

Committee on Standards

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From Chris Bryant MP, Chair of the Committee

Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP
Speaker of the House of Commons
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

30 November 2021

Dear Lindsay,

I am writing to you in your capacity as Chair of the House of Commons Commission. In its report published on 29 November making proposals for consultation on the Code of Conduct, the Committee on Standards set out its concerns over lack of progress with the long-running project to digitise the Register of Members' Financial Interests, to allow it to be fully searchable.

The Committee concluded that improving the accessibility of the Register is essential to achieve more effective transparency and accountability in public life. The outdated format and technology of the Register was identified as a significant weakness of our standards arrangements by external stakeholders, including the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The Standards Committee, through the Registrar, has been pressing for this work to be prioritised by the Parliamentary Digital Service for several years. Despite being given undertakings at various times that this work would take place, we have seen little tangible progress.

In its report, the Committee stated that it "remains very concerned that this work does not appear to be a priority for the Parliamentary Digital Service and there does not seem to be any effective mechanism for establishing a firm timetable that can be monitored. We call upon the House of Commons Commission to make a firm commitment to this work and to set out a timetable for its achievement that can be published in our final report".¹

I would be very grateful if you might be able to raise this matter on the Commission and secure a firm timetable from the Parliamentary Digital Service to achieve these long-promised improvements.

Yours ever,

¹ Committee on Standards, *Review of the Code of Conduct: proposals for consultation*, Fourth Report of Session 2021-22 (HC 270), para 142

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Bryant". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name "Chris" and the last name "Bryant" connected.

Chris Bryant MP

Chair, Committee on Standards



The Speaker

Speaker's House Houses of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Wednesday, 19 January 2022

Dear Chris,

Many thanks for your letter dated 6th December 2021 on the concerns raised by the Standards Committee on the Register of Members Financial Interests.

I have raised your concerns on this matter with the Managing Director of the Parliamentary Digital Service, David Smith. Your concerns on the digital maturity of the current solution and specifically the urgent need to improve accessibility, enable Members (and their staff) to update their entries directly and for content to fully searchable are acknowledged and the need to remedy accepted. He has committed to champion the redesign of the Register to meet your requirements and support the Registrar James Davies to obtain a committed timeline for the development work and implementation. He also noted that there has been some enhancement work recently undertaken which is not yet released, but confirmed unfortunately it is not sufficient to address the concerns raised by your Committee.

The key forum for setting the priorities for digital solutions needing software development is the bicameral Joint Digital Board. Shortly after your Committee's report was published the need for action was raised by the Registrar James Davies at this board. It was agreed that the high level requirements set out in your report should be taken to the more detailed level required to estimate the effort by his team, supported by the Parliamentary Digital Service. Once the work effort is scaled and we are clear on cost and elapse time to build and implement then David and James will work with colleagues on the Joint Digital Board to identify when the work might commence and what prioritisation will be required to expedite.

I have a regular monthly performance review with the Parliamentary Digital Service and will ensure that we use it to track progress on this important matter. I have also asked David Smith to ensure that you are kept informed of progress as the teams work towards defining a timeline to build and then implement the new solution.

Kind regards,

Rt. Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP
Speaker

Chris Bryant MP
House of Commons