



House of Commons  
Committee on  
Standards and Privileges

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# **Conduct of Nadine Dorries**

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**Twelfth Report of Session 2005–06**





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*Report and Appendices, together with formal  
minutes*

*Ordered by The House of Commons  
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## The Committee on Standards & Privileges

The Committee on Standards and Privileges is appointed by the House of Commons to oversee the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards; to examine the arrangements proposed by the Commissioner for the compilation, maintenance and accessibility of the Register of Members' Interests and any other registers of interest established by the House; to review from time to time the form and content of those registers; to consider any specific complaints made in relation to the registering or declaring of interests referred to it by the Commissioner; to consider any matter relating to the conduct of Members, including specific complaints in relation to alleged breaches in the Code of Conduct which have been drawn to the Committee's attention by the Commissioner; and to recommend any modifications to the Code of Conduct as may from time to time appear to be necessary.

### Current membership

Rt Hon Sir George Young Bt MP (*Conservative, North West Hampshire*) (Chairman)  
Rt Hon Kevin Barron MP (*Labour, Rother Valley*)  
Rt Hon David Curry MP (*Conservative, Skipton & Ripon*)  
Mr Andrew Dismore MP (*Labour, Hendon*)  
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Mr Brian Jenkins MP (*Labour, Tamworth*)  
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Mr Chris Mullin MP (*Labour, Sunderland South*)  
The Hon Nicholas Soames MP (*Conservative, Mid Sussex*)  
Dr Alan Whitehead MP (*Labour, Southampton Test*)

### Powers

The constitution and powers of the Committee are set out in Standing Order No. 149. In particular, the Committee has power to order the attendance of any Member of Parliament before the committee and to require that specific documents or records in the possession of a Member relating to its inquiries, or to the inquiries of the Commissioner, be laid before the Committee. The Committee has power to refuse to allow its public proceedings to be broadcast. The Law Officers, if they are Members of Parliament, may attend and take part in the Committee's proceedings, but may not vote.

### Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at: [www.parliament.uk/sandp](http://www.parliament.uk/sandp). A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Dr Christopher Ward (Clerk), Miss Libby Preston (Second Clerk) and Miss Michelle Owens (Secretary).

### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to The Clerk of the Committee on Standards and Privileges, Journal Office, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 6615.

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## Conduct of Nadine Dorries

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1. We have considered a memorandum by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards relating to complaints against Mrs Nadine Dorries, Member for Mid Bedfordshire, by Mr Simon Lewis and Councillor Neil Cliff. The Commissioner's memorandum is reproduced at Appendix 1.

2. As the Commissioner explains in his memorandum, the complaint relates to a letter written by Mrs Dorries on House of Commons headed stationery, substantial parts of which amount to personal endorsement by her of a candidate in a local authority by-election which was then pending in a ward which partly falls within her constituency.

3. Prior to considering the Commissioner's memorandum, we invited Mrs Dorries' comments on it, and these are reproduced at Appendix 2. Mrs Dorries has repeated both her acceptance that she should not have used House of Commons headed stationery for this purpose and her apology for having done so on this occasion. She also confirmed that she now uses alternative stationery, which does not bear the Portcullis emblem, to endorse candidates seeking election to public office.

4. **There is no dispute as to the facts, and we agree with the Commissioner that the complaints should be upheld.** It should have been clear to Mrs Dorries from the fact that the letter was distributed carrying an imprint, as required by election law, that it amounted to an 'election publication', and was therefore not a letter sent by her in the ordinary course of her parliamentary duties.

5. Mrs Dorries attributes her mistake to confusion in the guidance from the Serjeant at Arms on the permitted uses of parliamentary stationery as to the distinction between 'original' and 'bespoke' stationery. A full reading of the relevant guidance should, however, have left her in no doubt that parliamentary stationery of any type should never be used to support the return of a candidate to public office.

