

Sue Gray Report – House of Commons - Hansard 31-1-2022

15:31:00

The Prime Minister (Boris Johnson)

With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement. First, I express my deepest gratitude to Sue Gray and all the people who have contributed to this report, which I have placed in the Library of this House and which the Government have published in full today for everyone to read.

I will address the report's findings in this statement, but first I want to say sorry. I am sorry for the things we simply did not get right and sorry for the way this matter has been handled. It is no use saying that this or that was within the rules, and it is no use saying that people were working hard—this pandemic was hard for everyone. We asked people across this country to make the most extraordinary sacrifices—not to meet loved ones, not to visit relatives before they died—and I understand the anger that people feel.

But it is not enough to say sorry. This is a moment when we must look at ourselves in the mirror, and we must learn. While the Metropolitan police must yet complete their investigation, and that means there are no details of specific events in Sue Gray's report, I of course accept Sue Gray's general findings in full, and above all her recommendation that we must learn from these events and act now.

With respect to the events under police investigation, she says:

“No conclusions should be drawn, or inferences made from this other than it is now for the police to consider the relevant material in relation to those incidents.”

More broadly, she finds:

“There is significant learning to be drawn from these events which must be addressed immediately across Government. This does not need to wait for the police investigations to be concluded.”

That is why we are making changes now to the way Downing Street and the Cabinet Office run, so that we can get on with the job—the job that I was elected to do, and the job that this Government were elected to do.

First, it is time to sort out what Sue Gray rightly calls the “fragmented and complicated” leadership structures of Downing Street, which she says

“have not evolved sufficiently to meet the demands”

of the expansion of No. 10. We will do that, including by creating an Office of the Prime Minister, with a permanent secretary to lead No. 10.

Secondly, it is clear from Sue Gray’s report that it is time not just to review the civil service and special adviser codes of conduct, wherever necessary, to ensure that they take account of Sue Gray’s recommendations, but to make sure that those codes are properly enforced. Thirdly, I will be saying more in the coming days about the steps we will take to improve the No. 10 operation and the work of the Cabinet Office, to strengthen Cabinet Government, and to improve the vital connection between No. 10 and Parliament.

Mr Speaker, I get it and I will fix it. I want to say to the people of this country: I know what the issue is. [Hon. Members: “No!”] Yes. [Hon. Members: “You!”] It is whether this Government can be trusted to deliver. And I say yes, we can be trusted—yes, we can be trusted to deliver. We said that we would get Brexit done, and we did. We are setting up freeports around the whole United Kingdom. I have been to one of them today that is creating tens of thousands of new jobs. We said we would get this country through covid, and we did. We delivered the fastest vaccine roll-out in Europe and the fastest booster programme of any major economy, so that we have been able to restore people’s freedoms faster than any comparable economy. At the same time, we have been cutting crime by 14%, building 40 new hospitals and rolling out gigabit broadband, and delivering all the promises of our 2019 agenda, so that we have the fastest economic growth of the G7. We have shown that we have done things that people thought were impossible, and that we can deliver for the British people. [Interruption.] I remind those on the Opposition Benches that the reason we are coming out of covid so fast is partly because we doubled the speed of the booster roll-out.

I can tell the House and this country that we are going to bring the same energy and commitment to getting on with the job, to delivering for the British people, and to our mission to unite and level up across this country. I commend this statement to the House.

15:37:00

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab)

I would like to thank Sue Gray for the diligence and professionalism with which she has carried out her work. It is no fault of hers that she has only been able to produce an update today, not the full report.

The Prime Minister repeatedly assured the House that the guidance was followed and the rules were followed. But we now know that 12 cases have reached the threshold of criminal investigation, which I remind the House means that there is evidence of serious and flagrant breaches of lockdown, including the party on 20 May 2020, which we know the Prime Minister attended, and the party on 13 November 2020 in the Prime Minister's flat. There can be no doubt that the Prime Minister himself is now subject to criminal investigation.

The Prime Minister must keep his promise to publish Sue Gray's report in full when it is available. But it is already clear that the report discloses the most damning conclusion possible. Over the last two years, the British public have been asked to make the most heart-wrenching sacrifices—a collective trauma endured by all, enjoyed by none. Funerals have been missed, dying relatives have been unvisited. Every family has been marred by what we have been through. And revelations about the Prime Minister's behaviour have forced us all to rethink and relive those darkest moments. Many have been overcome by rage, by grief and even by guilt. Guilt that because they stuck to the law, they did not see their parents one last time. Guilt that because they did not bend the rules, their children went months without seeing friends. Guilt that because they did as they were asked, they did not go and visit lonely relatives.

But people should not feel guilty. They should feel pride in themselves and their country, because by abiding by those rules they have saved the lives of people they will probably never meet. They have shown the deep public spirit and the love and respect for others that has always characterised this nation at its best.

Our national story about covid is one of a people who stood up when they were tested, but that will be forever tainted by the behaviour of this Conservative Prime Minister. By routinely breaking the rules he set, the Prime Minister took us all for fools. He held people's sacrifice in contempt. He showed himself unfit for office.

