

Written evidence submitted by Full Fact (CTR 03)

Summary

- Full Fact welcomes the Procedure Committee's inquiry on correcting the record and reviewing the current system by which Ministers and backbench MPs correct the parliamentary record. This inquiry is recognition by MPs that the House of Commons corrections system is not fit for purpose.
- The current system has not been used as intended by many Ministers. Full Fact has fact checked numerous inaccurate statements made by Ministers in the House of Commons in the past year that remain uncorrected. Procedural mechanisms for MPs to challenge such mistakes are insufficient and often unsuccessful.
- This brings the House into disrepute and is bad for the Government. It leaves Ministers looking dishonest, exposed to accusations - whether fairly or unfairly - that they have misled the House. This drags out disputed cases and promotes cynicism that affects all MPs. Ministers should use and adhere to the current system.
- Full Fact also recommends that the parliamentary corrections process is extended so all MPs are able to correct the official record. Because many MPs already use Points of Order to address inaccurate statements, and one or two Ministerial corrections are already published on sitting days, this shows extending the corrections system to all MPs would be welcomed and that it is possible to treat correcting such mistakes as a normal part of the work of an MP.
- We have seen many MPs who have wanted to correct the record, but have found that the current parliamentary process does not allow them to make corrections officially on the record as they would like to. This hampers MPs from acting honestly, is ineffective, wastes House time, and leaves highly sensitive, incorrect, or inflammatory statements or allegations on the official record.
- Enabling all MPs, including high-profile backbenchers and the Official Opposition, to correct their mistakes in the same way that Government Ministers can, would also reduce political point scoring and improve public perception of politics and MPs to their constituents.
- There is public demand to raise the bar of honesty in Parliament. Full Fact research shows that 71% of Britons believe there was more lying and misuse of facts in politics than 30 years ago.
- The House of Commons could look to the Scottish parliamentary system, introduced in 2010, for guidance as this allows all MSPs to put forward corrections to the official record when they misspeak.
- Currently it is not always clear to the public when and how the official record is corrected on Hansard. Transparency would be improved if a correction appeared

alongside the original text on Hansard, along with the link to where and when it was published. Without this change there is the potential for harmful misinformation to remain on the record and be used by dangerous actors.

- Parliament should also have a mechanism to tackle MPs who make consistent or egregious misleading claims and refuse to correct them. Full Fact believes that a simple five-step process, based on the existing processes of the House, could work to ensure the MP corrects the record, or, where appropriate, is sanctioned. The Procedure Committee should consider recommending the introduction of such a system, or an improved version of it, as part of its inquiry into correcting the record.
- Lastly, we recognise the complexities that a system to address inaccuracies made outside of Parliament would have, but upholding truth and accuracy in political discourse is vital. We urge the Procedure Committee to commit to a future inquiry in this area. Exploring this should not stop a system for correcting mistakes by MPs in Parliament being put in place as soon as possible.

About Full Fact

1. Full Fact fights bad information. We're a team of independent fact checkers, technologists, researchers, and policy specialists who find, expose and counter the harm it does.
2. Bad information ruins lives. It promotes hate, damages people's health, and hurts democracy. So, we tackle it in four ways. We check claims made by politicians, public institutions, in the media and online. We ask people to correct the record where possible to reduce the spread of specific claims. We campaign for system changes to help make bad information rarer and less harmful, and we advocate for high standards in public debate.
3. Full Fact is a registered charity. We're funded by individual donations, charitable trusts, and by other funders. We receive funding from both Facebook and Google. Details of our funding can be found on our website¹.

Is the House's corrections system being used as intended?

4. The 2007 Procedure Committee report was agreed by the House of Commons to establish new rules to allow Ministers to correct the official report of parliamentary debates on Hansard when they make an inadvertent error in speaking². Ministers correct the record either in an oral statement in the House of Commons Chamber or by a written ministerial statement.

