

Written Evidence

1. Email from the complainant to the Commissioner, 7 June 2019

I am writing to complain about a letter from Greg Hands MP which was sent to residents in Mr Hands's Chelsea & Fulham parliamentary constituency during the recent European election campaign.

I believe this breaches the rules for the use of stationery and postage-paid envelopes provided by the House of Commons ("the rules").

The letter was sent in April but I am writing now as I have only just been made aware of the rules.

I've been told by four residents in Fulham that they received the letter by second-class post—one before 23 April, two on 23 April and one on 25 April. All the residents concerned will be happy to attest to this.

The letter purports to provide an update on a number of issues including the NHS, Heathrow, crime and schools. It specifically states:

"I am writing to provide you with an update on the work I have been doing as your Member of Parliament, and some of the issues I feel are vitally important to securing a better future for Chelsea & Fulham."

This is the clearest breach of Paragraph 3 of the rules which states:

"House-provided stationery and pre-paid envelopes are provided only for the performance of a Member's parliamentary functions. In particular this excludes using stationery or postage...for newsletters (including annual reports or general updates to constituents on a range of issues)."

I am unhappy that Mr Hands has used public resources in this way to send unsolicited mail which I believe was designed to make the recipients more favourable to him and the Conservative Party.

This is particularly improper as he sent the letter during the European election campaign.

I hope you will wish to investigate this matter fully. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

I have put a copy of the letter and envelope in the post to you.

7 June 2019

Enclosure: Letter from Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP to constituents, envelope post marked 18 April 2019

I am writing to provide you with an update on the work I have been doing, as your local Member of Parliament, and some of the issues I feel are vitally important to securing a better future for Chelsea & Fulham.

Charing Cross Hospital

On 26 March 2019, following a parliamentary question from myself, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, announced in the House of Commons that the Charing Cross Hospital's part of 'Shaping a Healthier Future' initiative is now no longer supported by the Department of Health and Social Care, by NHS Improvement or NHS England.

I greatly welcomed this announcement, as this programme was regarded by many of my constituents as a stalking horse for the downgrade of specialist services, and the closure of the 24/7 Accident & Emergency (A&E) Department at Charing Cross. It is now clear that Charing Cross Hospital, with an A&E, has a bright future as both a local hospital and as a provider of specialist hospital services to a wider west London population.

Heathrow Expansion

I have been a longstanding opponent of a third runway and have campaigned against the expansion of Heathrow Airport for more than a decade. In June last year, I honoured the pledge I made to my constituents during my 2017 General Election campaign, and resigned from the Government over the plans to build a third runway at Heathrow.

On Thursday 7th February, I chaired a public Q&A in Fulham, on Heathrow expansion and their latest consultation, which was well-attended by over 140 local residents. This meeting highlighted the strength of residents' concerns on night flights, air pollution and noise disturbance - issues which I will continue to lobby Heathrow on. Most recently, I submitted a formal response to Heathrow's consultation, against the expansion and the subsequent increase in flights; a copy of which you can find on my website, greghands.com.

Crime and Policing

I am acutely aware that crime and policing is a deeply concerning issue for many local residents, and an increasingly important one with the recent rise in violent crime. As such, in addition to regular contact with local police officers and Chief Superintendent [name redacted], I hosted and chaired two crime and policing meetings in September, and more recently, organised a further meeting in Fulham on 27 March, after the two fatal stabbings.

These events, attended by local councillors and police officers, provided an invaluable opportunity for constituents to express their concerns and receive answers on a variety of different issues, including knife crime, moped-enabled crime, burglary and anti-social driving.

Local Schools

I strongly believe that Fulham benefits from the presence of a number of excellent schools, both primary and secondary. Free schools and academies have been a major part of the Government's education policy, and nowhere is more exemplary of the benefits than the two boroughs in my constituency—the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea, and Hammersmith & Fulham.

Throughout both boroughs, we have no fewer than 30 free schools and academies, with five new secondary schools having opened since 2010—the Kensington Aldridge Academy, the Chelsea Academy, the West London Free School, the Hammersmith Academy and the Fulham Boys School. I am thrilled to say that every one of them has received a rating of good or outstanding, and earlier this year, I was very pleased to hear that Langford Primary, in Sands Ends, had been judged an ‘outstanding’ school by Ofsted.