The Prime Minister's desperate denials since he was exposed have only made matters worse. Rather than come clean, every step of the way, he has insulted the public's intelligence. Now he has finally fallen back on his usual excuse: it is everybody's fault but his. They go; he stays. Even now, he is hiding behind a police investigation into criminality in his home and his office.

The Prime Minister gleefully treats what should be a mark of shame as a welcome shield, but the British public are not fools. They never believed a word of it. They think that the Prime Minister should do the decent thing and resign. Of course, he will not, because he is a man without shame. Just as he has done throughout the life, he has damaged everyone and everything around him along the way. His colleagues have spent weeks defending the indefensible, touring the TV studios, parroting his absurd denials, degrading themselves and their offices, fraying the bond of trust between the Government—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker

Order. The hon. Member for South Ribble (Katherine Fletcher) is my neighbour. I expect better from my neighbours.

Keir Starmer

They have spent weeks fraying the bond of trust between the Government and the public, eroding our democracy and the rule of law.

Margaret Thatcher once said:

“The first duty of Government is to uphold the law. If it tries to bob and weave and duck around that duty when its inconvenient...then so will the governed”.

To govern this country is an honour, not a birthright. It is an act of service to the British people, not the keys to a court to parade to friends. It requires honesty, integrity and moral authority. I cannot tell hon. Members how many times

people have said to me that this Prime Minister's lack of integrity is somehow "priced in"—that his behaviour and character do not matter. I have never accepted that and I never will.

Whatever people's politics, whatever party they vote for, honesty and decency matter. Our great democracy depends on them. Cherishing and nurturing British democracy is what it means to be patriotic. There are Conservative Members who know that, and they know that the Prime Minister is incapable of it. The question that they must now ask themselves is what they are going to do about it.

Conservative Members can heap their reputation, the reputation of their party, and the reputation of this country on the bonfire that is the Prime Minister's leadership, or they can spare the country a Prime Minister totally unworthy of his responsibilities. It is their duty to do so. They know better than anyone how unsuitable he is for high office. Many of them knew in their hearts that we would inevitably come to this one day and they know that, as night follows day, continuing his leadership will mean further misconduct, cover-up and deceit. Only they can end this farce. The eyes of the country are upon them. They will be judged by the decisions they take now.

The Prime Minister

There is a reason why the right hon. and learned Gentleman said absolutely nothing about the report that was presented by the Government and put in the Library of this House earlier today. That is because the report does absolutely nothing to substantiate the tissue of nonsense that he has just spoken—absolutely nothing. Instead, this Leader of the Opposition, a former Director of Public Prosecutions—although he spent most of his time prosecuting journalists and failing to prosecute Jimmy Savile, as far as I can make out—chose to use this moment continually to prejudge a police inquiry. That is what he chose to do. He has reached his conclusions about it. I am not going to reach any conclusions, and he would be entirely wrong to do so. I direct him again to what Sue Gray says in her report about the conclusions that can be drawn from her inquiry about what the police may or may not do. I have complete confidence in the police, and I hope that they will be allowed simply to get on with their job. I do not propose to offer any more commentary about it, and I do not believe that he should either.

I must say to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, with greatest respect to those on the Opposition Benches, that what I think the country wants us all in this House to focus on are the issues that matter to them and getting on with taking this country forward. Today, we have delivered yet more Brexit freedoms with a new freeport in Tilbury, as I said, when he voted 48 times to take this country back into the EU. We have the most open society, the most open economy—[Interruption.] This is I think what people want us to focus on. We have the most open society and the most open economy in Europe because of the vaccine roll-out, because of the booster roll-out, and never forget that he voted to keep us in the European Medicines Agency, which would have made that impossible. Today, we are standing together with our NATO allies against the potential aggression of Vladimir Putin, when he wanted, not so long ago, to install as Prime Minister a Labour leader who would actually have abolished NATO. That is what he believes in and those are his priorities. Well, I can say to him: he can continue with his political opportunism; we are going to get on and I am going to get on with the job.

Mrs Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con)

The covid regulations imposed significant restrictions on the freedoms of members of the public. They had a right to expect their Prime Minister to have read the rules, to understand the meaning of the rules—and, indeed, those around them him to have done so, too—and to set an example in following those rules. What the Gray report does show is that No. 10 Downing Street was not observing the regulations they had imposed on members of the public, so either my right hon. Friend had not read the rules, or did not understand what they meant—and others around him—or they did not think the rules applied to No. 10. Which was it?

The Prime Minister

I would say, with great respect to my right hon. Friend—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker

Order. It is a very important question, and I want to hear the answer, even if other people do not.

The Prime Minister

No, that is not what the Gray report says. [Interruption.] It is not what the Gray

report says, but I suggest that my right hon. Friend waits to see the conclusion of the inquiry.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP)

Can I say that it is a pleasure to follow the former Prime Minister? Perhaps her behaviour in office, like that of many who went before her, was about dignity and about the importance of the office, of respect and of truthfulness, and the Prime Minister would be well advised to focus on those who have not dishonoured the office like he has done.

