

7 August 2025

Simon Hoare MP
Chair
Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

By email

Dear Chair,

PROPRIETY, ETHICS AND THE WIDER STANDARDS LANDSCAPE IN THE UK

I am writing in response to your committee's inquiry into propriety, ethics and the wider standards landscape in the UK.

Carnegie UK is a foundation that works to improve collective wellbeing through effective public policy. One of the ways we do this is by producing our annual Life in the UK Index which has been developed in partnership with Ipsos and measures the collective wellbeing of people in the UK across social, economic, environmental and democratic domains. Our most recent research highlights the urgent need to strengthen democratic wellbeing across the UK: Life in the UK 2024 showed that democratic wellbeing remains the lowest-scoring domain of the four, with scores of 41/100 in England, 39/100 in Scotland and Wales, and just 35/100 in Northern Ireland.¹

Following similar results in 2023, these figures reflect a persistent and systemic crisis in public trust and democratic engagement and show that huge numbers of people do not believe that they can trust or influence the people or institutions that affect their lives. Our findings for 2025, which will be published in the autumn, indicate that this crisis shows no significant signs of abating.

We urge the Committee to consider the following key points in the course of its inquiry:

- Trust in institutions is low and fragile. 53% of people in the UK report low levels of trust in the UK Government. 72% feel they cannot influence decisions affecting the UK, and 55% feel unable to influence decisions at a local level. Trust in local

¹ Paylor (2024), [Life in the UK: A measure of the UK's collective wellbeing](#). Carnegie UK: Dunfermline.

councils has also declined, with 28% expressing low trust—up from 26% in 2023.²

- Poor behaviour by individual politicians and officials is not the sole cause of this crisis. While ethical standards are vital, the solution cannot lie solely in tougher rules for elected members. A broader, systemic response is required.
- Democratic institutions must evolve to engage better with the public. As outlined in research from our Engaging Democracy programme, trust improves when people have more meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Carefully designed initiatives such as citizen juries and panels are a practical way to help rebuild trust and legitimacy, provided they actively feed into a decision-making process and are not treated as an extension of the consultation process.³
- Government must measure what matters. The current crisis in trust is exacerbated by the absence of a shared, meaningful narrative about how the UK is doing. The ONS Measures of National Wellbeing provide vital data on trust, agency, and democratic engagement. We urge the Committee to recommend continued investment in this dataset and to support the development of a more holistic outcomes framework that reflects what people value most.⁴

We believe that the Committee's inquiry presents a rare opportunity to reimagine the standards landscape in a way that strengthens democracy, rebuilds trust, and enhances collective wellbeing. Later this year, Carnegie UK will conduct additional targeted analysis of our Life in the UK data on democratic wellbeing to enhance understanding of the factors that drive this crisis of trust in democracy. We would be pleased to share this with the Committee ahead of wider dissemination.

If members have any further questions for Carnegie UK, please do not hesitate to get in touch with a member of our team (E; stuart.mackinnon@carnegieuk.org).

With all good wishes



Sarah Davidson

Chief Executive
sarah.davidson@carnegieuk.org

² Ibid.

³ Carnegie UK, [Engaging Democracy programme](#).

⁴ Office for National Statistics, [UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard](#).