As a co-patron of Fulham Boys School (FSB), I have been delighted to witness its ongoing success. I have been working closely with the Education Department, and most recently I have had a meeting with the Secretary of State for Education, in order to help facilitate their move to a permanent site in the heart of Fulham.

Transport for London’s Proposed Bus Cuts

Last autumn, Transport for London (TfL) announced a set of proposed changes to the 11, 14, 22 and 19 bus routes, which currently play a vital role in providing transport links to residents across the whole of my Chelsea and Fulham constituency. These proposed bus changes to the above routes have been viewed with great concern by me and many other residents, especially given that these buses are heavily relied upon by a range of different groups in the community.

To this effect, I launched my own online petition in response to these proposals, and you can find a link to my petition (which remains active) and a copy of my own submission to the public consultation on my website. We are currently still awaiting a response from TfL, regarding the outcome of the public consultation and a final decision on the fate of our buses, and rest assured that if the decision is not positive, we will keep campaigning!

In the meantime, I hold regular surgeries in both Chelsea and Fulham, held at Metro Bank, and as always, if any of you require any assistance on a particular issue or concern, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Sent on or around 18 April 2019

2. Letter from the Commissioner to Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP, 13 June 2019

I would welcome your help with an allegation I have received from [name redacted], about your compliance with paragraph 16 of the House of Commons Code of Conduct for Members. I enclose a copy of [name redacted] email and the enclosures he sent via the post as evidence.

I am writing to you now to seek your assistance with my inquiry.

My inquiry

My inquiry will focus on whether you have acted in breach of paragraph 16 of the House of Commons’ Code of Conduct for Members through your use of House provided stationery and postage paid envelopes.

The Code of Conduct

Paragraph 16 of the current Code states:

Members are personally responsible and accountable for ensuring that their use of any expenses, allowances, facilities and services provided from the public purse is in accordance with the rules laid down on these matters. Members shall ensure that their use of public resources is always in support of their parliamentary duties. It should not confer any undue personal or financial benefit on themselves or anyone else, or confer undue advantage on a political organisation.

Further to this the Rules on the use of stationery and postage-paid envelopes provided by the House of Commons, and for the use of the crowned portcullis state the following.

“Principles

2. These rules are not expected to cover every eventuality; Members should therefore always behave with probity and integrity when using House-provided stationery and postage. Members should regard themselves as personally responsible and accountable for the use of House-provided stationery and postage. They must not exploit the system for personal financial advantage, nor (by breaching the rules in paragraph 3 below) to confer an undue advantage on a political organisation.”

Paragraph 3 of the rules lists examples of uses for which House-provided stationery should not be used. Those examples include the use of stationery and pre-paid envelopes “for newsletters (including annual reports or general updates to constituents on a range of issues)”.

Next steps

I would welcome your comments on the allegation that your letter amounts to a breach of paragraph 16 of the Code of Conduct for Members. In particular I would appreciate your comments on the following questions:

1. Were you aware of the Rules regarding the use of House provided stationery and the limitations of its use for newsletters or general updates?
2. Did you take advice from the House authorities before using House-provided stationery for the purpose of sending out this communication?
 - a) If you did, please describe the advice given and provide copies of any correspondence you exchanged with House officials on the matter.
3. It would help to know whether the headed notepaper used was part of your House-provided allocation of stationery (I believe the postage pre-paid envelopes are clearly so);
 - a) If the paper was not, please can you provide supporting evidence of this.
4. Please could you also let me know how many letters were distributed as part of this mailing.
5. Have you distributed any similar letters using House-provided stationery and/or postage pre-paid envelopes since the start of the 2017 Parliament?

- a) If yes, please provide copies of each letter, and the details of each mailshot (number of letters and whether sent first or second-class)

It would be helpful to receive any supporting evidence you have at the same time as receiving your response to these questions. Any other points you may wish to make to help me with this inquiry would also be most welcome.