¹ Full Fact, Funding, 2022, <https://fullfact.org/about/funding/>

² House of Commons, Procedure Committee, Corrections to the Official Report, Second Report of Session 2006–07, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmproced/541/54104.htm#a10>

5. Since its inception, we can see that many Ministers do use the system available to them to correct mistakes made in the House of Commons. Since 2007/8 data suggests there has been one or two ministerial corrections published every sitting day and that this has been broadly stable over the years since³.
6. However, the House of Commons corrections system is not being used as intended by all Ministers. At Full Fact we find that many Ministers and their departments are unwilling to engage with correcting the record, and that the process is insufficiently used. We often fact check Ministers who have not used the system available to them to correct their mistakes⁴.
7. An unwillingness to engage with the corrections system goes right to the top of the Government. Full Fact fact checked statements made by Prime Minister Boris Johnson MP in the House of Commons on numerous occasions in the past year^{5 6 7}.
8. Between November 2021 and April 2022⁸, the Prime Minister repeated at least 12 times to the House of Commons the inaccurate statement that employment is going up when it is going down. After Full Fact published the fact check on this false claim, we contacted Boris Johnson MP to request a correction, but did not receive a substantive response. This happened many times. The UK Statistics Authority, the Office for Statistics Regulation, and the Liaison Committee all challenged this claim. The Prime Minister responded to the Liaison Committee saying that he "thinks" he's taken steps to correct the record on false claims about employment⁹. Mr Johnson acknowledged what he had said was not true, but the former Prime Minister never corrected the official record on this matter. On 6 July, the day before his resignation, a letter from Mr Johnson was published in which he referred to a written question on the issue¹⁰. This was not a correction. No Ministerial Correction on any of the related claims has ever been published.
9. The Government has claimed that it enforces standards, including that accurate and truthful information be given to Parliament, through the Ministerial Code, with Ministers expected to correct any inadvertent errors at the earliest opportunity¹¹.

³ Correspondence between Full Fact and House of Commons library, July 2022.

⁴ For example, on 3 February 2022 the then Leader of the House [Jacob Rees-Mogg MP](#) incorrectly claimed the morning after pill is an abortifacient in a statement during Questions on Business of the House. [Full Fact published a fact check](#) on this claim and contacted Mr Rees-Mogg to request a correction regarding this claim. He did not respond and the mistake remains on the official record.

⁵ For example, on 6 July 2022, [Boris Johnson MP](#) repeated the false claim that Sir Keir Starmer MP had voted 48 times to take the UK back into the European Union.

⁶ For example, on 5 January 2022, [Boris Johnson MP](#) wrongly claimed that the Government supports 2.2 million households with a £140-a-week discount on energy bills.

⁷ For example, on 15 December 2021, [Boris Johnson MP](#) falsely stated that the percentage of the UK population who have received a booster vaccine is double that of any other European country.

⁸ Full Fact, 21 April 2022, Boris Johnson makes false employment claim for ninth time in Parliament, <https://fullfact.org/economy/boris-johnson-makes-false-employment-claim-for-ninth-time-in-parliament/>

⁹ Boris Johnson MP, 30 March 2022, The Liaison Committee, <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/10037/default/>

¹⁰ Boris Johnson MP, letter to the Liaison Committee, 6 July 2022, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/22975/documents/168341/default/>

¹¹ The Cabinet Office, May 2022, Ministerial Code,

However, there are many examples that demonstrate that this has not been adhered to and the public has not been able to rely upon this for many years.

10. As set out, the corrections process available to Government Ministers in the House of Commons has too often not been used as intended. This has brought the House into disrepute, with the public spectacle of MPs being thrown out of the House of Commons for challenging inaccuracy¹² - whether fairly or unfairly. This is bad for the Government, it leaves Ministers looking dishonest and exposed to accusations that they have misled the House even when those accusations are wrong. It leaves the Speaker looking complicit and MPs looking foolish and impotent, dragging out disputed cases and promoting cynicism that affects the whole House.

11. Full Fact recommends that the Procedure Committee works with the new Prime Minister wherever possible to ensure the highest standards of accuracy and honesty of Government Ministers in Parliament are met, including that the system for Ministerial Corrections is being adhered to, and securing Government support for an all MP corrections system.

