

Ministers order overhaul of Whitehall standards regime to tighten appointment and vetting process

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New measures to strengthen appointment and vetting processes.

- National Security Vetting process to be reviewed following Peter Mandelson case
- Ethics and Integrity Commission tasked with tightening financial disclosures, lobbying and business appointment rules
- Further reforms build on ambitious programme of standards and ethics reform

The Government has ordered an overhaul of standards in Whitehall to boost ethics and integrity in political and public life following the Peter Mandelson case.

Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister Darren Jones confirmed the work builds on the significant action this Government has already taken to deliver reforms to standards and ethics.

However, the Mandelson case has also shown more needs to be done and raised further questions about how the direct ministerial appointment process, and wider operation of government, can be strengthened.

The Government will continue to go further to strengthen standards in public life, including by looking again at how ministers and senior officials declare and publish their financial interests, how transparency around lobbying is enforced, and whether the rules on post-employment activity are fit for purpose in preventing unfair access to, or influence within, government.

The Prime Minister has written to the Ethics and Integrity Commission, asking them to review current arrangements relating to financial disclosures for ministers and senior officials, transparency around lobbying and the Business Appointment Rules. The Government will swiftly respond to any recommendations to bolster standards in public life.

Alongside this, the Government will review the National Security Vetting system, including lessons learned from Peter Mandelson's developed vetting. The Government has already confirmed that, in future, diplomatic appointments will not be announced until security vetting has been completed.

To drive this work forward, Baroness Anderson, Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office, has been appointed to work on standards policy and to deliver the Government's agenda on ethical standards and constitutional affairs.

Ministers have asked the Lords Conduct Committee to review the Code of Conduct to consider what changes are required to ensure peers can be removed when they have brought the House into disrepute. Ministers are also exploring whether the Committee can tighten rules on lobbying and paid advocacy to bring the Lords in line with the Commons.

In parallel, the Government has also committed to bringing forward legislation to remove peerages from disgraced peers as soon as possible. This work will build on progress to reform the second chamber, such as the upcoming removal of hereditary peers from the House of Lords.

These further steps add to the action the Government has already taken to raise standards — including publishing a new Ministerial Code, establishing the Ethics and Integrity Commission, strengthening the powers of the Independent Adviser, and reforming the business appointments system.

The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office is supporting the strengthening of the due diligence and security vetting processes for politically appointed Heads of Mission. This includes introducing individual due diligence-specific interviews with proposed candidates and ensuring politically appointed Ambassadors will have to undergo security vetting before they are appointed.

The government is also looking at assurance processes for high-profile Direct Ministerial Appointments across government, ensuring there are robust measures in place with further details on this work to be set out in due course.

The Government recognises that the Mandelson case has raised serious concerns about standards and inflicted real damage on people's trust in politics. While the specifics of that case are now a matter for the police, it has exposed the gaps in whether the systems designed to uphold integrity are strong enough.

Taken together, these measures show this Government's determination to address the issues raised and uphold integrity in public life by strengthening the rules, improving transparency, and restoring confidence in how government operates. ENDS

Notes to editors

Further detail on reviews

The terms of reference for the Ethics and Integrity Commission's review terms of reference and are published online [here] (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ethics-and-integrity-commission-to-drive-up-standards-across-the-public-sector>).

Action taken by the Government on standards

- The Ethics and Integrity Commission was established in October 2025 with a remit to uphold the highest standards across the public sector. The Commission promotes the Seven Principles of Public Life and guides bodies on developing rigorous codes of conduct.
- In October the Government also announced restrictions to eligibility for ministerial severance payments. Under the new changes, ministers who leave office following a serious breach of the Ministerial Code or having served fewer than six months will be expected to forgo their severance payment. Ministers who return to office within three months of leaving will be expected to forgo their salary until the end of that three-month period. Former ministers who are found in breach of the BARs will be expected to repay any severance received.
- The Government has strengthened the Independent Adviser's ability to open investigations into ministerial conduct. The Independent Adviser can now initiate an investigation without needing the Prime Minister's permission.

- The Government has moved from quarterly to monthly publications of Gifts and Hospitality.
- The Government has strengthened the business appointments system.
- The Government has issued a new Ministerial Code that includes, for the first time, a full articulation of the Seven Principles of Public Life in the Code itself.
- Party leaders nominating individuals for political peerages must now provide a public citation justifying their selection.
- Parliament is currently legislating on the Hillsborough Law, which will place a legal duty of candour on officials.
- Read more about the Government ethics policy here.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ministers-order-overhaul-of-whitehall-standards-regime-to-tighten-appointment-and-vetting-process>