Important information

As you will be aware, my inquiries are conducted in private. Following the decision taken by the House on 19 July 2018, I will not publish the fact that I am conducting an inquiry into an allegation of an alleged breach of the Code of Conduct. My office will not comment on any aspect of the inquiry to third parties. They will answer direct factual questions about the processes I follow and the standards system more generally but will neither confirm nor deny that I have begun an inquiry.

Procedure

I enclose a copy of the Commissioner's Information Note, which sets out the procedure for inquiries. Please note that this has not yet been updated to reflect the changes flowing from the decision of 19 July 2018.

This letter and any subsequent correspondence between us in connection with this inquiry is protected by parliamentary privilege. It should be kept confidential until the outcome of my inquiry is published. All the relevant evidence, including our correspondence, will be published when I have concluded my work.

While I do not, at this stage, know whether it will be necessary to interview you about this matter, it would be open to you to be accompanied at any such interview. I am, of course, very happy to meet with you at any stage if you would find that helpful.

I should say now, as a matter of courtesy, that I may seek the advice of the House authorities and others as part of this inquiry.

Action

I would be grateful to have your response to this letter as soon as possible and no later than 27 June 2019.

13 June 2019

3. Letter from Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP to the Commissioner, 21 June 2019

Thank you for your letter of 13th June asking some questions about a recent constituency mailing I carried out, after a complaint from a Hammersmith-based Labour Councillor.

First, can I say that I welcome your inquiry, as it enables me to answer some of the points raised by the Councillor, who regrettably did not copy me into his complaint, or make me aware of it. Your letter was the first time I learned of his unhappiness. I have had no other complaint about the mailing.

To be clear, I defend this mailing on the following basis:

- It very likely saved the taxpayer money compared with responding to each individual petition and each individual issue in turn.
- No political content was included at all, there was no mention of any political party or parties, no mention of any election and no mention of any candidates for any election.
- The mailing was entirely about my work as the recipients' Member of Parliament.

The mailing was done particularly in response to several different petitions I have been running recently. The five paragraphs have all either been the subject of local petitions or opt in sign in sheets at public meetings—Charing Cross Hospital, Heathrow (two public meetings since 2017), Local Crime & Policing (this was the sign in sheets from three public meetings in the last 12 months), Local Schools (including a parents petition on the Fulham Boys School in the local area), and Transport for London's proposals on local bus services (which is a live petition on my website currently: <https://www.greghands.com/buses>)

The purpose of the mailing was to combine responses to all these petitioners and sign-in sheets and produce one letter on all the five issues, rather than have to send out separate letters to each of the five categories, which would likely have led to a greater volume of letters and envelopes overall.

To answer each of your five additional questions:

- Yes, I am aware of the rules relating to parliamentary stationery.
- I did not take advice from House authorities on this occasion.
- The headed paper and envelopes were House-provided stationery.
- The number of letters distributed was just under 7,000.
- There have been several smaller mailings since the 2017 General Election in response to individual petitions and sign-ins at events. All these mailings have been in the hundreds of copies, I believe. There has also been a large mailing of approximately 11,000 to all EU nationals in the constituency, which was approved by House authorities, in Summer 2017. I would need some days to go through and find and provide each of these mailings.

In conclusion, the mailing in question was in response to local issues which were covered by my petitions and/or to keep residents who attended my public meetings abreast of the issues. None of the content was political, no party or parties featured, and no candidates or any elections. In my view, this was an entirely appropriate use of resources in keeping residents informed on issues that they had raised with me.

21 June 2019

4. Letter from the Commissioner to the Director of Customer Experience and Service Delivery, 27 June 2019

I would like to ask for your advice on a complaint I have received, from [name redacted], concerning the conduct of the Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP. In essence the complaint is that Mr Hands has misused House of Commons stationery and postage pre-paid envelopes to send a newsletter or general update to constituents. I enclose a copy of the relevant correspondence, and envelope, used by Mr Hands.

I would be grateful if you would tell me how you would have advised Mr Hands at the time, had he sought your advice about using House-provided stationery and postage pre-paid envelopes for this letter.