6. **We take this opportunity to remind Members that guidance on the rules relating to the use of House stationery, pre-paid envelopes and the use of the Crowned Portcullis is reproduced in the stationery catalogue, which also makes clear that further advice on the use of House of Commons bespoke stationery may be obtained from the Assistant Serjeant at Arms.**

7. Mrs Dorries also by inference attributes her mistake in part to her relative inexperience as a Member. We note that there is no question in this case of any misuse of public funds: Mrs Dorries has confirmed that none of her parliamentary staff were involved, and she paid for the stationery herself. Having regard to all these factors, and her apologies both to the Commissioner and to us, we do not recommend any further action to the House in this matter. **This was, nonetheless, a clear breach of the rules and, had it been committed by a more experienced Member, we would have taken a different view.**



# Appendix 1: Memorandum from the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

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## Complaints against Nadine Dorries

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### The Complaints

1. On 24 March 2006 I received a letter of complaint (of which he had earlier notified me by e-mail) from Mr Simon Lewis, a constituent of Nadine Dorries, the Member for Mid Bedfordshire. In his letter, the text of which is at WE1, Mr Lewis complained about a letter he and other constituents had recently received from Nadine Dorries, which had been written on House of Commons headed stationery.

2. The letter in question referred to the future of two Post Offices in, respectively, Houghton Conquest and Haynes, and to street surgeries which Nadine Dorries was shortly to hold in these two communities in her constituency. However, the bulk of the letter was devoted to promoting the claims of the Conservative candidate in the by-election which was due to take place in the Houghton Conquest, Haynes, Southill and Old Warden Ward of Mid-Bedfordshire District Council on 16 March 2006. A facsimile of this letter is at WE2.

3. Mr Lewis said:

*“My main objection to the letter would be that it is a blatant piece of electioneering which urges me to vote Conservative. I am sure that Commons paper cannot be used this way. Did the publishers have permission to use the House of Commons heading?”*

The Serjeant at Arms had also received a letter dated 14 March from Councillor Neil Cliff, the Liberal Democrat Group Leader on Mid-Bedfordshire District Council, asking whether Nadine Dorries’ use of what appeared to be House of Commons notepaper in this way was permissible and, if not, what the Serjeant intended to do about it. The Serjeant, aware of Mr Lewis’ intention to complain to me, subsequently passed Councillor Cliff’s letter to me. The text of that letter—which I have regarded as a second complaint—is at WE3.

### Relevant Provisions of the Code of Conduct and Rules of the House

4. Paragraph 14 of the Code of Conduct approved by the House on 13 July 2005 provides:

*“Members shall at all times ensure that their use of expenses, allowances, facilities and services provided from the public purse is strictly in accordance with the rules laid down on these matters, and that they observe any limits placed by the House on the use of such expenses, allowances, facilities and services.”*

5. The facility at issue in this case is the stationery provided to Members for use on official business and, associated with that, the facility of being able to use the principal emblem of the House, the Crowned Portcullis, in carrying out Members’ parliamentary duties. The

Rules on such matters are approved by Mr Speaker on the advice of the Administration Committee. They were reproduced in full with the Committee's Tenth Report of the current Session.<sup>1</sup>

6. Paragraph 1 of the Rules makes clear that the Crowned Portcullis, the principal emblem of the House, is a royal badge and its use by the House has been formally licensed by HM The Queen. It continues:

*“...the designs and symbols of the House should not be used for purposes to which such authentication is inappropriate, or where there is a risk that their use might wrongly be regarded, or represented, as having the authority of the House.”*

Paragraph 3 of the Rules provides that original House stationery provided at public expense should not be used *inter alia* for “supporting the return of any person to public office.” Paragraph 4 says that it should not be used for circulars of any description. However, Members are allowed to purchase or reproduce at their own expense House stationery in order to send out circular letters, and such stationery may include the Crowned Portcullis (paragraph 5). Nonetheless, such circulars must, again, not be used in connection with “supporting the return of any person to public office” (paragraph 6). For ease of reference I have attached the full text of paragraph 3-6 of the rules as WE4.

7. Paragraph 7 of the Rules defines a circular as including:

*“A letter sent in identical or near identical form to a number of addressees (whether or not it is individually signed and addressed) if it is unsolicited, i.e. if it is not sent in reply to queries or correspondence from the addressees.”*

8. The essence of these Rules was most recently conveyed to Members in a leaflet published by the Serjeant at Arms in the summer of 2005 (the text of which is reproduced at WE5). It is also available to Members in guidance notes posted on the Serjeant's section of the Parliamentary intranet.

## **My Inquiries**

9. Following receipt of the complaints by Mr Lewis and Councillor Cliff, I wrote to Nadine Dorries (as at WE6) seeking her response. I have also sought the views of the Serjeant at Arms on the issues raised by the complaints.