We stand here today faced with the systematic decimation of public trust in Government and the institutions of the state, and at its heart a Prime Minister—a Prime Minister—being investigated by the police. So here we have it: the long-awaited Sue Gray report—what a farce. It was carefully engineered to be a fact-finding exercise with no conclusions, and now we find it is a fact-finding exercise with no facts, so let us talk facts. The Prime Minister has told the House that

“all guidance was followed completely”—[Official Report, 1 December 2021; Vol. 704, c. 909.]

that “there was no party”, covid rules were followed, and

“I believed...this was a work event”.—[Official Report, 12 January 2022; Vol. 706, c. 562.]

Nobody—nobody—believed him then, and nobody believes you now, Prime Minister. That is the crux. No ifs, no buts; he has wilfully misled Parliament.

Mr Speaker

Order. It would be acceptable to say “inadvertently misled the House”, but “misled the House” is not acceptable. The right hon. Member must withdraw that comment.

Ian Blackford

The Prime Minister inadvertently told the House on 8 December that no parties had taken place and then he had to admit that they had.

It is bad enough that the Prime Minister's personal integrity is in the ditch, but this murky business is tainting everything around it. It is the Scottish National party's intention to submit a motion instructing the Prime Minister to publish the Gray report in full. Will the Prime Minister obey an instruction by this House to publish as required?

Amid allegations of blackmail by Tory Whips, Tory Members have been defending the indefensible. We were told, "Wait for the report." Well, here it is, and it tells us very little—except it does state that

"There were failures of leadership and judgment by different parts of No. 10"

and that

"Some...events should not have been allowed to take place."

That is the Prime Minister's responsibility. If there was any honour in public life, he would resign. Where is—[Laughter.] The Prime Minister laughs. We ought to remind ourselves in this House that 150,000-plus of our citizens have lost their lives and family members could not be with them. That is a sight that people will remember: a Prime Minister laughing at our public. I extend the hand of friendship to all those who have sacrificed. I certainly do not extend the hand of friendship to the Prime Minister, who is no friend of mine.

Where is the shame? Where is the dignity? Meanwhile, the police investigation will drag on and on. Every moment the Prime Minister stays, trust in Government and the rule of law is ebbing away. With the litany of rule breaking, the culture of contempt and the utter disdain for the anguish felt by the public who have sacrificed so much, what the public see is a man who has debased the office of Prime Minister, shirked responsibility, dodged accountability and blamed his staff at every turn, presided over sleaze and corruption and tainted the very institutions of the state. In short—[Laughter.] Government Members can laugh, but the public know that this is a man they can no longer trust. He is being investigated by the police. He misled the House. He must now resign.

Mr Speaker

Order. The right hon. Member will have to withdraw that last comment.

Ian Blackford

Mr Speaker, I gave the evidence of 8 December.

Mr Speaker

Order. You will have to withdraw “misled”.

Ian Blackford

Mr Speaker, the Prime Minister has misled the House.

Mr Speaker

Order. Unless you withdraw, I will have to stop, and that is not good. Just withdraw the words.

Ian Blackford

I am standing up for my constituents who know that this Prime Minister has lied and misled the House.

Mr Speaker

Order. I will give you, as leader of the SNP, one more chance to say “inadvertently misled.” I do not want to have to throw you out, so I will give you this chance. Please.

Ian Blackford

I will speak truth to power. That man has misled the House.

Mr Speaker

Order. I am sorry that it has come to this, and I am sorry that the leader of the party has not got the decency just to withdraw those words in order that this debate can be represented by all political leaders. Would you like to say “inadvertently”?

Ian Blackford

Mr Speaker, if the Prime Minister has inadvertently misled the House, I will state that.

Mr Speaker

Right. We will leave it at that.

The Prime Minister

I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for withdrawing what he just said, because he was wrong, and I am afraid that he is wrong in his analysis. I apologise, as I have said, for all the suffering that people have had throughout the pandemic and for the anger that people feel about what has taken place in No. 10 Downing Street. But I must tell the right hon. Gentleman that, for much of what he said, his best course is simply to wait for the inquiry to conclude.

Mr Speaker

Can I just say: I take it that the right hon. Member has withdrawn his remark?

Ian Blackford

The Prime Minister may have inadvertently misled the House—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker

Order. To help me and to help the House, has the right hon. Gentleman withdrawn his earlier comment and replaced it with “inadvertently”?

Ian Blackford

Mr Speaker, it is not my fault if the Prime Minister cannot be trusted to tell the truth—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker

Order. Under the power given to me by Standing Order No. 43, I order the right hon. Member to withdraw immediately from the House—

An hon. Member: He has left anyway!

Mr Speaker

It's all right; we do not need to bother. Let us move on. I call Andrew Mitchell.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con)

Does my right hon. Friend recall that ever since he joined the party's candidates list 30 years ago, and until we got him into No. 10, he has enjoyed my full-throated support? But I am deeply concerned by these events, and very concerned indeed by some of the things he has said from that Dispatch Box, and has said to the British public and to our constituents. When he kindly invited me

to see him 10 days ago, I told him that I thought he should think very carefully about what was now in the best interests of our country, and of the Conservative party. I have to tell him that he no longer enjoys my support.

The Prime Minister

I must respectfully tell my right hon. Friend, great though the admiration is that I have for him, that I simply think he is mistaken in his views, and I urge him to reconsider upon full consideration of the inquiry.

Dame Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab)

The Prime Minister told us:

“I have been repeatedly assured since these allegations emerged that there was no party and that no covid rules were broken.”—[Official Report, 8 December 2021; Vol. 705, c. 372.]

We now know that 12 of the 16 parties are subject to a police investigation, and that of the remaining four, the Sue Gray report states that she has seen a “serious failure” to observe the high standards at No. 10. She has seen “failures of leadership” and of judgment, yet the Prime Minister thinks that is fine. Just how bad do things have to be before he takes personal responsibility, does what everybody in the country wants him to do, and resigns?

The Prime Minister

What we are doing is taking the action that I have described to set up a Prime Minister’s department to improve the operation of No. 10. We will be taking further steps in the days ahead.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con)

The inquiry has found that there have been serious failings, and it has suggested there be changes in the way that No. 10 is run. There is a real opportunity now to take forward this new Office of the Prime Minister, and ensure that further improvements are made so that we can carry on delivering. What the Opposition parties hate is the fact that this Government will carry on delivering on the things that matter most to people, while also making sure that the governance within No. 10 is improved.

The Prime Minister

I thank my hon. Friend very much. I think he is completely right. The Opposition, of course, want to keep their focus trained on this. That is their decision. I think that what people in this country want us to do is get on with the job that they want us to do. That is to serve them and, frankly, to stop talking about ourselves.

Ed Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD)

There is no word in the English language for a parent who has lost a child. There is no equivalent of “widow” or “orphan” for that particular horror. It is a loss that is literally beyond words; a loss that hundreds and thousands of parents have tragically experienced during this pandemic. Many had to bury their children alone; many could not be there with them at the end. Meanwhile, No. 10 partied. Does the Prime Minister understand? Does he care about the enormous hurt his actions have caused to bereaved families across our country? Will he finally accept that the only decent thing he can do now is to resign?

The Prime Minister

I do care deeply about the hurt that is felt across the country about the suggestion that things were going on in No. 10 that were in contravention of the covid rules. I understand how deeply people feel about this and how angry they are. I have apologised several times, but I must say that I think we should wait for the outcome of the inquiry before jumping to the conclusions that the right hon. Gentleman has raised. In the meantime, we should focus on the issues that matter to the British people.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con)

The public and this House have been frustrated by having to wait for Sue Gray and the Metropolitan police, and today the Prime Minister has announced his new office at No. 10. Will he please let the House know what specific structures will be put in place so that this House can hold it accountable?

The Prime Minister

We will make sure that there is a new permanent secretary, who will be accountable to me, and that the codes of conduct that apply both to special advisers and to civil servants are properly enforced. Of course, all of that will be properly communicated to the House. What I want to see is much better communication and links between No. 10 and the entirety of the House of

Commons, and we will do that.

Sir George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab)

Yesterday, at the local Tesco store in my constituency, a constituent asked me in a tone more in sorrow than in anger, “Why doesn’t the Prime Minister realise that as every day goes by, he damages the reputation of our country abroad, around the world?” How would the Prime Minister respond to that constituent?

The Prime Minister

I think that the reputation of our country around the world is built on the fastest vaccine roll-out in Europe, if not in all the major economies; it is built on having, therefore, the fastest growth in the G7; and it is built on our ability to bring our allies together to stand up against Vladimir Putin. That is what the world is focused on, that is what I am focused on, and that, frankly, is what the right hon. Gentleman should be focused on.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con)

Will my right hon. Friend first of all remind the Leader of the Opposition and the Labour party that the Back Benchers of the Conservative party need no reminders about how to dispose of a failing leader? Will he also, when he is restructuring No. 10, concentrate on the fact that the country wants results? We cannot see the point of such a large No. 10 superstructure; it needs to be slimmed down and streamlined. May I commend his determination to restore Cabinet government? It is on results, over the next few months, that he will be judged.

The Prime Minister

I thank my hon. Friend very much; I think he is entirely right. I am more than content to be judged on the results we have already delivered and the results that we will deliver. I am sure that we will be greatly assisted by the reforms of No. 10 that I have outlined.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab)

Anybody who has actually read the Sue Gray report can only wonder what she was made to leave out. Will the Prime Minister give the House an undertaking that as soon as he is able, he will release the full unredacted report to this House?

The Prime Minister

Sue Gray has published everything that she can. I propose that we wait until the conclusion of the inquiry. In the meantime, I think it peculiar that the report is being simultaneously hailed as utterly damning and condemned for not having enough in it—it cannot be both.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con)

President Truman had on his desk, “The buck stops here”, so the Prime Minister was right to apologise for the events that happened in No. 10 Downing Street. Two weeks ago, I reminded Tom Harwood that Tony Blair suggested that there should be an Office of the Prime Minister, so that it could be governed not from 70 Whitehall but from the building itself. Will the Prime Minister tell me how he envisions the office working? Will the permanent secretary be based in No. 10, controlling what civil servants do in No. 10?

The Prime Minister

I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I think the House understands, even if many people outside do not, that No. 10 hosts more than 400 officials on a busy day. They have a huge amount to do — [Interruption.] No, they are working very hard. We need to make sure there are proper lines of authority and that we sort out the command structures, and that is what we are doing.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC)

Whatever the police decide, this update, severely limited as it is, would be enough to persuade any other Prime Minister to resign. This Prime Minister could resign and salvage a crumb or two of honour, or he may try to delay and take his party down with him. Is it not clear that, with notable exceptions, his Back Benchers should discover their backbone and sack him?

The Prime Minister

I have answered several questions like that. I must ask the hon. Gentleman to look at the report properly and to wait for the inquiry when it comes.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con)

We have been asked to keep some sense of perspective, and I think that is right. The question here is whether those who make the law obey the law—that is pretty fundamental. Many, including some of my constituents, have questioned

the Prime Minister's honesty, integrity and fitness to hold that office. In judging him, he rightly asked us to wait for all the facts. Sue Gray has made it clear in her update that she could not produce a meaningful report with the facts, so may I ask the Prime Minister the question that the right hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) asked, and to which he did not give an answer? When Sue Gray produces all the facts in her full report after the police investigation, will the Prime Minister commit to publishing it immediately and in full?

The Prime Minister

What we have to do is wait for the police to conclude their inquiries. That is the proper thing to do. People have given all sorts of evidence in the expectation that it would not necessarily be published. At that stage, I will take a decision about what to publish.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab)

I imagine I am going to be asked to wait for something else, but was the Prime Minister present at the event in his flat on 13 November? I assume he does not need other people to tell him whether he was there. Was he at the flat event on 13 November listed in the report?

The Prime Minister

I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for inviting me to comment on something that is being investigated. With great respect to her, I simply will not indulge in running commentary. She will have to wait.

Sir Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con)

Saying sorry is very important, but my right hon. Friend will be judged by the deeds he undertakes as a result. I heard today a proper acknowledgment that he needs to look in the mirror, and I am glad to hear about reforms to the centre of Government that I think are overdue, as he knows from our previous conversations. Will he give me and the House an undertaking today that, in co-operating with the Metropolitan police inquiry, he will show the appropriate tone and approach that I think the British public demand of him as a person of serious purpose who is up to the level of the events? That is what we expect from him now, and that is what I will be expecting him to do.

The Prime Minister

I thank my right hon. and learned Friend. I stress that I have great admiration for and full confidence in the Metropolitan police. I suggest that they now be allowed to get on with their job.

Karl Turner (Kingston upon Hull East) (Lab)

We now know that there is a criminal investigation into the party that took place on 13 November 2020 in the Prime Minister's flat to celebrate the exit of Mr Cummings. On 8 December last year, the Prime Minister came to that Dispatch Box and flatly denied the very idea that any such party had taken place— [Interruption.] He is shaking his head. In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), he said that it had not happened. He has inadvertently misled the House, so the very least he should do is get to that Dispatch Box and correct the record.

The Prime Minister

No. I stand by what I said, and I would simply urge the hon. Member to wait for the outcome of the inquiry. That is what he needs to do.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con)

May I advise my right hon. Friend publicly what I have said to emissaries from his campaign team privately? It is truly in his interest, in the Government's interest and in the national interest that he should insist on receiving the full, unredacted report immediately, as I believe he can, and that he should then publish the uncensored version without any further delay.

The Prime Minister

I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend, but I think extensive legal advice has been taken on this point and Sue Gray has published everything that she thinks she can that is consistent with that advice.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP)

If the police investigation were to result in serious criminal charges necessitating a criminal trial such as, I don't know, misconduct in public office or conspiracy to pervert the course of justice, how would the Prime Minister feel about having to give evidence on oath?

The Prime Minister

I am not going to speculate about hypothetical questions which, frankly, I reject.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con)

You will know, Mr Speaker, that it is a very rare event for any Prime Minister to come to this House and apologise—it is a difficult thing for any Prime Minister to do—but on the issue of the police investigation, does my right hon. Friend agree that there should be due process, free and unfettered access to all at No. 10 and, most of all, no prejudging or undermining of the police inquiry before it has concluded?

The Prime Minister

Yes, I completely agree, and I must say that I am shocked by some of the commentary that I have heard from the Benches opposite about that matter today.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab)

The thing is, this is who the Prime Minister is:

“a serious failure to observe...high standards...failures of leadership and judgment...excessive consumption of alcohol...in a professional workplace”.

“gatherings” that “should not have been” able “to take place”; staff too frightened to raise concerns; parties in his own private flat. A leopard does not change its spots, does it? Every single one who defends this will face this again and again and again, because he still will not even admit to the House that when he came to us and said, of 13 November, that

“the guidance...and the rules were followed at all times”—[Official Report, 8 December 2021; Vol. 705, c. 379]—

and, on 1 December, that all the guidelines were observed, those things simply were not true. If he will not correct the record today, there is nothing accidental about this, is there? It is deliberate.

The Prime Minister

I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is trying to say, but I direct him again to

the point made by Sue Gray:

“No conclusions should be drawn, or inferences made from this other than it is now”

time

“for the police to consider the relevant material”.

That is what the House should allow them, frankly, to do.

Shailesh Vara (North West Cambridgeshire) (Con)

It is absolutely right that over the past few weeks constituents of Members on both sides of the House have been writing to us about this hugely important issue, and I do not wish in any way to minimise its importance, but there are military bases in my constituency, and I am receiving emails from families who are concerned about their loved ones and the potential role that they may end up playing given the conflict on the Russia-Ukraine border. Opposition Members may treat this lightly, but the families of those serving in the military do not treat it lightly. Will my right hon. Friend give me an assurance that, notwithstanding the importance of the issue we are discussing at present, his Government will start to address other important matters that concern my constituents and those of Members throughout the House?

The Prime Minister

I thank my hon. Friend very much indeed. I think he is completely right. Of course these matters are important, and we have to wait for the inquiry, but in the meantime the UK must play the leading role that we are playing, in bringing the west together to form a united front against Vladimir Putin, in particular with the economic sanctions that we need. That is the priority of the Government right now.

Colum Eastwood (Foyle) (SDLP)

While the Prime Minister was eating birthday cake with his pals, people were standing outside nursing home windows looking in at their loved ones dying. Contrary to what the Prime Minister has said multiple times from that very Dispatch Box, any objective reading of Sue Gray’s update makes it absolutely

clear that the rules were broken multiple times in Downing Street. Will the Prime Minister continue the habit of a lifetime and keep blaming everybody else, or will he finally stand up, take responsibility, and just go?

The Prime Minister

The hon. Gentleman really has to read the report. He has to look at the report, and he must wait—[Interruption.] Everything he has said is, I am afraid, not substantiated by the report. He should look at it, and wait for the police inquiry.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con)

Millions of people took seriously a communications campaign apparently designed by behavioural psychologists to bully, to shame and to terrify them into compliance with minute restrictions on their freedom. What is my right hon. Friend's central message to those people who complied meticulously with all the rules and suffered terribly for it, including, I might say, those whose mental health will have suffered appallingly as a result of the messages that his Government were sending out?

The Prime Minister

I want to thank all those people for everything that they did, because together they helped us to control coronavirus. Thanks to their amazing actions in coming forward to be vaccinated, we are now in a far better position than many other countries around the world, so I have a massive debt of gratitude to all the people whom my hon. Friend has described.

Dame Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab)

Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), I am not asking for a running commentary, but I would like to know whether the Prime Minister was present in his flat at the event on 13 November 2020.

The Prime Minister

I am really grateful to the right hon. Lady, and I understand why people want me to elaborate on all sorts of points, but I am not going to give a running commentary on a matter that is now being considered by the authorities. I have to wait for them to conclude.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con)

The update from Sue Gray is, as she says herself, “extremely limited”. She says that

“it is not possible at present to provide a meaningful report”.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that at the earliest opportunity he will have the report published in full?

The Prime Minister

What we will do is wait until the police have concluded their inquiries, and then see what more we can publish. That is what we are going to do.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab)

As the Prime Minister will recall, during Prime Minister’s Question Time on 8 December, I asked

“whether there was a party in Downing Street on 13 November”.—[Official Report, 8 December 2021; Vol. 705, c. 379.]

Now the report says, as one of the bullet points on the first page, that there was

“a gathering in the No 10 Downing Street flat”

and

“a gathering in No 10 Downing Street on the departure of a special adviser”.

Did the Prime Minister inadvertently mislead this House? Will he put us all out of our agony, and stop dragging democracy through the mud?

The Prime Minister

I stick by what I said to the hon. Lady, and if she cares about democracy and due process, she should wait until the inquiry has been concluded.

Mark Jenkinson (Workington) (Con)

As a non-drinker who long ago realised that sobriety delivers everything that

alcohol promised, I have noted with interest that a drinking culture exists in Downing Street and that it predates my right hon. Friend's tenure by some decades. Does he, like me, welcome Sue Gray's report, and will he commit to fixing that culture?

The Prime Minister

Yes. I thank my hon. Friend very much, and we are certainly going to take up the relevant parts of the recommendations and see that they are properly enforced within the civil service and the spad—special adviser—code.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green)

The shocking incompetence of the Met police has meant that we have a report that has been gutted, but frankly, we did not need Sue Gray to tell us about the level of dishonour and deception that has infected not only Downing Street but so many Tory Members. It has been excruciating to watch so many Tory MPs and Ministers willing to defend the indefensible and calculating what is in their own party political interests rather than what is right for our country, complicit in the same decaying system where the pursuit of power trumps integrity. The Prime Minister is certainly a bad apple, but the whole tree is rotten and the whole country wants reform. Could we not make a start with a major overhaul of the ministerial code, given that its founding assumption—that it could be policed by the Prime Minister of the day, because they would be a person of honesty and integrity—has been so widely, comprehensively and utterly discredited?

The Prime Minister

We are reforming the ministerial code. Of all the things that the hon. Lady has just said, I disagree with her most passionately about what she said about the police. I think they do an outstanding job, and I think we should allow them to get on with that job. I will await their conclusions.

Jackie Doyle-Price (Thurrock) (Con)

I draw attention to general finding number (vii) in the report, which documents that No. 10 Downing Street has morphed from a small team supporting the Prime Minister into a self-indulgent bureaucracy all of its own. I am personally tired of reading in Sunday newspapers about officials briefing against Ministers, and about delays as things are stuck in No.10. I have spoken to Ministers who

are getting frustrated by this. Call me old-fashioned, but when my right hon. Friend institutes his review, could he ensure that it is Ministers who are accountable for decisions that are taken in their name, not flunkies in No.10? Will he ensure that the reforms properly restore ministerial accountability?

The Prime Minister

I thank my hon. Friend very much; I enjoyed our joint trip to Tilbury this morning. Yes, I do think it is vital, as Sue Gray says, that we learn from this and that we strengthen Cabinet Government and the principle of ministerial responsibility.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab)

I have spoken about my own experience of loss during the pandemic many times. I do not claim that my experience is special—indeed, it has been all too common—but as a member of Parliament I have a responsibility to provide a voice for the bereaved families. Make no mistake, this report is utterly damning and suggests that the Prime Minister’s and the Government’s actions were a risk to public health. How on earth can the Prime Minister stand there and justify this? Does he now accept that his actions were a complete and absolute failure of leadership and judgment?

The Prime Minister

I repeat what I have said: that I am deeply sorry for all the suffering there has been throughout this pandemic, whether of the hon. Gentleman’s constituents or anyone in the country. As to his points about what is in the report, I do not think his views are substantiated by what the report says. I think he should wait to see where the inquiry goes. That is what I propose to do.

Suzanne Webb (Stourbridge) (Con)

Does my right hon. Friend agree that Opposition Members have used up far too much parliamentary time debating this? I can assure him that the residents of Stourbridge want the Prime Minister to focus on the matters that they really care about.

Mr Speaker

Just a moment. In fairness, the Prime Minister asked to make the statement. I am not going to attack the Prime Minister for making the statement, and I certainly would not expect it from his own side.

The Prime Minister

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I want to say how strongly I agree, none the less, with my hon. Friend, because, yes, of course it is vital that we make this statement, that we learn from Sue Gray's report and that we take action, which is what the Government are doing, but it is also vital, frankly, that we get on with the people's priorities. That is what this Government are also doing.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab)

Just to summarise, we have had, "I didn't know there was a party", "There wasn't a party, it was a work meeting" and, "There was a party but I wasn't there". The Prime Minister mentioned international negotiations. Why should anybody—any country, any Government—with whom we enter into negotiations deal at all with, and take any kind of word from, a Government who clearly act with mendacity aforethought from the start?

The Prime Minister

This is the Government who took this country out of the European Union—did what was necessary—and who are bringing the west together to stand up against Vladimir Putin. Those are the important considerations. As for the rest of what the hon. Gentleman said, it is nonsense but he should wait for the police inquiry.

Holly Mumby-Croft (Scunthorpe) (Con)

My constituents in Scunthorpe are very keen to see industrial energy prices fixed, so will the Prime Minister reassure me that he will not be distracted by any of this, and that he will get on with the job and come forward with a solution to that issue?

The Prime Minister

Yes, my hon. Friend is completely right; we need to address not only consumer energy costs, but business and industrial energy costs, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will be bringing forward a package of measures as soon as he can.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP)

During his statement, the Prime Minister kept referring to "we" when he talked about the sorry saga that Sue Gray has reported, but it is his rules, his rule-

breaking and his inability to tell the truth about it that is the issue. He is the Prime Minister. Does he not take any personal responsibility at all for this disgraceful fiasco?

The Prime Minister

I have taken full responsibility throughout the pandemic.

Richard Fuller (North East Bedfordshire) (Con)

As with the report on Owen Paterson, I felt it was important to support the process and read the report, because it is important to separate fact from allegation, and to know what the report actually says, rather than what I would wish it to say. Those are two lessons that the Leader of the Opposition needs to learn. I promised my constituents that I would ask the Prime Minister to say that he would support the recommendations in the report, and there are four. One is that

“every Government Department has a clear and robust policy in place covering the consumption of alcohol in the workplace.”

Another is that access to the garden,

“including for meetings, should be by invitation only and in a controlled environment.”

A third is:

“There should be easier ways for staff to raise such concerns”.

That is basically about whistleblowing. Another is:

“Too much responsibility and expectation is placed on the senior official whose principal function is the direct support of the Prime Minister.”

Those are the facts and the findings of the report. Will the Prime Minister accept them in full?

The Prime Minister

Yes, I do. As I have said to the House earlier, I accept the findings of the report in full—the general findings—and we are immediately taking steps to implement the changes.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab)

The Prime Minister has just said that he accepts the findings of the report. One of them says:

“There were failures of leadership and judgment by different parts of No 10 and the Cabinet Office at different times.”

He provides the political leadership and the political judgment at No. 10. Does he accept his own personal wrongdoing and failings in this regard?

The Prime Minister

Not only have I accepted full responsibility throughout, but I have apologised repeatedly to the House for any misjudgements that I may have made myself, but, again, I must urge the hon. Lady to wait for the conclusion of the inquiry.

Aaron Bell (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Con)

It seems that a lot of people attended events in May 2020. The one I recall attending was my grandmother’s funeral. She was a wonderful woman. As well as her love for her family, she served her community as a councillor and she served Dartford Conservative Association loyally for many years. I drove for three hours from Staffordshire to Kent. There were only 10 people at the funeral; many people who loved her had to watch online. I did not hug my siblings. I did not hug my parents. I gave a eulogy and afterwards I did not even go into her house for a cup of tea; I drove back, for three hours, from Kent to Staffordshire. Does the Prime Minister think I am a fool?