In addition, I have also enclosed a copy of a letter from Mr Hands, sent to me on 21 June 2019, in which he indicates that since the 2017 General election he has sent several other similar mailings.

In particular he states that *“There has also been a large mailing of approximately 11,000 to all EU nationals in the constituency, which was approved by House authorities, in Summer 2017”*. I have written to ask him from whom advice was taken and, in the meantime, I would be grateful if you would arrange for your team’s records to be checked, and copies of any relevant notes and emails to be attached to your reply to this letter.

I am writing to Mr Hands today to ask him for the text of all similar mailshots he has sent using House-provided resources since June 2017 and I will share those with you in due course, if appropriate.

It would be very helpful to have your response to this letter as soon as possible and no later than 12 July 2019.

27 June 2019

5. Letter from the Commissioner to Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP, 27 June 2019

Thank you for your letter of the 21 June 2019 and for the information that it provided.

In my first letter I explained that I might seek the advice of the House authorities as part of my inquiry. In accordance with my usual practice, I have today written to the Director of Customer Service, [name redacted], to ask how he would have advised you, had you sought advice about using House-provided stationery and postage pre-paid envelopes for the mailing you sent out in April 2019. I enclose a copy of that letter for information.

In your letter you explain that since 2017 you have sent out a number of different mailings to constituents. I would appreciate it if you could provide me with a copy of the text of each of those mailings which were sent using House-provided resources (stationery and/or pre-paid postage).

I understand that it might take you a few days to find and provide this information. However, I would be grateful to have your response as soon as possible and no later than 12 July 2019.

I will write to you again when I have the Director's advice and give you an opportunity to comment. In the meantime, our correspondence remains protected by parliamentary privilege and I must ask that you continue to maintain the strict confidentiality of the inquiry.

27 June 2019

6. Letter from Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP to the Commissioner, 9 July 2019

Thank you for your letter of 27 June requesting copies of all the mass mailings to constituents that I have written using House-provided resources since 2017. Please find copies of all the relevant mailings enclosed.¹

Thank you also for the copy of your letter to [name redacted], which I have put on record.

I look forward to hearing how your inquiry progresses.

9 July 2019

7. Email from the Director of Customer Experience and Service Delivery to the Commissioner, 10 July 2019

Thank you for your letter of 27 June.

You asked me to let you know what advice I would have given Rt Hon Greg Hands MP if he had sought my advice about using House provided stationery and postage pre-paid envelopes for his letter to his constituents.

I can confirm that my team and I were not consulted by Mr Hands on this occasion, though I would note there is not a requirement for Members to do so.

The House provides the stationery budget to assist Members in performing their parliamentary duties but, as you noted in your email, the rules cannot be expected to cover every eventuality. You will be aware that while my team and I can provide guidance on usage, ultimately Members should always behave with probity and integrity when using House-provided stationery and postage, and should regard themselves as personally responsible and accountable for the use of it. If a complaint is made, whatever guidance we might have provided cannot bind your ability to come to a different conclusion.

If I had been asked, in my opinion the letter falls outside the rules. Point three of the rules' states "this excludes using stationery or postage... for newsletters (including annual reports or general updates to constituents on a range of issues)". Mr Hands letter starts "I am writing to provide you with an update on the work I have been doing, as your local Member of Parliament, and some of the issues I feel are vitally important to security a better future for Chelsea & Fulham." He then goes on to cover various topics: Charing Cross Hospital, Heathrow Expansion, Crime and Policing, Local Schools and Transport for London's Proposed Bus Cuts. I consider this to be a general update to constituents on a range of issues, and therefore would have advised that this was not an appropriate use of the budget.

¹ Mailings not reproduced here as they all single topic letters

I have also checked our records and cannot find anything regarding advice that was given to Mr Hands in summer 2017 concerning 'a large mailing of approximately 11,000 to all EU nationals in the constituency', but if he is able to provide information regarding what advice he sought, we can check our records again.

Please let me know if you would like any further information.