What procedural opportunities do MPs have to challenge the accuracy of information provided by Ministers to the House?

12. The procedural opportunities available to MPs to challenge the accuracy of information provided by Ministers to the House are insufficient and have not changed greatly since the introduction of a corrections process for Ministers in 2007. MPs can write to Ministers, ask Parliamentary Questions, raise a Point of Order or raise the matter in a Select Committee evidence session.

13. However, recent attempts by MPs to secure corrections on misleading statements by Ministers, or even the Prime Minister, have been unsuccessful^{13 14}.

14. As set out in paragraph 8, the Liaison Committee challenged the Prime Minister on his inaccurate statements on employment figures. The Liaison Committee Chair, Sir Bernard Jenkin MP, requested that Boris Johnson MP send the Committee a copy of the corrections, once they have been made. In response the Prime Minister sent a

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1079310/Ministerial_Code.pdf

¹² Dawn Butler MP, 22 July 2021, Summer Adjournment, Vol 699, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2021-07-22/debates/C6DDD184-A106-47DB-8CCA-38A5B0128352/SummerAdjournment>

¹³ For example, on 4 July 2019, [Thangam Debbonaire MP](#) raised a point of order to highlight that then Prime Minister, Theresa May MP, had both consistently failed to correct the record or respond to multiple correspondence on the incorrect claim that the Labour Lords blocked or attempted to block the statutory instrument for the UK to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

¹⁴ For example, on 7 February 2022, [Yvette Cooper MP](#) raised with the Speaker in a Point of Order the then Prime Minister's uncorrected claims that the Government had been cutting crime by 14%. The UK Statistics Authority had earlier informed the Government that this was misleading, when in fact there has been a 14% increase in total crime, driven by a 47% increase in fraud and computer misuse. Prior to this both [Sarah Jones MP](#), on 4 February 2022, and [Wendy Chamberlin MP](#), on 3 February 2022, had also asked the Prime Minister to correct the record with no success.

letter referring to an answer to a written parliamentary question deemed to be a clarification.¹⁵ This is not a Ministerial Correction and the inaccurate statements remain on the official record.

15. The procedure for correcting the record should be followed by all Ministers. Clearly, the system does not work if it is not taken as seriously as it should be by Ministers. The persistent failure of the last Prime Minister and other Ministers to correct the record when they are clearly required to do so under parliamentary rules creates not just a problem of their own behaviour, but a crisis of parliamentary accountability.

Should a wider range of corrections and clarifications be recorded? Should backbench MPs have more formal opportunities to correct statements that they make in the House?

16. The current parliamentary corrections process is out of date, ineffective and does not extend to non-Ministers. This therefore means the vast majority of MPs have no official means by which to correct the record.
17. At Full Fact we believe that MPs are being hampered in acting in the spirit of honesty and correcting their mistakes by the current lack of a parliamentary corrections process. While MPs are able to suggest corrections to daily published parts on Hansard to correct misspeaking, they are unable to make substantive alterations to the meaning of what was said or to make factual corrections.
18. It is crucial that all MPs are able to formally correct the record. The inefficient system leaves senior high-profile backbenchers, and the Shadow Frontbench and Leader of the Opposition, who have a formal role in holding the Government to account, unable to correct the record¹⁶. Given the visibility and reach of prominent MPs like this, their comments have the potential for false claims to spread far beyond the House of Commons chamber.
19. However, it is not just high-profile opposition or backbench MPs which should have available to them a formal method of correcting their mistakes. All MPs would benefit from such a process being available to them. There are examples where MPs respond positively to correction requests by Full Fact, and many MPs from across the House make efforts to correct their mistakes, usually through raising a Point of Order with the Speaker or in the course of another debate. But this cannot be done officially on the record.

¹⁵ Boris Johnson MP, 5 July 2022, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/22975/documents/168341/default/>

¹⁶ During Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons on 20 April 2022, the Leader of the Opposition, Sir Keir Starmer MP, claimed that the Prime Minister had criticised the BBC for their comments on and coverage of Ukraine. However, this was not true. Although a Point of Order was made the next day to withdraw the comment, the original record still retains the false claim with no annotation that it has since been corrected.