## **Nadine Dorries' Response**

10. Nadine Dorries replied to my letter on 24 April. The text of her reply is at WE7. Nadine Dorries said that the stimulus for her letter was concerns raised by local businesses and residents about a leaflet distributed in part of her constituency by local Liberal Democrats. The leaflet had implied that two local post offices, in Haynes and Houghton Conquest,

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<sup>1</sup> HC 1223, Appendix 3.

were to be closed down, whereas one of them had only just opened after a great deal of personal investment by the owner. In order to alleviate the concern expressed by the two businesses, Nadine Dorries had offered to write to residents explaining that the claims made in the leaflet were inaccurate. She had “also used this opportunity to endorse my own support for [the Conservative candidate in the district council by-election].”

11. Nadine Dorries said that, before distributing her letter, she consulted a number of her parliamentary colleagues, who had advised that as long as she paid for the paper used personally, she would have no difficulty. She therefore bought 1250 sheets of the relevant paper, containing the Portcullis emblem and her House of Commons address.

12. At around the time she had bought the paper, she received the Serjeant at Arms’ guidelines regarding use of the paper (i.e. presumably, the leaflet reproduced at WE4). She understood the guidance to say that original House stationery could not be used for unsolicited mail (i.e. for circulars). Since the letterhead she had used was bespoke (i.e. specifically printed) stationery, she believed she was entitled to use it in the way she did.

13. Nadine Dorries concluded that, although she had paid for the stationery herself, she now realised she was wrong:

*“ . . .in using parliamentary stationery in this way—this was certainly not my intention and I would like to take this opportunity to apologise for so doing.”*

She continued:

*“Since this incident I have ordered alternative printed letter headed paper, which does not contain the portcullis logo— to avoid a similar complaint arising again.”*

14. On receipt of her letter, I wrote to Nadine Dorries again posing some supplementary questions: the text of my letter is at WE8. Nadine Dorries replied on 18 May (WE9), confirming that no staff or other facilities of the House had been used in the production or distribution of her letter. She explained that a comment a local newspaper, “The Comet”, had reported her to have made to the effect that she had “satisfied the Serjeant at Arms that nothing irregular [had] happened” had been based on her reading of the Serjeant’s guidance leaflet (see paragraph 13 above).

## The Views of the Serjeant at Arms

15. I shared both Nadine Dorries’ letters (WE7 and WE9) with the Serjeant at Arms. The Serjeant commented:

*“I believe that the rules on unsolicited mailings and the use of the portcullis emblem are clear cut and moreover are understood by the great majority of Members. I remain of the view that she [Nadine Dorries] was incorrect to use the stationery . . .”*

On Nadine Dorries’ reading of the stationery leaflet, the Serjeant observed:

*“I regret that I do not consider that the overprinting of original House stationery turns it into bespoke stationery. The original sheet sent with the complaint letter has the embossed crowned portcullis on it. I suggest that our leaflets make it clear that this paper should not be used, even at a Member’s own expense, in supporting the return of somebody to public office.”*

## Findings of Fact

16. In March 2006 Nadine Dorries circulated to 1250 constituents in the communities of Haynes and Houghton Conquest a letter, responding in part to comments on a leaflet circulated by local Liberal Democrats concerning the future of local post offices. The letter, which was produced and distributed by party volunteers, was printed on stationery which, although purchased by Nadine Dorries from her own pocket, carried her House of Commons letterhead and included the Crowned Portcullis device.

17. The letter referred to “spurious claims” about the post offices; assured residents of their future; and referred to street surgeries Nadine Dorries planned to hold shortly in the two communities. The bulk of the letter, however, urged the merits of the Conservative candidate in a by-election then pending in the relevant ward of Mid-Bedfordshire District Council. It contained an imprint indicating that it had been published on behalf of the Conservative candidate in that by-election.

18. Nadine Dorries says that she believed at the time she distributed the letter that, since she had paid for the stationery involved herself, she was not contravening any rules of the House in sending it. She has since realised that she was wrong to use House stationery in the manner she did and has apologised for doing so.

## Conclusions

19. There is no dispute about the facts relating to the complaints by Mr Lewis and Councillor Cliff. The key question is this. Was Nadine Dorries right, as she believed she was at the time she sent out her letter, that the fact that she had paid herself for the stationery she had used meant that she was not in breach of any rule of the House?

