



House of Commons
Committee on Standards

Rules for the use of House of Commons stationery

Seventh 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*)

[Rita Dexter](#) (*Lay member*)

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

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

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

[Sir Bernard Jenkin MP](#) (*Conservative, Harwich and North Essex*)

[Dr Michael Maguire](#) (*Lay member*)

[Mehmuda Mian](#) (*Lay member*)

[Victoria Smith](#) (*Lay member*)

[Paul Thorogood](#) (*Lay member*)

[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 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

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1 Report

Background to the stationery rules

1. The House has long-standing arrangements whereby Members are provided with official House stationery. Prior to 2007, there was no cap on the amounts of House notepaper and pre-paid envelopes to which Members were entitled. The then Speaker introduced a cap of £7,000 per Member per year from 1 April 2007. The current cap is £11,000 per Member per year, set by the House of Commons Commission. This provision is in addition to any stationery and postage costs which Members may have reimbursed under IPSA's business costs scheme.

2. Rules on the use of House of Commons stationery were first introduced in March 1984, through decisions taken by the Select Committee on House of Commons Services. Before July 2005, the enforcement of the stationery rules was the responsibility of the Serjeant at Arms. Misuse of parliamentary facilities was brought within the scope of the Code of Conduct for Members following the review of the Code by the Standards and Privileges Committee in the 2004–05 session and its approval by the House in July 2005.¹ This gave the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards responsibility for investigating alleged breaches of the stationery rules, and this Committee responsibility for adjudicating on such cases referred to it by the Commissioner. An amendment to the rectification procedure set out in Standing Order No. 150 was introduced at the same time to allow the Commissioner to rectify minor breaches relating to misuse of resources (including misuse of stationery).

3. The current rules for the use of stationery and postage-paid envelopes provided by the House of Commons, and for the use of the Crowned Portcullis, were published in the First Report of the Members Estimate Committee of Session 2014–15.² In 2015, responsibility for the stationery rules passed to the Administration Committee. Following joint representations by this Committee and the Administration Committee, the House of Commons Commission transferred the responsibility for the stationery rules to this Committee on 17 May 2021.

4. In our Fourth Report of Session 2021–22, we notified the House of this and stated that:

We intend to produce an update of the stationery rules in light of recent experiences and cases. The main aim will be to provide greater clarity to Members and the Commissioner, so as to avoid inadvertent breaches.³

5. The new rules for the use of House of Commons stationery are published as an annex to this report, and come into force immediately.

1 Committee on Standards and Privileges, Review of the Code of Conduct, [Fourth Report of Session 2004–05](#) (HC 472); CJ (2005–06), 127 (item 47)

2 Members Estimate Committee, Consolidated list of provisions of the Resolutions of the House relating to expenditure charged to the Estimate for House of Commons: Members as at 16 March 2015, [First Report of Session 2014–15](#) (HC 1132)

3 Committee on Standards, *Review of the Code of Conduct: proposals for consultation*, [Fourth Report of Session 2021–22](#) (HC 270)

The new rules

6. The new stationery rules represent a significant simplification of the existing rules. In order to give clarity to Members, rather than setting out detailed provisions for the different possible uses of House stationery, we have taken a principles-based approach. In some cases, this will involve an exercise of judgment on the part of Members (who are encouraged, when in doubt, to seek advice), and, in the case of an investigation, the Commissioner.

7. The new rules make clear that use of House stationery is subject to rules on the use of the Crowned Portcullis (principally, that it should not be used where its authentication of a connection with the House is inappropriate), relevant requirements of the Electoral Commission, and the overarching rule in the Code on facilities (paragraph 8):

Excepting modest and reasonable personal use, Members must ensure that the use of facilities and services provided to them by Parliament, including an office, is in support of their parliamentary activities, and is in accordance with all relevant rules.