20. The system as it currently stands not only prevents MPs from correcting the record, but in some cases this leaves mistakes concerning individual constituents, including distressing life events that may have happened to them¹⁷, or inflammatory allegations about members of the public, to stand on the record¹⁸.
21. The methods presently available for correcting the record by MPs are not the most efficient use of House time and an inefficient way of correcting a mistake, because (as set out further below) the correction does not cross-reference to the original statement made. For example, someone might search on Hansard for the transcript of a particular debate because they have an interest in a subject. In doing so, those people would be unlikely to read the Point of Order raised at a later date.
22. Full Fact has recently worked with one MP who made a claim that we fact checked and requested they make a correction. That MP fully recognised that they got something wrong and wanted to correct the record, but they did not want to make a Point of Order. The MP instead sought to correct the claim on social media instead. This demonstrates that there are MPs with a willingness to set the record straight, but the lack of an easy system holds them back from doing so in Parliament.
23. Not wanting to correct the record through a Point of Order can be for a number of reasons. It can feel somewhat embarrassing when you have to admit an honest mistake made in good faith and a Point of Order can feel like too much of a spotlight. Possible other factors which make MPs reluctant to correct a mistake in this way would be that it draws more attention to what might have only been quite a small error and they might not think this is warranted. The way the present system is set up acts as a disincentive to MPs being honest and correcting a mistake in the institution where that mistake was made.
24. Full Fact believes extending the parliamentary corrections process to all MPs would be a balanced, impartial, and non-partisan approach. The fact that only Government Ministers can actually correct the record officially, but don't always do so, perpetuates the view that asking MPs to correct the record is used to score party political points. We believe this needs to change if we are to have any hope of creating a culture of correcting mistakes.
25. As members of the Procedure Committee noted in the evidence session with the Leader of the House of Commons this year¹⁹, this is not about allowing MPs to rework or recontextualise an argument in a new context - it is about factual error. We would anticipate that a process that is set around enabling corrections to factual statements will enable a better standard of honesty to be enacted.
26. As set out in paragraph 5, the existing system has averaged one to two corrections per day since its introduction for Ministers and shows that it is possible to treat

¹⁷ Full Fact can provide further information upon request of the kinds of instances this can include.

¹⁸ Chris Bryant MP, 25 May 2022, Foreign Lobbying, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2022-05-25/debates/43ACFEE4-4FE9-48B6-A94A-C607BDD95F0D/ForeignLobbying>

¹⁹ Mark Spencer MP, 25 May 2022, The Procedure Committee, <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/10289/pdf/>

correcting mistakes as a normal part of the job of being an MP. The introduction of such a system for all MPs would massively improve public perception of politics and MPs to their constituents. We can't have honest political debate in this country while the official record remains littered with false or misleading claims by elected representatives.

27. Full Fact recommends that the parliamentary corrections process is updated and extended so that all MPs can correct the official record.

What public concern is there around misleading statements in the House of Commons?

28. At Full Fact we know from experience that MPs are more honest than prevailing overall perceptions, but the actions of a few are damaging the reputations of all MPs and political parties.

29. Public concern around the standards and accountability of elected representatives has increased in recent years, and there is both public and political demand to raise the bar of honesty in Parliament. An improved corrections process will help in that wider endeavour.

30. Full Fact research shows that 71% of Britons believe there was more lying and misuse of facts in politics and media than 30 years ago, with a 15% increase in three years. The Ipsos Issues Index, which each month records spontaneous and unprompted responses of what people say are the important issues facing Britain, has seen a sharp increase in the number of people worried about the behaviour of politicians. Lack of faith in politicians and politics has been in the top 3 to 6 concerns for the public in recent months, and remains at higher levels than any previous year since the issue was first added to the Index in 2016²⁰.