20. Had Nadine Dorries confined her letter to the future of the two local post offices, what she did would have been acceptable. It was a circular but she had paid for the stationery herself and it would have fallen within the scope of paragraph 5 of the Rules. It may be that this is what was reflected in the advice Nadine Dorries says she received from some parliamentary colleagues at the time.

21. However, Nadine Dorries’s inclusion in her letter of material openly advocating support for the Conservative Party candidate in an impending District Council by-election fell foul of the prohibition in paragraph 6 of the Rules. Moreover, in my submission, it also fell foul of the rule on the use of the Crowned Portcullis, in that it involved the use of that emblem in her letterhead in circumstances in which “such authentication is inappropriate or where there is a risk that [its] use might wrongly be regarded, or represented, as having the authority of the House.” The fact that Nadine Dorries’ letter carried an imprint under her name saying that the letter had been published on behalf of the Conservative candidate

in the by-election only serves to highlight its non-parliamentary nature and hence the inappropriateness of her use of House stationery and of the Portcullis emblem.

22. Having looked at the guidance leaflet on stationery and postage issued by the Serjeant in the summer of 2005 (WE5) alongside the original Rules, it is possible that the leaflet is less clear on this point than are the Rules themselves, which until recently have not been readily available to Members. In its Tenth Report of Session 2005-06, the Committee reproduced the Rules and recommended that both the Serjeant at Arms' leaflet and his intranet guidance be revised as soon as possible to set out, in full, the authoritative text, together with appropriate explanatory material including any relevant case law.<sup>2</sup> No doubt if there is any scope for doubt on the matter, the position can be made even clearer in the context of this revision. However, I do not think it can be claimed that, on a plain reading of the text, the present position is, in fact, unclear or that Nadine Dorries' conduct can be excused on this basis.

23. In her letters to me of 24 April and 18 May, Nadine Dorries makes a distinction between official House stationery (i.e. stationery provided by the House at public expense) and bespoke stationery (i.e. stationery for which she had paid). But since the bespoke stationery she used for her letter to constituents simply reproduced the heading and footer she also used on her official House notepaper and to all intents and purposes was thus indistinguishable from her official House stationery, I do not find this argument convincing. Moreover, the distinction is irrelevant in the context of the general prohibition on the use of House stationery in any circumstances for supporting the return of anyone to public office.

24. In evaluating this case, the Committee will no doubt feel it right to take into account the fact that Nadine Dorries was first elected to the House in 2005. She has apologised for her error, as she now accepts it was wrong to use House stationery in the way she did. She has also put in place new arrangements designed to ensure that a similar mistake is not made in future. As she paid for the stationery herself, there is no question in this case of any misuse of public funds.

25. Nonetheless, Nadine Dorries' action was, in my view, a clear breach of the House's stationery rules. **I therefore recommend that the complaints by Mr Lewis and Councillor Cliff be upheld.**

21 June 2006

*Sir Philip Mawer*

# Written evidence received by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

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## **1. Letter to the Commissioner from Mr Simon Lewis, 17 March 2006**

I wish to make a formal complaint about a letter that I received on the 10th March 2006 from my MP, Nadine Dorries. I enclose the letter which has the Crowned Portcullis logo at its head and claims to be from The House of Commons.

My main objection to the letter would be that it is a blatant piece of electioneering which urges me to vote Conservative. I am sure that Commons paper cannot be used this way. Did the publishers have permission to use the House Of Commons heading?

I await your reply with interest.

*17 March 2006*

## 2. Letter to Constituents from Nadine Dorries, March 2006

NADINE DORRIES MP

Mid Bedfordshire



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

March 2006

Dear Resident/s,

I am so concerned about some of the claims that have been made in the recent deluge of Liberal Democrat leaflets (so much for the environment) that I felt I had to write to you personally in order to achieve some level of reasonable balance

The spurious claims regarding the Post Offices in Houghton Conquest and Haynes and the impression that they may be closing down in the very near future are totally untrue. Both Post Offices are trading well and will be here for some considerable time and welcome your continued support. **Angela Barker** is standing as your Conservative candidate on **Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2006**. I have known Angela for some time. She is a lady who is already deeply entrenched in the local community having been one of the original movers and shakers at Keech Cottage Children's Hospice.