10 July 2019

8. Letter from the Commissioner to Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP, 11 July 2019

Thank you for your letter of the 9 July. Thank you also for the copies of all your mass mailings, sent to constituents from 13 February 2017 to 3 April 2019, this is very helpful.

When I wrote to you on 27 June 2019 I said that I was seeking the advice of the House Authorities and that I would give you the opportunity to comment on that advice before I reach any decision.

I have now received a response from the Director of Customer Experience and Service Delivery, a copy of that advice is enclosed.

In your letter of the 21 June 2019 you said, *"There has also been a large mailing of approximately 11,000 to all EU nationals in the Constituency, which was approved by the House authorities, in Summer 2017."*

In his letter the Director of Customer Experience and Service Delivery states, *"I have also checked our records and cannot find anything regarding advice that was given to Mr Hands in Summer 2017..."*

It would be most helpful if you are able to provide me with copies of any correspondence you exchanged with House officials at the time on this matter.

I would be grateful to receive any comments you wish to make in light of the enclosed advice by 25 July 2019. In the meantime, our correspondence remains protected by parliamentary privilege and I must ask that you continue to maintain the strict confidentiality of the inquiry.

11 July 2019

9. Letter from Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP to the Commissioner, 18 July 2019

Thank you for your letter of 11 July and for enclosing the response from the Director of Customer Experience and Service Delivery for the House Authorities.

Since the September 2017 mailing to EU nationals in my constituency, regrettably, all of the then members of staff, have moved on from my office. Sadly, I am unable to locate any copies of correspondence which were sent and received by these employees, to the House Authorities, as all associated e-mail addresses have since been deactivated.

I am sorry that I am unable to help further on this point, however, I am confident that approval was sought, and I believe received, by my staff at the time.

18 July 2019

10. Letter from the Commissioner to the Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP, 6 August 2019

Thank you for your letter of the 18 July 2019, and the information that you provided. I'm sorry I have not been able to reply sooner.

With the reply from the Director of Customer Experience and the various example letters you have previously provided, I believe I now have sufficient information to consider whether a breach of the rules has occurred.

Once I have had the opportunity to review all the evidence I will write to you again.

Please be aware that I will be away from my office from 8 August 2019 and will return at the beginning of September 2019.

6 August 2019

11. Letter from the Commissioner to the Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP, 3 September 2019

Thank you for your letter of the 18 July 2019. The information you provided is helpful and I am now able to make a decision on the allegation that you misused House-provided stationery.

My Decision

Your letter to constituents, updating them about Charing Cross Hospital, Heathrow expansion, crime and policing, local schools and Transport for London's proposed bus cuts, was sent in breach of the rules on House-provided stationery. Breaking the stationery rules has put you in breach of paragraph 16 of the Code of Conduct for Members.

The rationale for my decision

Paragraph 16 of the current Code states:

Members are personally responsible and accountable for ensuring that their use of any expenses, allowances, facilities and services provided from the public purse is in accordance with the rules laid down on these matters...

Paragraph 3 of the *Rules for the use of stationery and postage-paid envelopes provided by the House of Commons, and for the use of the crown portcullis* excludes the use of stationery and postage paid envelopes;

...

- For newsletters (including annual reports or general updates to constituents on a range of issues);

...

The Director of Customer Experience and Service Delivery has told me that, *“If I had been asked, in my opinion the letter falls outside the rules... I consider this [letter] to be a general update to constituents on a range of issues, and therefore would have advised that this was not an appropriate use of the budget.”*

I agree with the Director’s analysis.

In your letter of the 21 June 2019 you told me that the mailing was *“...done particularly in response to several different petitions I have been running recently. The five paragraphs have all either been the subject of local petitions or opt in sign in sheets at public meetings...”* You also said that this was sent *“...to combine responses to all these petitioners and sign-in sheets and produce one letter on all five issues, rather than have to send out separate letters to each of the five categories, which would likely have led to a greater volume of letters and envelopes overall.”*

I appreciate that sharing all the information in one large mailing may have been more cost-effective than writing separate letters to the respondents to each survey. However, the stationery rules state unambiguously that using House-provided stationery to provide general updates to constituents on a range of issues is not permissible.

