))
- 6 Finlay, Professor the Baroness (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0009](#))
- 7 Griffith, MP Dame Nia; and Coussins, Baroness (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0011](#))
- 8 Haringey, Lord Harris of (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0013](#))
- 9 Hobhouse, Mrs Wera (Member of Parliament , House of Commons) ([APC0015](#))
- 10 Hussein-Ece, Baroness (Co-Chair, APPG on Population, Development and Reproductive Health) ([APC0020](#))
- 11 Kimble, Lord Gardiner of (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0018](#))
- 12 Lipsey, Lord (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0007](#))
- 13 Liverpool, Lord Alton of (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0005](#))
- 14 Liverpool, Lord Russell of (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0004](#))
- 15 Lloyd, Tony (Member, House of Commons) ([APC0019](#))
- 16 Manor, Baroness Bennett of (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0003](#))
- 17 Mineral Products Association ([APC0002](#))
- 18 Newport, Lord Howarth of (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0014](#))
- 19 Sandwich, Earl of (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0008](#))
- 20 Winterbourne, Baroness Nicholson of (Member, House of Lords) ([APC0012](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the publications page of the Committee's website.

### Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st	New Code of Conduct and Guide to the Rules: promoting appropriate values, attitudes and behaviour in Parliament	HC 227
2nd	Code of Conduct: Procedural Protocol	HC 378
3rd	New Guide to the Rules: final proposals	HC 544
4th	Andrew Bridgen	HC 855
5th	Precautionary exclusion: response to the House of Commons Commission's consultation	HC 1049
6th	Alex Davies-Jones	HC 1048
7th	Rules for the use of House of Commons stationery	HC 1263
8th	All-Party Parliamentary Groups: final proposals	HC 228
9th	Margaret Ferrier	HC 1276
1st Special	Government Response to the Committee's First, Second and Third Reports	HC 709

### Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Boris Johnson	HC 549
2nd	Mrs Natalie Elphicke, Sir Roger Gale, Adam Holloway, Bob Stewart, Theresa Villiers	HC 582
3rd	Mr Owen Paterson	HC 797
4th	Review of the Code of Conduct: proposals for consultation	HC 270
5th	Daniel Kawczynski	HC 1036
6th	Review of fairness and natural justice in the House's standards system	HC 1183
7th	All-Party Parliamentary Groups: improving governance and regulation	HC 717

### Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Kate Osamor	HC 210
2nd	Stephen Pound	HC 209

<b>Number</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reference</b>
3rd	Greg Hands	HC 211
4th	Conor Burns	HC 212
5th	Mr Marcus Fysh	HC 213
6th	Confidentiality in the House's standards system	HC 474
7th	Sanctions in respect of the conduct of Members	HC 241
8th	David Morris	HC 771
9th	Dr Rosena Allin-Khan	HC 904
10th	The House of Commons and the criminal law: protocols between the police and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and the Committee on Standards	HC 883
11th	ICGS investigations: Commons-Lords agreement	HC 988
12th	Sanctions and confidentiality in the House's standards system: revised proposals	HC 1340