8. The new rules maintain explicit prohibitions on the use of House of Commons stationery for business purposes and for party political campaigning. However, outside of these prohibitions, it is for Members to judge whether their use of House stationery is in support of their parliamentary duties (or is modest and reasonable personal use). We have provided an illustrative definition of what parliamentary duties include, and do not include, in an annex to the new rules—which takes into account that the role of an MP has evolved since the stationery rules were first introduced.

9. It should be remembered that the stationery provided by the House is limited. We are aware that in the past some Members have transferred any unused franked envelopes to colleagues. This had the potential effect, however, of allowing some Members to exceed the annual cap. The new rules prohibit this to ensure that individual use is not excessive.

10. The existing rules state that a Member's allocation of House stationery is in addition to any stationery paid for separately and reimbursed by IPSA. The rules that apply depend on who provides stationery: where stationery is House-provided, the House's rules apply; where IPSA separately fund stationery, IPSA's rules apply. Our proposed new rules make this clear. For the avoidance of doubt, where IPSA pays for House-provided stationery to be overprinted, the House's rules (and not IPSA's) apply to its use.

11. Members who seek and follow the advice of the Clerk of the Journals in respect of a specific course of action under the stationery rules will have the benefit of the "safe harbour" provision in the Guide to the Rules, and therefore will not later be found to be in breach of the Code, so long as they have provided sufficient information for the advice to be relevant.⁴ It is our expectation that the Clerk of the Journals, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, and IPSA will maintain a common understanding of the meaning of these rules.

Annex: Rules for the use of House of Commons stationery

Principles for the use of House of Commons stationery

The House provides a cash limited amount of stationery and envelopes for Members to use in their Parliamentary duties (see Annex for a definition of those duties).

MPs may purchase further paper, but no further envelopes. Whatever the source of funding, stationery is not to be used in ways which would contravene the Code of Conduct or the rules on use of the Crowned Portcullis. Members must also comply with any relevant requirements of the Electoral Commission.

Where stationery is separately funded through IPSA, IPSA rules apply.

The principles for use of House provided stationery are as follows:

- a) The stationery is to be used for Parliamentary duties; it is not for outside business use.
- b) Members must be mindful of the Code of Conduct for MPs. In particular, paragraph 8 of the Code states that:

“Excepting modest and reasonable personal use, Members must ensure that the use of facilities and services provided to them by Parliament, including an office, is in support of their parliamentary activities, and is in accordance with all relevant rules.”
- c) The stationery is not to be used for party political campaigning.⁵ Party political logos or emblems may not be used on House stationery.
- d) Each allocation is personal to the Member concerned, and unused stationery cannot be transferred to another Member.⁶

Any allegations of breaches of the rules may be investigated by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

Advice on the application of these rules can be sought in the first instance from the Customer Experience and Service Delivery team, and, if necessary, from the Clerk of the Journals.⁷

Under the Guide to the Rules, a Member who has sought and followed advice from the appropriate authority on a course of action (in respect of the stationery rules), so long as they have provided adequate information for that advice to be relevant, will not have acted in breach of the rules in respect of that action.

Annex: definition of an MP's duties

There are many aspects to an MP's role. These include:

5 Communications with members of constituency parties and associations are permitted.
 6 Unused stationery should be returned to the Customer Experience and Service Delivery Team.
 7 Contact details can be found on the Parliamentary intranet.

- supporting their party in votes in Parliament
- furnishing and maintaining the Government or Opposition;
- representing and furthering the interests of their constituency and the public;
- representing individual constituents and taking up their problems and grievances;
- scrutinising and holding the Government to account and monitoring, stimulating and challenging the Executive;
- initiating, reviewing and amending legislation; and
- contributing to the development of policy whether in the Chamber, Committees or party structures and promoting public understanding of party policies.

An MP's role does not include:

- promoting personal or family interests;
- outside commercial work;
- promoting the election of any identifiable person to public office;
- seeking financial support for a political party or individual candidate;
- anything that would otherwise breach the Code of Conduct for Members.

Formal minutes

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 (*Rules for the use of House of Commons stationery*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 11 read and agreed to.

Annex agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Seventh 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.

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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

Number	Title	Reference
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