A move into local politics is a natural progression for Angela. She regularly holds meetings around her kitchen table summoning both local people, council and government departments to attend. It is not unusual to see an Area Manager of the Environment Agency walking down Angela and Nigel's path with a flea in his ear!

Since I became an MP she is on the phone to my office at least once a week wanting information - now! She is a lady who gets things done and who values action rather than words. I could work well with Angela, which is why she has my total support and why I am asking you to give her yours.

I want to see you represented by someone who I know will work incredibly hard with energy and enthusiasm on your behalf at a local level and who will work with me as a team member. As Angela has already proven, she will continue to work hard on your behalf, not just at election time.

I will be conducting street surgeries in **Houghton Conquest** on **Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2006** at **12noon until 1 00pm** outside the Post Office and in **Haynes** at **2.00pm until 3 00pm** in the Village Hall Car Park with Angela and Simon. Please do come along for a chat, we would love to meet you if we haven't already. If you are unable to attend, please do vote for Angela on the 16<sup>th</sup> and give her your support. I know it is just another thing to do in your already busy day, however, we know that you understand the threat rural communities are under and the importance of a strong local team.

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nadine".

**Nadine Dorries**

*Member of Parliament for Mid-Beds*

Published by John Lewis on behalf of Angela Barker both of Biggleswade Conservative Club, St Andrew's Street Biggleswade Beds SG18 8BA. Printed by Mid-Beds Conservative Association St Michael's Close High Street, Shefford Beds SG17 5DD.

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dorriesn@parliament.uk www.dorries.org.uk

### 3. Letter to the Serjeant at Arms from Cllr Neil Cliff, 14 March 2006

A by-election will take place on March 16th 2006 for a vacant District Councillor seat in the Haynes and Houghton Conquest Ward of Mid-Bedfordshire District Council, Mid-Bedfordshire District, Bedfordshire.

Election literature is being delivered in the various villages which make up the Ward, which is split between two Constituencies, Mid-Bedfordshire and North East Bedfordshire.

I enclose a letter written by Ms Nadine Dorries MP for Mid-Bedfordshire copied on to what appears to be House of Commons notepaper.<sup>3</sup>

I would be interested to know whether this is allowed, because of course we might wish to do the same using one of our Liberal Democrat MP's.

However, if not permissible, perhaps you could let me know what you intend to do, and in any case what would be the notional cost of the notepaper.

*14 March 2006*

### 4. Extract from the Rules on the use of the House emblem, House of Commons Stationery and pre-paid envelopes

#### *Original House Stationery*

3. Original House stationery which is provided at public expense should not be used for the following purposes:—

- a) communications of a business or commercial nature;
- b) personal correspondence, other than in modest quantities;
- c) correspondence of Associate Parliamentary Groups which include persons other than Members of Parliament;
- d) in connection with fund raising for the benefit of a political party, advocating membership of a political party, or supporting the return of any person to public office.

4. Original House stationery should not be used for circulars of any description.

#### *Circulars (see also 4 above)*

5. Members who wish to send out circulars may purchase the original House stationery, or, at their own expense, may photocopy or by other means reproduce such stationery which may include the Crowned Portcullis or the Royal Arms, whether or not associated with the words 'House of Commons'.

6. Such circulars must not be used:—

- a) for correspondence of a business, commercial or personal nature; or
- b) in connection with fund raising for the benefit of a political party, advocating the membership of a political party, or supporting the return of any person to public office.

- c) An Associate Parliamentary Group which includes persons other than Members of Parliament may make use of House emblems on stationery other than original House stationery, subject to this and rule 5 above.

## 5. Guidance on the use of Stationery, Post-paid Envelopes and the Crowned Portcullis from the Serjeant at Arms' Department, Summer 2005

House of Commons stationery is provided at public expense and is therefore subject to a set of rules approved by the Speaker, on the recommendation of the Administration Committee. The same applies to use of the Crowned Portcullis, the principal emblem of the House. In each case application and interpretation usually rests on the good sense of individual Members, with supervision and enforcement by the Serjeant at Arms.

### When can original House stationery and post paid envelopes\* be used at public expense?

- In solicited reply to written contact from constituents
- In solicited reply to names and addresses on petitions addressed directly to the Member
- In response to direct contact (eg doorstep, public meetings, surgeries)
- Unsolicited items such as newsletters, cards and calendars must not be included with solicited mailings
- Members are advised to keep accurate records of any such contact.