Your letter to your constituents started with an acknowledgement that it was *“...an update on the work I have been doing...”* and it covered a wide range of topics. I can only conclude that this letter was a general update and, therefore, breached the stationery rules.

Other letters

I asked whether you had distributed other similar letters, using House-provided stationery and postage paid envelopes, since the start of the 2017 Parliament and you very helpfully provided me with examples of letters sent to constituents since the 2017 election.

Thank you for doing this. Having reviewed the content of those mailings, and based on the information you have provided, I have decided further investigation is not merited. I have not sought the advice of the House authorities about this correspondence as I have seen no evidence to suggest further stationery breaches are likely to have occurred.²

Next steps

I consider this breach of the rules to be at the less serious end of the spectrum. With your agreement this inquiry could be concluded through the rectification procedure available to me through Standing Order No 150. This makes provision for me to end an inquiry without making a referral to the Committee on Standards in certain circumstances. The Committee would generally expect the Member to have acknowledged and apologised for their breach of the rules, and to have taken any steps necessary to rectify their error.

Action required

Acknowledgement of, and an apology for, the breach can be made by way of your response to this letter. You would also need to tell me about the measures you will take/have taken to ensure there is no repeat of this breach. To rectify the misuse of public funds, you would

2 Mr Hands provided examples of 17 other mailings. All of these letters dealt with single issues.

need to refund to the House authorities a sum equal to the cost of the stationery and prepaid postage used. In your letter of 21 June, you told me that the mailing comprised “*just under seven thousand*” letters. It would be helpful to have the precise number if that is available. My office will then liaise with the House authorities to calculate the final amount required for repayment.

Concluding the inquiry

If you agree to this proposal, I would share with you a draft of my letter to [name redacted] concluding the inquiry and the evidence pack that will accompany it. The content of the letter is, of course, a matter for me alone but I would give you the opportunity to check factual accuracy.

On conclusion of my inquiry, the evidence pack will be published on my webpages and I would also report the outcome to the Committee on Standards in due course.

Please let me have a response to this letter by 18 September 2019. In the meantime, our correspondence remains protected by parliamentary privilege and I must ask that you continue to maintain the strict confidentiality of the inquiry.

3 September 2019

12. Letter from Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP to the Commissioner, 18 September 2019

Thank you for your letter of 3 September updating me on the complaint you have received from [name redacted], a Labour Party councillor and activist in my constituency.

While I disagree with the decision, I accept your proposal in the interests of bringing this matter to a conclusion. I note your comment that the breach was at the “less serious end of the spectrum”. I apologise for the breach, and have ensured that my office and I are fully aware of the latest rules for the use of stationery and postage-paid envelopes provided by the House of Commons.

I would like to emphasise what I believe to be a flaw in the rules. The mailout in question was the most cost-effective way of updating my constituents on issues that are pertinent in my constituency, including providing responses to surveys that this group of constituents had responded to. This is an important aspect of a Member of Parliament’s role representing their constituency. Your decision suggests that if I had sent out multiple letters to the same group of constituents then I would not have been in breach of the rules.

There were 6,916 letters sent in the mailout in question. The second-class postage fee for a standard envelope is £0.61. Therefore, I estimate the postage cost of my mailout to be £4,218.76. This figure excludes the cost of paper and the cost of the envelopes themselves minus postage.

According to the rationale of your decision, I would have acted within the rules if had I sent out a larger number of separate letters to constituents provided my total yearly spend on postage still came in at under £9,000. Two separate letters to the same group of

constituents totalling £8,437.52 in postage would have been within the rules provided they had only dealt with one issue each. This seems a bizarre and extremely cost ineffective policy.

I look forward to your reply.

18 September 2019

13. Letter from the Commissioner to Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP, 1 October 2019

Thank you for your letter of 18 September 2019, and the information provided. In your letter you make several points, which I will address below.

You state that, *“While I disagree with the decision, I accept your proposal in the interests of bringing this matter to a conclusion”*. In my letter of 3 September 2019, I explained that the conditions for rectification include an acknowledgement that you were in breach of the rules, and your apology for that. I would not be able to conclude this matter via rectification without acknowledgment from you that you were in breach of the rules. If you do not agree to resolve the allegation against you in this way, I would need to submit a formal report to the Standards Committee.

