

The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London, SW1A 2AA

3 December 2022

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to welcome your appointment of Adam Tolley KC to investigate the latest allegations of bullying in government and to urge you to go further to demonstrate your commitment to high standards of behaviour in your government. While we have no doubt that Mr Tolley will conduct a thorough and robust investigation, we believe it is nonetheless important that you fulfil your commitment to appoint an independent adviser on ministerial interests. An adviser will be able to conduct future similar investigations if the need arises.

Recent history has shown, however, that simply appointing an adviser will not be enough – you must give him or her the powers and protections to be able to do the job fully and without any perception of interference. While this has been much discussed in parliament recently, the government has not yet committed to any expansion of the adviser’s powers.

We urge you to accept the recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in its report of November last year, *Upholding Standards in Public Life*, regarding ways in which the role of the independent adviser could be strengthened. Most important among the recommendations are the need for the adviser to be able to start his or her own investigations without prime ministerial approval; the ability for the adviser to determine whether the ministerial code has been breached; and the importance of the adviser’s reports being made public in good time. These changes could be made now, by you giving these additional powers to a new independent adviser upon their appointment.

Alongside appointing a new adviser, we encourage you to issue a new ministerial code in your name, which restores the centrality of the Nolan principles. This change, alongside other recommendations from the CSPL, will strengthen the system for upholding standards in your government. Lord Anderson’s draft Public Service (Integrity and Ethics) Bill, currently in the House of Lords, would put many of them into statute, and we urge the government to support it.

None of these changes would infringe on your ability as prime minister to appoint, defend, or dismiss ministers – the choice of whether someone enters or continues in a ministerial role would continue to be yours alone. But these changes would strengthen the system of standards in government which has been brought into disrepute in recent months. When you entered Downing Street, you committed to leading a government of “integrity, professionalism and accountability”. Taking these steps will demonstrate that you are committed to keeping that promise.

Your sincerely,

Daniel Bruce – Chief Executive, Transparency International UK

Susan Hawley – Executive Director, Spotlight on Corruption

Dave Penman – General Secretary, FDA

Professor Meg Russell – Director, Constitution Unit, UCL

Dr Hannah White – Director, Institute for Government