31. The Committee on Standards in Public Life's research has also repeatedly identified telling the truth as one of the highest concerns the public has about standards in public life. The 2021 report, Upholding Standards in Public Life - A report of the Standards, states that:

“Perceptions of low ethical standards do not trigger immediate political crises, but such figures can be a sign of a long-term deterioration of confidence in British politics. Low figures on politicians owning up to mistakes, telling the truth, and being open about decision-making indicate a troubling disconnect between the standards the public expects of its elected leaders and the standards they perceive.”²¹

²⁰ IPSOS, 24 August 2022, Ipsos Issues Index: August 2022, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/ipsos-issues-index-august-2022>

²¹ The Committee on Standards in Public Life, November 2021, Upholding Standards in Public Life, Final report of the Standards Matter 2 review, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/102

32. Between April and August 2022, Full Fact’s petition, which calls for “MPs to admit publicly when they get things wrong, and along with all MPs, agree new rules to make it easy to correct mistakes and stop politicians from misleading Parliament”, has received well over 32,000 signatures.²²
33. Additionally, Compassion in Politics reports that 76% of the public would back a specific criminal offence covering politicians who lie,²³ with over 200,000 signatures on their petition to bring in such an offence.²⁴
34. This research demonstrates public demand for more accountability and transparency of MPs and the claims they make in the course of their work. While Full Fact does not believe a new specific criminal offence would be an effective or measured course of action, the Compassion in Politics petition does demonstrate significant public outcry at the problem of honesty in public life and underlines the need for change. A new system which allowed all MPs to easily correct the record would help to improve the situation and increase constituents’ faith in their Members of Parliament.

How would a new Parliamentary corrections process in the House of Commons work?

35. That many MPs do already use Points of Order to address inaccuracies made in statements and debates shows that extending the system to all MPs to self-refer to correct the record when they make mistakes would be welcomed and used by the majority of MPs across the House.
- 36. The House of Commons could look to the Scottish parliamentary system for clear guidance on how an all MP corrections process could work and what would be in scope. A system for corrections was introduced in Holyrood in 2010 and allows all Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) to put forward corrections to the official record when they misspeak.²⁵**
37. In the Scottish system an MSP can make a request to correct inaccurate information provided in Parliamentary proceedings, providing it satisfies the relevant criteria set out in the official guidance. They must then make the correction widely known, write to various parties, including, where relevant, the MSP to whom the inaccurate information was originally given (for example, in answer to a question or a debate intervention), or the MSP who drew attention to the need for a correction. They must

[9944/Upholding_Standards_in_Public_Life_-_Web_Accessible.pdf](#)

²² Full Fact, 2022, MPs owe Parliament—and the public—the truth, <https://actions.fullfact.org/petitions/mps-owe-us-truth/>

²³ The Mirror, 05 May 2021, Lying by politicians should be made a specific criminal offence, say voters, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/lying-politicians-should-made-specific-24045115>

²⁴ Compassion in Politics, 2022, End the lies, <https://www.change.org/p/uk-parliament-end-the-lies>

²⁵ The Scottish Parliament, 2022, Guidance On Corrections To The Official Report, <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/official-report/guidance-on-corrections-to-the-official-report.pdf>

place a copy of the correction in the library, and copy any correspondence to all business managers and so on.

38. The system in Holyrood works well. There are incentives for correcting the record as soon as possible, with a limit of 20 working days to make a correction²⁶. In a new House of Commons system, it would be beneficial to have mechanisms to ensure early correction. However, mistakes can only be corrected if an MP is aware of their error, so it may not be optimal to have a hard cut-off date for any system. In the House of Commons Full Fact has seen errors that require correction later than 20 days²⁷.
39. This example, along with a list on Full Fact's website of uncorrected claims made by MPs, either inside or outside of the House of Commons²⁸, many of which are many months uncorrected, highlight the need for a new corrections process to not have a cut-off date.
40. In the Scottish Parliament, the system has generated only 7 corrections this year to date²⁹. There are only 129 MSPs versus 650 MPs in the House of Commons, so we anticipate proportionately more corrections being made, and possibly greater than that level given the extent of business of the House.
41. For MSPs (including Ministers) this has become an everyday part of fulfilling their personal responsibility to be accurate and truthful in their contributions during Parliamentary proceedings.