\*Post paid envelopes should be safeguarded to prevent misuse and not be overprinted in any way. Spoilt envelopes should be sent back to the Postmaster for refund of postage.

### When can original House stationery and plain envelopes be used, at a Member's own expense? \*\*

- For unsolicited circulars and letters on constituency issues
- Questionnaires or surveys that are 'politically neutral'
- In response to answers from surveys/questionnaires
- For surgery/contact details
- Welcome to new constituents letters
- To send any type of greeting card
- Correspondence of All Party Groups which include people who are not Members of Parliament.

\*\*Please note some circulars and their distribution costs can be claimed through Incidental Expenses Provision (IEP). Members should check with Finance and Administration Department.

### When can original House stationery and envelopes NOT be used?

- Personal, business or commercial correspondence
- In connection with fund raising for a political party
- Advocating membership of a political party
- Supporting the return of somebody to public office.

### How can stationery be ordered?

Members and their staff can order stationery for Parliamentary or constituency offices from the House of Commons Stationery catalogue or on line at <sup>\*\*\*</sup>. This will be delivered the next working day to Westminster or any other designated UK address. Serjeant at Arms' staff can provide complete stationery ordering packs.

### Can post-paid envelopes be used for overseas addresses?

Only for BFPO numbered addresses. Post-paid envelopes valid for European destinations are available from the stationery catalogue.

### Are there special rules for times when Parliament has been dissolved?

Yes—House stationery, House emblems and post-paid envelopes must not be used during the period of dissolution. In correspondence ex-Members must not use the title MP or the House of Commons address until the day after Polling Day if re-elected.

### What are the rules for use of the Crowned Portcullis?

The Crowned Portcullis is a royal badge and its use by the House has been formally authorised by licence granted by Her Majesty the Queen. The designs and symbols of the House should only be used for appropriate purposes and not when it might be wrongly regarded or represented as carrying the authority of the House when this is not the case.

### Can Associated Parliamentary Groups use the Crowned Portcullis?

Those which include people other than Members of Parliament may use stationery other than original House stationery, subject to the same rules as those applying to Members and their use of Original House Stationery for circulars.

### Where can I get further information about supplies of House of Commons stationery?

From the House of Commons Stationery Helpdesk or the Senior Office Keeper.

### Who can advise me on appropriate use of House of Commons stationery?

If in doubt please telephone the Serjeant at Arms office.

## 6. Letter to Nadine Dorries from the Commissioner, 27 March 2006

I have received a complaint from one of your constituents, a Mr Simon Lewis, about a letter on what appears to be your House of Commons stationery which was circulated during the recent by-election in the Haynes and Houghton Conquest Ward of Mid-Bedfordshire District Council. Mr Lewis (a copy of whose letter, confirming an earlier e-mail, is enclosed)<sup>4</sup> questions the use of House stationery and the House's crowned portcullis emblem, for this purpose.

The Serjeant at Arms has passed me a letter from Councillor Neil Cliff, Liberal Democrat Group Leader on the District Council, raising a similar query.<sup>5</sup>

The Code of Conduct approved by the House last July includes a provision that:

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4 Not appended to the Commissioner's report

5 WE3

*“Members shall at all times ensure that their use of expenses, allowances, facilities and services provided from the public purse is strictly in accordance with the rules laid down on these matters, and that they observe any limits placed by the House on the use of such expenses, allowances, facilities and services.”*

The rules on the use of House stationery promulgated by Mr Speaker on the advice of the Administration Committee provide that House stationery must not be used to support the return of anyone to public office. The crowned portcullis emblem is not to be used where its use might wrongly be regarded or represented as carrying the authority of the House.

I enclose a procedural note I send all Members who are the subject of a complaint.<sup>6</sup> In accordance with this, I should be grateful if you will let me have your response to Mr Lewis’s complaint. It would be helpful if this included information about whether actual House stationery was used for your letter, how many copies of the letter were produced and how they were distributed. Could you also say whether any other facilities of the House or the time of any staff paid out of parliamentary allowances were used in connection with the production and distribution of the letter?

According to a journalist for “Bedfordshire on Sunday” who contacted my office about this complaint, people associated with you (she used the phrase ‘Mrs Dorries’ camp’) claimed that you had been granted permission to pen the letter on House of Commons notepaper. Could you let me know whether such a claim was made on your behalf and if so, by whom and with what justification?

If you wish a word, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to the Serjeant at Arms, who I will be consulting about the issues raised by the complaint.

27 March 2006

## 7. Letter to the Commissioner from Nadine Dorries, 24 April 2006

With reference to your recent letter to myself regarding the above—may I first of all take this opportunity to thank you for your patience in the amount of time you have given me to reply. As you will no doubt be aware, Cllr Neil Cliff is a Liberal Democrat District Councillor and the letter of complaint is from a Liberal Democrat party activist.

The by-election to which I refer in the letter distributed, took place in a ward partly located in the Mid-Bedfordshire Parliamentary Constituency, to Mid-Bedfordshire District Council—Mrs Angela Barker was standing as the Conservative Party candidate.

Supporting a candidate by personal letter to constituents is not something I would usually choose to do, however I felt motivated to do so in this case, due to concerns raised by local businesses and residents about a misleading and inaccurate leaflet distributed by the Liberal Democrats. The leaflet concerned had implied that two local Post Offices were to be closed down, one of the Post Offices had only just opened after a great deal of personal investment by the owner and the leaflet both angered and alarmed both the businesses concerned. In order to ameliorate the situation I offered to write to residents explaining that the claims made by the Lib-Dems were inaccurate and also used this opportunity to endorse my own support for Mrs Angela Barker.

Before the letter was distributed I consulted a number of my parliamentary colleagues who I am aware have also written to residents in their constituencies and was advised that as long as the paper used was paid by me personally—and not via any parliamentary allowance/expenses—it would be permitted. I therefore purchased

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6 Not appended to the Commissioner’s report

the required number of reams before I wrote the letter—for your information copies of the invoices are enclosed<sup>7</sup>

I understand that at the time I purchased the reams of paper, the Sergeant at Arms Dept sent to my office guidelines regarding use of the paper. Having read the guidance I understood that it was Members' use of Original House Stationery that was not to be used for unsolicited mail. As the letterhead I used was bespoke stationery, with the contact details for my Westminster Office included, I believed I was entitled to use the stationery in the manner that I did.

Since the by-election took place, local Liberal Democrats have attempted to imply that tax payers' money was used in the production of the letter, which I strongly refute. However, it does appear that I was wrong in using parliamentary stationery in this way—this was certainly not my intention and I would like to take this opportunity to apologise for so doing.

Since this incident I have ordered alternative printed letter headed paper, which does not contain the portcullis logo—to avoid a similar complaint arising again.

I hope the content of this letter is of use during your investigation into this matter—however if there are any further points that you consider may need clarification, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to receiving the outcome of your investigation in due course.

*24 April 2006*

## **8. Letter to Nadine Dorries from the Commissioner, 2 May 2006**

Thank you for your letter of 24 April in response to mine of 27 March about this complaint. I am in touch with the Serjeant at Arms about your explanation of the circumstances surrounding the complaint, and when I have his reply will be in touch with you again.

In the meantime, I wonder if you can clarify one matter for me. According to the enclosed report in The Comet newspaper of 30 March, you have received some indication from the Serjeant's office that your use of House notepaper on this occasion was not irregular. Is this so? Are you correctly reported in the story?

At the same time it would be helpful if you could answer the following questions posed in my original letter but not covered in your recent reply:

1. how many copies of your circular letter were produced? I assume (from the invoices you sent me) the answer is 1250 but it would be good to have this confirmed.
2. how was the circular letter distributed?
3. were any facilities of the House or the time of any staff paid out of parliamentary allowances used in connection with the production and distribution of the letter?
4. do you have any comment on the claim made by a 'Bedfordshire on Sunday' journalist that people associated with you had claimed that you had been granted permission to use House of Commons notepaper?

I am copying this letter to the Serjeant.

*2 May 2006*

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<sup>7</sup> Not appended to the Commissioner's report.

## 9. Letter to the Commissioner from Nadine Dorries, 18 May 2006

With reference to your most recent letter to myself regarding the above, I would like to take this opportunity to answer those points on which you seek further clarification.

