

STEVE BAKER MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Chris Bryant MP **Written evidence submitted by Steve Baker MP**
Chair
Committee on Standards

2 February 2022

Dear Chris,

I have read with interest your Consultation on the Review of The Code of Conduct, in particular the proposal to add the additional principle of 'Respect'. I am writing to set out why this proposal should be abandoned.

Having been personally involved in founding an organisation to promote anti-racism, and as the joint Politician of the Year 19/20 as awarded by the Civility in Public Life awards, I have great sympathy with the political project of fighting racism positively. We must not merely avoid being racist, but we must be positively anti-racist.

While I have sought to be positively anti-racist with some success, I would not wish to impose any political position on other MPs by force of the Code of Conduct. However desirable we might think a position to be, whether it should be represented in the Commons is a matter for electors.

Frankly, I find the politics and personal behaviour of some politicians abhorrent. As an elected representative I have a right to make my opinions about them known, perhaps even a duty to do so. This is why I cannot support your determination to police the comments of MPs in any medium: it might be necessary to express contempt for hateful political positions.

Further, I am advised, and can see for myself, that were this to be adopted, it would mean that our conduct in the Chamber would be subject to the investigation and judgement of the Commissioner. In my view, that seems an absurd, counter-productive and damaging position to adopt. If the Committee were to adopt a report which so undermined the privilege of MPs in the Chamber, I would regard that as a grave failure.

I am counting on you as Chair and the Committee to ensure our Political and Parliamentary Conduct remains privileged and that the Bill of Rights is upheld. Absolutely nothing should be done to undermine our capacity to behave in the House of Commons as we see fit and to be accountable for it at the Ballot Box.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Baker".

Steve Baker MP

2 February 2022

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