Can the visibility of corrections made to Hansard be improved?

42. When established in 2007, the corrections system proposed that Ministers correct any error 'at the earliest opportunity', as they may, for example, be relevant to a matter or to legislation which is currently before the House. The new system also set out that each correction should reproduce the texts of the original question and answer, or the original passage from debate, followed by the text of the correction, and that this should be listed on a dedicated corrections page. The correction would also be flagged on Hansard via a hyperlink inserted between the original text where it originally appeared.

43. Full Fact believes the approach set out for Ministers' to correct the record should continue and, if this Committee recommends and the House agrees,

²⁶ iBid

²⁷ For example, on 11 July 2022 [Matt Western MP](#) made an inaccurate claim in a debate on Ministers' Severance Pay being around £400,000, however it wasn't until 4 August that Mr Western corrected that mistake in a Twitter post, after [Full Fact](#) had fact checked the claim, which had originated from the Liberal Democrats' press office, at around £245,000.

²⁸ Full Fact, 2022, MPs who have not corrected the record, <https://fullfact.org/updates/mps-who-have-not-corrected-the-record/>

²⁹ The Scottish Parliament, 2022, Corrections and changes to the Official Report, <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/corrections-and-changes-to-the-official-report>

this should be extended to all MPs. However, a number of improvements should be implemented to bring better transparency of debate in the House of Commons.

44. The system established 15 years ago in 2007 is now not up to the standard of modern online communications. The visibility and searchability of Hansard has increased and it is easier now than ever for the public to view debates and statements in the House of Commons and share these on social media platforms. It is not clear to the public when and how the official record is corrected.
45. At present with Ministerial corrections, there is a disconnect on Hansard between the original claim and the subsequent correction being accessible. In a Ministerial Correction, the majority of the time the original claim does not have a link to the correction. This is in the form of a square bracketed link - 'Official Report, Day/Month/Year, and the number of the volume of Hansard'³⁰.
- 46. Whilst a reference and link is helpful, transparency would be improved if correction appeared alongside the original text, along with the link to where and when it appeared as a Ministerial Correction³¹.**
47. Whilst Hansard is a substantially verbatim report of what is said in Parliament, the current approach to Ministerial Corrections to insert a hyperlink to the corrections page shows that it is possible to insert the subsequent correction alongside the original claim.
48. Additionally, and as set out above, the present way for MPs to correct the record, via a Point of Order, does not link to the original statement that they are correcting and is insufficient in preventing the spread of bad information. This can lead to potentially dangerous misinformation remaining on the official record³².
49. The potential for misleading statements made in Parliament to spread and fuel misinformation and disinformation is high. We see claims similar to ones occasionally made by MPs being used in health disinformation by bad actors. This will only become more and more important as people are exposed to more and more sources of information online that may appear credible without being trustworthy. This has been, and will be, particularly important during election periods³³.

³⁰ For example, this correction by [Rishi Sunak MP](#) from an Urgent Question on Covid-19: Economic Package on Tuesday 12 May 2020, which original stated that more than £8 billion of Barnett consequential had been provided to devolved Administrations across the UK to respond to the pandemic, which was later corrected on 09 June 2020 to £6.8 Billion.

³¹ The above example by Rishi Sunak still states that £8 billion of Barnett consequences was provided to devolved Administrations.

³² For example, on 14 December 2021, [Sir Desmond Swayne](#) claimed that more people were dying in the carnage on the roads than of Covid-19. Sir Desmond used a [Point of Order](#) on 8 February 2022 to acknowledge that, having seen the statistics, this was incorrect.

³³ For example, on the day MPs voted to hold a general election in 2019, then Prime Minister [Boris Johnson MP](#) wrongly claimed that extending Brexit costs £1 billion a month, a claim that remains uncorrected on [Hansard](#) and was repeated by the [Conservative Party](#) during the election campaign.