In your reply you reiterate that, in combining several updates into one mailing, you used the most cost-effective method of communicating with your constituents. This is not the point. As I explained in my letter, *“...the stationery rules state unambiguously that using House-provided stationery to provide general updates to constituents on a range of issues is not permissible.”*

In relation to whether you are permitted to send updates on several issues, in your letter you also said, *“I would like to emphasise what I believe to be a flaw in the rules.”* If you wish to raise this matter further, you should contact the Clerk of the Administration Committee, [name redacted].

Finally, thank you for calculating the cost of second-class post, £4,218.76, for the 6,916 letters sent out as part of your mailing. When I add this to the cost for A4 paper, £299.88 and envelopes, £346.91, I calculate that the total amount for repayment to the House authorities is £4,865.55.

If you would like me to continue with rectification, please write to me again acknowledging that you were in breach of the rules and apologising. I would then share with you details of methods for repayment.

If you agree to this proposal, I also would share with you a draft of my letter to [name redacted] concluding this inquiry, as well as the draft evidence pack that will accompany it. I would provide you with the opportunity to check and comment on the factual accuracy before the letter and evidence are published on my website.

However, if you would like to arrange a meeting to discuss any of the points above you can contact my PA, [name and contact details redacted], to arrange a mutually convenient appointment at my office [details redacted].

Please let me have a response to this letter by 16 October 2019. In the meantime, our correspondence remains protected by parliamentary privilege and I must ask that you continue to maintain the strict confidentiality of the inquiry.

1 October 2019

14. Letter from Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP to the Commissioner, 14 October 2019

Thank you for your letter dated 1 October 2019 regarding the complaint made by [name redacted], a Labour Party councillor and activist in my constituency.

To be clear, I acknowledge that I was in breach of the rules, and I apologise for the breach. As mentioned in my previous letter, I note your comment that the breach was “at the less serious end of the spectrum”, and I have ensured that my office and I are fully aware of the latest rules for the use of stationary and postage-paid envelopes by the House of Commons.

Thank you for providing me with the details of the Clerk of the Administration Committee, [name redacted], whom I shall be contacting to point out what I believe to be a flaw in the rules.

I would be grateful if you would provide me the details of the repayment methods for the stationary that I used for the mailout in question.

I look forward to your reply.

14 October 2019

15. Letter from the Commissioner to Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP, 21 October 2019

Thank you for your letter of 14 October 2019, in which you acknowledged and apologised for your breach of the rules. You have agreed to refund the House authorities for the stationery you had misused and the details about how to do this are below.

As previously stated, the total amount for repayment to the House authorities is £4,865.55. Payment can be made using one of the following methods;

- Pay by cheque made payable to HOC Admin 2 and sent to, [address redacted].
- Complete a BACs transfer to acct – [details redacted] stating who and what the payment relates to in the narrative. (If you use this method, please send a copy/screenshot to confirm completion of the transaction.)
- Pay by card (Amex not accepted) by calling [number redacted].

I have enclosed a draft of my letter to [name redacted] concluding my inquiry, as well as a draft copy of the written evidence pack that will accompany it. The content of the letter is, of course, a matter for me alone but you are invited to comment on the factual accuracy of the pack.

On conclusion of my inquiry I will report the outcome to the Committee on Standards, at which point I will consider this matter closed and the written evidence pack will be published on my webpages.

I would be pleased to have any comments you wish to make on the written evidence pack and confirmation of your chosen method of repayment as soon as possible and no later than 31 October 2019.

21 October 2019

16. Letter sent via email from the office of Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP to the Commissioner, 31 October 2019

Thank you for your letter of 21 October 2019 regarding the complaint made by [name redacted], a Labour Party councillor and activist in my constituency.

I would be grateful if you would clarify what you mean by “comments [I] may wish to make on the written evidence pack” given this pack is merely a compilation of the correspondence between Labour Party [name redacted], [named redacted], you, and I.

