



**HOUSE OF COMMONS**

LONDON SW1A 0AA

8<sup>th</sup> March 2024

*Dear Anthony,*

**RE: ELECTORAL COMMISSION**

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of your concerns about the Electoral Commission. I have read your comments with interest.

The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK. In accordance with the *Political Parties, Elections & Referendums Act 2000*, the Electoral Commission has a range of supervisory and investigatory powers which enable them to monitor compliance with electoral finance laws proactively and enforce suspected offences.

The Electoral Commission has civil sanctioning powers that apply to referendums and elections. More serious criminal matters can be, and are, referred to the police, and then considered by a court of law. The courts already have the power to levy unlimited fines.

It is important to remember that political parties are voluntary organisations and not large corporate organisations. Disproportionate regulation could discourage volunteering and undermine local democracy. Political parties and referendum participants of all colours have been fined for breaches of technical reporting requirements.

As I say, the Electoral Commission is operationally independent of the Government and is governed by the Commissioners. The Electoral Commission is accountable to Parliament through the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission.


I do not agree with the view that the requirement for a 'Strategy and Policy Statement' will compromise the independence of the Electoral Commission (EC). While the EC will be required to have regard to the 'Strategy and Policy Statement', this does not give the Government new powers to direct the Electoral Commission's decision-making. It is commonplace for the Government to set a broad policy framework, as approved by Parliament, by which independent regulators should work. This is already the case for Ofcom and Ofgem, for example. The Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission and the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee were consulted on a draft of the statement and the final statement was voted on by a majority in Parliament.

Let me assure you that I believe the statement was compatible with the foundational principle that the Electoral Commission remains operationally independent. I know that the Government has been clear on this fact. The Government had already made substantive revisions to the statement, after the statutory consultation, providing clarifications and reassurances regarding the operational independence of the Electoral Commission. Additionally, it clarified that the statement articulated the Government's view of factors the EC should have regard to, but that Commissioners and the EC's executive leadership remain responsible for determining how it exercises its functions. Therefore, for these reasons, I voted for the 'Draft Electoral Commission Strategy and Policy Statement'.

I am assured that the Government will continue to work closely with the Electoral Commission.



Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

*With best wishes,*  


**TOM PURSGLOVE MP  
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT  
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**