50. Without the visibility and accessibility of corrections being increased on Hansard the risk remains that unsubstantiated claims by elected representatives can be easily shared online, with the authoritative Parliamentary website giving false claims legitimacy. Increasingly, we see content travelling online in atomised bits that have been taken out of context. This is more likely to happen with interventions from MPs in the House of Commons if a correction does not sit with the original text. It will also be harder to slow the spread of any false or misleading claim and to do so in a timely way if a correction is not associated with the original claim.
51. It is important that Hansard and the Parliamentary Digital Service have the ongoing space and mandate to publish corrections in a way that informs the audience and avoids misuse of the original or the correction.
52. As the information environment evolves online, we can anticipate that in the coming years Hansard and the Parliamentary Digital Service will make key decisions of what technology can offer and what organisations, including fact checking organisations like Full Fact, do with that information.
53. An example of the way in which future technology can support corrections in Parliament can be seen in Full Fact's automated fact checking tools that can be used in newsrooms and by fact checkers all over the world.³⁴ Such technology could be used to fact check claims made in Parliament, and it is important that any inaccuracies or mistakes listed on the official record are cross-referenced clearly with the correction.
- 54. Hansard could look to the system in the Scottish Parliament. When an MSP has made a request to correct inaccurate information provided in Parliamentary proceedings, the corrections are published on a page of the Scottish Parliament's website³⁵. It would be helpful if such a list was created as on the UK parliament website in addition to using the search function to find corrections, as is currently available for Ministerial Corrections.**
- 55. Further, the search page for Ministerial Corrections is not easily accessible on Hansard. The introduction of this page on Hansard's home page could improve the accountability of parliamentary corrections.**

Consistent failure to correct the record

56. The issue of MPs being unable to correct mistakes when they occur is only part of the problem of a lack of honesty that is affecting the House of Commons. At Full Fact we, and our supporters, know that honesty is about more than just looking at your own behaviour and correcting incorrect statements. A truly honest and accountable

³⁴ Full Fact, 2022, Automated Fact Checking, <https://fullfact.org/about/automated/>

³⁵ The Scottish Parliament, 2022, Corrections and changes to the Official Report, <https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/official-report/corrections-and-changes-to-the-official-report>

Parliament would have a mechanism to tackle failures of MPs who make consistent or egregious misleading claims, and refuse to correct them.

57. Where an MP persistently fails to uphold the standards expected of them and correct the record, Full Fact believes that a simple five-step process, based on the existing processes of the House, could work to ensure the MP corrects the record, or, where appropriate, is sanctioned for failing to do so.

- i. When an MP believes another may have made an error, they can ask the House of Commons Library to assess the issue. The UK Statistics Authority can also be called on to provide authoritative independent advice.
- ii. If the Library analysis confirms there was an error, the MP should raise that with the MP who made the statement and ask them to correct the record.
- iii. If the MP who made the statement fails to correct the record and is a Minister, the MP may ask the Speaker to authorise a debate or an Urgent Question under existing powers to bring attention to the issue.
- iv. If the Speaker becomes aware of multiple instances of an MP failing to correct the record when required, the Speaker alone should be given the power to refer this pattern of behaviour to the Commissioner for Standards for investigation.
- v. If the Commissioner finds that an MP has persistently failed to correct the record in accordance with the rules of the House, the Committee on Standards should be empowered to impose appropriate sanctions.

58. This new system would include an enhanced role for the Speaker, both to act on failures of MPs to correct misleading statements on the record, and to act as a check on attempts to politicise the process.

59. We recognise that conduct in the Commons Chamber means that the Commissioner for Standards may not investigate complaints about matters which fall under the jurisdiction of the Speaker in respect of orderliness and conduct during sittings of the House. However, there are instances where an instant judgement by the Speaker on the conduct of an individual MP is not possible or desirable and further investigation may be necessary. The Speaker could in the future have the option to refer a matter of conduct to the Commissioner for investigation where an MP makes consistent and egregious inaccuracies and fails to correct the official record.

