



**Public Administration
and Constitutional Affairs
Committee**

From the Chair
William Wragg MP

Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP,
Deputy Prime Minister and
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Cabinet Office
Via email only

21 July 2023

Dear Oliver

Government response to PACAC's Fourth Report, Session 2022-23

Thank you for your letter announcing the Government's response to PACAC's report on Propriety of Governance in Light of Greensill, alongside the Committee on Standards in Public Life's report on Upholding Standards in Public Life and Sir Nigel Boardman's review of the involvement of Greensill Capital in Government.

I am pleased to see that some of the Committee's recommendations have been accepted. For example, it became clear during our inquiry that the Business Appointment Rules give neither the assurance that privileged knowledge or contacts will not be exploited when Ministers or senior Officials move to private sector, nor sufficient clarity to those subject to them. We welcome the measures outlined in this area.

The changes outlined in respect of appointments are also positive. The extra transparency provided should a Minister seek to appoint a candidate to a role for which they have been deemed unappointable by the appointment panel is a necessary check and balance, though one that does not interfere with the principle of Ministerial accountability. So too are steps to increase the transparency around Direct Ministerial Appointments and the appointment of Departmental Non-Executives.

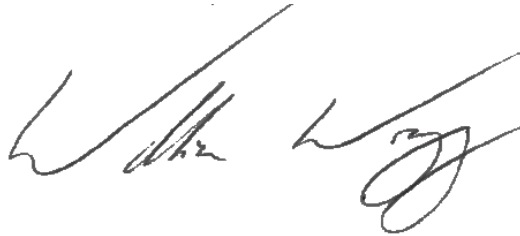
In spite of these welcome changes, we were disappointed to see that the Government rejected proposals that would have strengthened the autonomy of ethics watchdogs. Requiring due process around the Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests and making the position statutory could have significantly improved public confidence in the propriety of public life without in anyway interfering with the Prime Ministers' prerogative to decide the composition of their Cabinet. Similarly, placing the Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments and the Commissioner for Public Appointments on a statutory basis would merely have strengthened their ability to fulfil their existing roles. I note that the Committee on Standards in Public Life reached similar conclusions, which were similarly rejected by the Government. Public

confidence in the integrity of public life is not high at present, and our recommendations in this area could have gone some way towards improving that. We are therefore disappointed by the Government's reluctance in this area.

I also note the Government's measures on lobbying and transparency. With these now published, we will be resuming our inquiry into *Lobbying and Influence: post-legislative scrutiny of the Lobbying Act 2014 and related matters* after the Summer recess, and we look forward to discussing the Government's proposals with Ministers and interested stakeholders.

I am copying this letter to Lord Evans of Weardale KCB DL, Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, Rt Hon Lord Pickles, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, and Sir Nigel Boardman.

I will place a copy of this letter on the Committee's website.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William Wragg', written in a cursive style.

William Wragg MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee