



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
Westminster
London – SW1A 2AA

23.07.2020

Dear

Prime Minister

I am writing to you today as a matter of urgency requesting the immediate investigation into serious allegations of corruption and gerrymandering, which have been raised against Havering Council Conservative Group, and the Council Leader.

These shocking revelations were brought to the fore by a leaked recording released to the press on Monday 13 July. The 32-minute recording documents a Conservative Group meeting held on Monday 3 February and raises serious concerns surrounding the abuse of power and misconduct of elected representatives and senior civil servants.

As the Member of Parliament for Dagenham and Rainham which incorporates South Hornchurch and Elm Park within the London Borough of Havering, I can confirm that I have already raised this issue with the Local Government Boundary Commission and the Monitoring Officer at Havering Council. I would have written to the Secretary of State for Local Government as my next port of call but considering the current controversies surrounding the Minister, I felt it inappropriate.

The content of the recording includes Cllr White expressing that the Chief Executive has allowed him to manipulate the process for political gain stating; ***"he has agreed for some reason to allow me to influence the proposals and I've been able to."*** He also goes on to insinuate that the MP for Romford has also been allowed to influence the proposals, alleging that he had met with the MP to check which option would deliver the largest political win. He explained to the Conservative Group that ***"we've come up with a set of proposals that I think are really politically advantageous for us."***

As you will be aware, gerrymandering is a serious allegation which should prompt an immediate investigation. You will no doubt remember the 'Homes for votes' scandal of the late 80's/90's where the Conservative Leader of Westminster Council was alleged to have moved population numbers in order to rig the electoral system. That debacle prompted two major investigations which found Shirley Porter guilty of "wilful misconduct" and "disgraceful and improper gerrymandering".

The recently leaked recording from within the Havering Conservative Group shows the council leadership in detailed discussion, stating that they have met with civil servants to manipulate the boundary changes for political gain.

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CLLr White is directly quoted as saying: ***"Funnily enough, the one officer that is able to use the computer programme is Joshua's [Councillor Chapman] cousin."*** On the recording the Conservative Group laugh at this as CLLr White continues; ***"he's the chap who's been able to govern the boundaries and what not."***

CLLr White's remarks and lack of objection from within the meeting suggest that the entire Conservative Group are complicit. This must now be subject to a full investigation, and if substantiated, those implicated must face the consequences.

As the holder of high office, you will know the importance of abiding by the seven principles of public life which consist of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and leadership. If the recording is accurate and the allegations are found to be true pending a full investigation then action should follow.

The Council Leader is also heard alleging that the Chief Executive has aided him, by allowing the Governance Committee to 'filter' the options so that only the Conservative Group's preferred option is discussed at Full Council. He goes on to explain that this process will undermine the ability of the LGBC to investigate the matter further, which is why it is so crucial that these decisions are subject to external scrutiny.

"[The Chief Executive] has now agreed that we can have a Governance Committee Meeting to discuss the four options, pick which one we like, make any recommendations and changes to it and that then goes on to Full Council as an administration amendment or a motion... By changing it and having Governance Committee filter, we can argue that there's cross-party involvement in the boundary proposals we have brought forward."

As it stands, it appears that the independence of the boundary change system has been undermined. The recording erodes public confidence in the political process.

I am urging you to investigate this matter further, both within the Conservative Party and through the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. I look forward to your response on this matter.

Kind regards

Jon Cruddas MP

Member of Parliament for Dagenham and Rainham
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