60. We suggest that this proposed approach has several advantages. First, it has built-in cooling off time so that it cannot be used to make allegations of misleading the House in the heat of a particular moment. Secondly, it is informed (but not determined) by the impartial input from the House of Commons Library so it cannot be triggered by selective or partial use of competing evidence. Thirdly, it depends on the Speaker to make a referral and the Standards Committee to consider it so that it cannot be triggered by a single MP or even political party. We would argue that this is

both careful and perhaps the least the House should do to uphold its expectations of MPs, and Government Ministers in particular.

61. This is something that would be beneficial in addressing public concern. 2022 research by Spotlight on Corruption finds that the majority of voters want to see wide ranging reforms to standards in public life, with 80% of respondents wanting the Ministerial Code put into law and to include a requirement to be honest. 70% of respondents also have no confidence in the current system for investigating and punishing Ministers who break the rules, and 71% believe we cannot trust politicians to police their own behaviour.³⁶

62. That the House of Commons does not already have a system to tackle consistent or egregious failures by MPs to correct their mistakes must be remedied. We believe the Procedure Committee should consider recommending the introduction of a system for persistent or serious failure to correct the record, such as the one proposed by Full Fact or an improvement on it, as part of its inquiry into correcting the record.

Correcting the mistakes made outside of Parliament

63. Full Fact recognises that the Members' Code of Conduct does not seek to regulate what MPs do in their purely private and personal lives, nor does it seek to regulate MPs' views and opinions.

64. However, when MPs make a contribution in a public setting, such as on social media, on television, in a newspaper, or a public setting outside of Parliament, they are speaking in a public forum, engaging in public debate, and making statements in their capacity as public representatives. They should be subject to the Seven Principles of Public Life, including the principle of being Honest.

65. The Commissioner for Standards has told the Standards Committee that a high proportion of complaints she receives from members of the public relate to MPs' tweets and other uses of social media or the internet, on the basis that they allegedly contain abusive or disrespectful language or errors of fact, exaggerations or downright lies³⁷.

66. The Committee on Standards states MPs are able to pursue correction from another within the rules of Parliament, through the tabling of a substantive motion, either in the form of an Early Day Motion or a motion intended for debate³⁸. As there are no

³⁶ Spotlight on Corruption, 28 July 2022, New polling reveals huge public support for raft of reforms to improve standards in public life, <https://www.spotlightcorruption.org/new-polling-reveals-huge-public-support-for-raft-of-reforms-to-improve-standards-in-public-life/>

³⁷ House of Commons, Committee on Standards, 23 November 2021, Review of the Code of Conduct: proposals for Consultation, Fourth Report of Session 2021–22, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7999/documents/82638/default/>

³⁸ iBid

formal processes for countering misleading claims by all MPs inside or outside of Parliament, these mechanisms are neither effective nor applied consistently.

67. Full Fact sees the extent to which a post on social media that contains an inaccuracy by a high-profile MP with hundreds of thousands of followers³⁹, or a statement by a senior Government or Shadow Minister on television⁴⁰, can reach and inform public debate. This reach can be far greater than an inaccuracy made in the House of Commons.

68. We recognise the complexities that a system to address inaccuracies made outside of Parliament would have, but upholding truth and accuracy in political discourse is vital. We urge the Procedure Committee, and other relevant committees, including the Standards Committee, to each commit to a future inquiry in this area according to their remit. Exploring this should not stop a system for correcting mistakes by MPs being put in place as soon as possible.

September 2022

³⁹ For example, during the 2019 general election the then Leader of the Labour Party, [Jeremy Corbyn MP](#), misleadingly tweeted on 11 November that a Government formed by Boris Johnson "...could send £500 million a week from our NHS to big drugs companies." Despite [Full Fact](#) fact checking this claim and contacting Mr Corbyn about this, the tweet remains online and has been liked, tweeted and quoted more than 58,000 times.

⁴⁰ For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, on 16 April 2020 on ITV's Good Morning Britain, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, [Matt Hancock MP](#), claimed that 15,000 passengers were arriving into the UK daily, something [Full Fact](#) found no evidence for and contradicted by the Home Office.