In terms of the repayment method, I wish to pay by cheque made payable to HOC Admin 2 and sent to [address redacted].

I look forward to your reply.

31 October 2019

17. Email from the Office of the Commissioner for Standards to the Office of Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP, 1 November 2019

Thank you for forwarding the letter from Mr Hands, which sets out his preferred method of payment to be by cheque. I shall pass this information on to the Commissioner when she returns next week.

Please could you also let Mr Hands know that, in answer to his question regarding comments on the written evidence pack, the Commissioner always gives Members the opportunity to check and comment on the factual accuracy of correspondence in connection with her inquiries. This enables both parties the opportunity to check, and if necessary correct, factual information due to be published on her website. If Mr Hands has any points he wishes to raise would it be possible to have these by return, or no later than Monday 4 November 2019.

Do let me know if you require any further information.

1 November 2019

18. Letter sent via email from the office of Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP to the Commissioner, 4 November 2019

Thank you for the clarification provided by [name redacted], Investigations and Complaints Officer at your office, following my letter to you of 31 October.

Upon further reflection of the evidence pack that you have provided, and before your enquiry is concluded, I wish to appear before the Committee on Standards to discuss what I perceive to be the lack of cost efficiency of the present rules.

I look forward to your reply.

4 November 2019

19. Letter from the Commissioner to Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP, 5 November 2019

Thank you for your letter of 4 November 2019.

When I wrote to you on 3 September 2019, I explained that I had enough information to make a decision on the allegation that you had misused House-provided stationery. As a result of my investigation I had decided that your letter to constituents in the spring of 2019 was a general update, which is against the existing rules for the use of House-provided stationery.

In your reply, on 18 September 2019, you said you disagreed with my decision due to what you believed to be “...*a flaw in the rules*”. In this same letter you also said you would accept my proposal of rectification “...*in the interests of bringing this matter to a conclusion*”. You also apologised for the breach.

In my follow up letter, on 1 October 2019, I reiterated that “...*the conditions for rectification include an acknowledgement that you were in breach of the rules, and your apology for that*”. I said that if you did not acknowledge the breach and apologise for it, “...*I would need to submit a formal report to the Standards Committee*”. My letter also provided you with information about who to contact on the Administration Committee, about “...*a flaw in the rules*”.

Your letter of the 14 October 2019 said, “*To be clear, I acknowledge that I was in breach of the rules, and I apologise for that breach*”. You also said that you would be contacting the Administration Committee regarding your concerns about the rules.

I am, therefore, surprised by your letter of the 4 November 2019, asking to “*appear before the Committee on Standards to discuss what I perceive to be the lack of cost efficiency of the present rules*”.

Please would you confirm, by return, whether your acknowledgement and apology for your breach of the rules, and your agreement to refund the House authorities, still stand. If they do not, the criteria for a rectification are no longer met, and I will prepare a Memorandum for referral to the Committee on Standards after the General Election. That Memorandum will ask the Committee to decide whether it agrees with my finding on the alleged breach, and invite them to decide what, if any action, is required.

If your previous commitments still stand, it would be helpful if you would clarify the basis on which you would like the matter referred to the Committee on Standards. As noted on the last page of the rules on the use of House-provided stationery, the content of those rules was approved by the Administration Committee on 2 March 2015 and by the

Members' Estimate Committee on 16 March 2015. If you wish only to discuss the "*lack of cost efficiency*" of the present rules, that would be a matter to draw to the attention of the Administration Committee and it need not impede the resolution of this inquiry.

This correspondence means that I cannot conclude my inquiry until after the General Election. In the meantime, I will update the evidence pack I sent to you on 21 October 2019 to reflect our recent exchanges.

5 November 2019

20. Letter from Rt Hon. Greg Hands MP to the Commissioner, 21 November 2019

I am writing to thank you for your letter, regarding my response of 4 November 2019.

I do appreciate you taking the time to write to me. I am afraid that, upon reflection, I would prefer to go before the Committee on Standards in order to present my case in person.

I do hope that you understand, and I can only apologise for any inconvenience my change in position has caused.

21 November 2019