With regard to your query about the report in the Comet Newspaper of 30 March 2006, claiming that I had received some indication from the Serjeant at Arms Office that my use of House notepaper on this occasion was not irregular, as I stated in my original correspondence to you, this was based on the understanding, that at the time I purchased the reams of paper, the Serjeant at Arms Dept sent to my office guidelines regarding use of the paper. Having read the guidance I understood that it was Members' use of Original House Stationery that was not to be used for unsolicited mail. As the letterhead I used was bespoke stationery, with the contact details for my Westminster Office included, I believed I was entitled to use the stationery in the manner that I did, I hope this helps to answer your query on this matter.

As to your further queries, I can clarify them as follows:

1. The number of letters that were produced correlates to the copies of the invoices I purchased - ie 1250 letters were printed.
2. The circular letter was distributed by hand, by volunteer deliverers in my constituency.
3. No facilities of the House and no time of any of my members of staff paid out of parliamentary allowances were used in connection with the production and distribution of the letter.
4. I have no comment to make with regard to a comment attributed to a journalist from the Bedfordshire on Sunday Newspaper, as it is the policy of my office not to make comments to this particular publication.

I hope this letter answers your queries, but should you have any further points that may need further clarification then please do not hesitate to get in contact with me.

*18 May 2006*

## Appendix 2: Letter to the Clerk of the Committee from Nadine Dorries, 26 June 2006

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With reference to your recent letter to myself dated 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2006—may I first of all take this opportunity to thank you for providing me with copies of all the relevant documentation for the Committee’s consideration into this matter.

For your information I do not intend to give oral evidence to the Committee, although I would appreciate it if the following comments were brought to the attention of Members. As I have previously stated, I recognise that I was wrong to use parliamentary stationery in this way and have apologised for doing so.

For the avoidance of doubt it does not state in the report that Mr Simon Lewis is a Liberal-Democrat party activist, whom I met personally whilst delivering leaflets in the by-election campaign.

As I have previously stated, I did make enquiries before I wrote the letter—the guidance from the Serjeant at Arms refers to House of Commons paper which does not have an MP’s name printed on it, as ‘original’ stationery which is where the confusion arose regarding ‘original’ and ‘bespoke’. I understand that the Serjeant at Arms intends to revise the wording of guidance on this matter to ensure greater clarity for Members.

As I have already stated, in elections subsequent to this by-election I have used alternative stationery which does not have the Portcullis emblem on it when endorsing candidates seeking election to public office.

The production, distribution, supply and printing of the letters concerned did not cost the taxpayer a single penny. The letterheads were paid for by myself, delivered by hand by local volunteer activists and did not involve the use of my parliamentary staff.

As previously stated, I offer my most sincere apologies for what was a genuine mistake as a newly elected Member of Parliament.

*Nadine Dorries*

*26 June 2006*

## Formal minutes

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**Tuesday 27 June 2006**

Members present:

Sir George Young, in the Chair

Mr Kevin Barron

Mr David Curry

Mr Andrew Dismore

Mr Chris Mullin

The Hon Nicholas Soames

Dr Alan Whitehead

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The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report [Conduct of Nadine Dorries], proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the Chairman's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 6 read and agreed to.

Paragraph 7 read, amended and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report, as amended, be the Twelfth Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Several Papers were ordered to be appended to the Report.

*Ordered*, That the Appendices to the Report be reported to the House.—(*The Chairman.*)

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[Adjourned till Tuesday 11 July at 10.30 am

# Reports from the Committee on Standards and Privileges in the current Parliament

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## Session 2005–06

First Report	Conduct of Mr Jonathan Sayeed	HC 419
Second Report	Conduct of Mr John Horam	HC 420
Third Report	Conduct of Mr Tony Baldry	HC 421
Fourth Report	Pay for Standing Committee Chairmen	HC 568
Fifth Report	Electoral Administration Bill: Simplification of Reporting Requirements	HC 807
Sixth Report	Mr Stephen Byers (Matter referred on 19 October 2005)	HC 854
Seventh Report	Conduct of Mr George Galloway	HC 1067
Eighth Report	Conduct of Mr Mark Lancaster	HC 1144
Ninth Report	Lobbying and All Party Groups	HC 1145
Tenth	Conduct of Mr Michael Foster (Worcester)	HC 1223
Eleventh	Conduct of Ms Emily Thornberry	HC 1367
Twelfth	Conduct of Nadine Dorries	HC 1368