

Open Letter to House of Commons Standards Committee

From Compassion in Care

24th May 2022

Dear Mr Bryant and Committee Members,

We raise the following points regarding your recently published report on All Party Parliamentary Groups.

1. Report Page 9, item 30

“ During the inquiry, we have also received a number of complaints from members of the public, alleging conflicts of interest on the part of funders of or secretariats to an APPG . The parliamentary commissioner for standards is unable to accept such complaints for investigation as there is no rule against conflicts of interest for APPGs. For the most part we have not accepted these complaints as formal evidence or published them, as we are not empowered to conduct investigations into individual APPGs, and our inquiry has dealt with general issues rather than arbitrating on alleged misconduct by specified APPGs. However, such complaints indicate to us a level of public concern that APPGs are being used as a route of access for lobbyists.

Response,

We have submitted comprehensive evidence to your inquiry regarding our concerns about the APPG on whistleblowing. At no time was the evidence provided as a “Complaint” We spent considerable time and effort in providing evidence to inform your inquiry of the issues of concern regarding this APPG.

The response to our evidence and indeed to all evidence provided by the public;

. You discuss concerns from the public in a private session

. Omit all concerns raised by the public from the record.

. Incorrectly label all concerns from the public as “*Complaints*” rather than valid evidence relating to the APPG system and how it can be abused.

. Go to considerable lengths to justify why such valid concerns are not against the rules and therefore justify why they cannot be acted on, rather than treat this evidence as good reason to change the rules.

Page 11 of your report, item 37

“Lobbying is an important part of a healthy democracy. It is crucial that the interests of different sectors, organisations, and communities can be brought to the attention of members and Ministers. All party parliamentary groups provide a significant benefit to the house by providing a forum where matters of policy can be discussed and a vehicle for making representations to ministers and the wider house”

Response,

I must point out that the above statement should apply as equally to the public standards committee as it does to APPGs.

There is certainly no level playing field at all when it comes to providing evidence to any sector of the house.

Members of the public are referred to their individual MPs even on issues of national importance. Example we have written to the corruption Tsar John Penrose and not even had the courtesy of a response. Dr Minh Alexander has also written and been told by John Penrose he cannot help as it's a matter for her MP.

It certainly is the experience of many campaigners and ordinary members of the public, that access to our parliament and influence of the law of the UK is something that only the highest bidder can influence. We can well understand why such a view is held.

Not only was this charity blocked in accessing MPs and this APPG, but we endured the following for even attempting to join the debate,

Halford Hall, the secretariate among (other titles) of the APPG on Whistleblowing, who is a parliamentary pass holder, targeted this charity, its trustees, and volunteers, with a targeted and sustained string of completely malicious, covert allegations and harassment.

Such attacks at any time would be reprehensible but in the middle of a pandemic, whilst our national helpline was taking a 60% increase in calls from Whistleblowers, such attacks nearly brought this charity to its knees, which was the intent.

All members of The APPG on whistleblowing were aware of their secretariates actions early on and failed to stop the attacks.

This charity was not just denied a level playing field, it was attacked for raising valid, fully evidenced concerns on behalf of its beneficiaries. The motive for the attacks? Valid dissent and challenge must be silenced. Tactics that make country's like north Korea look democratic by comparison.

None of the above could remotely be described as concerns about "*conflicts of Interest*"

We could say much more, but we have already given considerable evidence to your committee.

We like many are of the view that parliament is there to represent the highest bidder not the people of this country.

Your handling of our evidenced concerns and indeed all concerns raised by the public has been a loss of trust in a situation where there was little trust in the first place.

“Your concerns regarding bringing the house into disrepute”

That horse has definitely already bolted.

We suggest that in future parliament acts on concerns instead of finding excuses why such concerns are not against the rules, when it would certainly be misconduct in any other workplace.

We also suggest that you do not use the word “*inquiry*” in your reports for the following reason,

“A question, an investigation, a request for information or the process of seeking information” Oxford Dictionary

None of the above applies to your inquiry into APPGs when its members of the public wish to submit evidenced concerns.

Yours Sincerely

Eileen Chubb