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THE PRIME MINISTER

3 December 2018

Dear Sir Stuart


Thank you for your letter of 7 November.

As part of the Civil Society Strategy, the Government recognises the importance of the voice of charities and social enterprises in speaking out on behalf of beneficiaries, and in contributing their valuable insights and expertise to the development of Government policy. I maintain that it is vital that the sector's independence and freedom of speech are protected to allow charities and social enterprises to continue providing a voice for everyday people.

Government contracts do include provisions to ensure that providers adhere to the high standards we expect. This helps us to respond in a reasonable and proportionate manner if a provider brings our reputation into disrepute by, for example, breaking employment law or using dangerous, unfair or unethical practices.

However, I want to be clear that these provisions are in no way 'gagging clauses'. They do not stop providers or affiliates from fairly criticising Government departments or Government policy. Furthermore, they do not prevent charities from campaigning for any particular cause and would never be used as a means of attempting to stifle debate or prevent legitimate criticism. Please be assured that the Government will consider ways of clarifying future contracts and grant agreements in order to address the unfortunate perception that has arisen regarding these clauses.

I do hope this provides the clarity you are seeking and would like to thank you, once again, for writing.

Your sincerely


Sir Stuart Etherington