The Prime Minister

No. I want to thank my hon. Friend and say how deeply I sympathise with him and his family for their loss. All I can say, again, is that I am very, very sorry for misjudgements that may have been made by me or anybody else in No.10 and the Cabinet Office. I can only ask him respectfully to look at what Sue Gray has said and to wait for the conclusion of the inquiry.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab)

It is important that this House can trust what Ministers tell us from that Dispatch Box. On 8 December, regarding events at No.10 Downing Street, the Prime Minister said:

“I repeat that I have been repeatedly assured since these allegations emerged that there was no party and that no covid rules were broken. That is what I have been repeatedly assured.”—[Official Report, 8 December 2021; Vol. 705, c. 372.]

The people who gave him those assurances led to his inadvertently misleading the House. Have those people faced any disciplinary proceedings?

The Prime Minister

First, the hon. Gentleman needs, I am afraid, to await the conclusions of the police inquiry, because the premise of his question may or may not be substantiated. What I can tell the House is that, yes, as I have said before, there will certainly be changes in the way that we do things, and changes in No.10.

Duncan Baker (North Norfolk) (Con)

North Norfolk consistently had some of the lowest levels of infection in the country; we followed the rules. Many of my constituents have been incensed by this matter, and the damage it is doing to the Government is enormous. It is about integrity and trust. May I ask again, because people want to know, how can the Prime Minister satisfy my constituents and assure me that full accountability and transparency on the findings of the final Gray report will swiftly follow?

The Prime Minister

I will do whatever I can to ensure that the House has as much clarity as possible. There are legal issues that we face about some of the testimony that has been given, but, in the meantime, what Sue Gray wants us to do is to wait for the conclusion of the investigation and to see where that goes, and to support the police in their work.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD)

Does the Prime Minister need somebody else to tell him whether he was there, or that he is there now?

The Prime Minister

I refer the hon. Lady to the answer that I have already given.

Simon Baynes (Clwyd South) (Con)

We all recognise that No. 10 Downing Street is an unusual amalgam of workplace, office space and private home. What steps will the Prime Minister take to ensure that the lines between each of them are made clearer in the future?

The Prime Minister

My hon. Friend will see reference to that very problem in Sue Gray's report and we will take steps to clarify things and make sure that there is greater transparency in the lines of command.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab)

Does the Prime Minister recognise that repeatedly making statements, including from the Dispatch Box, which turn out subsequently to be untrue, is a serious problem, or does he not recognise that?

The Prime Minister

I really think the right hon. Gentleman is prejudging things, and he should wait for the conclusion of the inquiries.

Paul Holmes (Eastleigh) (Con)

I welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend has come to this House as a first step in responding to the report. He has also rightly outlined that the relationship between No. 10 and this House needs to improve. Will he reassure me that he will continue to come to the House to update us on the implementation of the recommendations in Sue Gray's report and say how that will happen?

The Prime Minister

I am only too happy to assure the House that we intend to make changes starting from now and that I will keep the House updated.

Paula Barker (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab)

When there is a failure of leadership and an inappropriate culture in an organisation, the person at the top should go. This outrageous debacle has not happened in spite of the Prime Minister; it has happened because of him. Will he now do the right thing and resign?

The Prime Minister

The answer is no, because I am going to wait for the conclusions of the inquiry before any of the assertions that the hon. Lady has made can be established.

Greg Smith (Buckingham) (Con)

I thank the Prime Minister for his statement, particularly the acknowledgment of the enormous sacrifice that many British people went through. As somebody who was unable to say goodbye to their grandparents this time last year, I welcome his sincere apology. As we wait for the Metropolitan police's findings, can he give me a categorical assurance that it will be full speed ahead on fixing the Northern Ireland protocol, standing up for our friends in Ukraine and fixing the cost-of-living crisis?

The Prime Minister

Yes. That is exactly what the Government are going to do and we will not be distracted for one minute.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab)

In the general findings of Sue Gray's report, there is a reference to the

“failures of leadership and judgment by...No 10”.

Does the Prime Minister accept that she was largely referring to him?

The Prime Minister

I really think that the hon. Gentleman should recite the whole report. I have told him that I accept the findings that Sue Gray has given in full and we are acting on them today.

Mrs Natalie Elphicke (Dover) (Con)

I welcome my right hon. Friend's apology. He has taken responsibility; he has

apologised; and it is right that he should do so. Can he confirm that tackling the small boats crisis will remain top in the new Office of the Prime Minister, because that is what the country wants to see—this Prime Minister getting on with the job?

The Prime Minister

Yes, that is right. That is why we brought forward the Nationality and Borders Bill, which I am delighted to say that my hon. Friend supports and that the Government are getting through, and which the Labour party voted against.

Stephen Farry (North Down) (Alliance)

The flippancy of some of the answers today and the non-answers to other questions do not suggest that the Prime Minister is genuinely sorry. Does he recognise the long-term damage that he risks doing to historical norms of democracy? Is it right that they are sacrificed in the interests of one man who refuses to do what the country knows needs to happen? Can he point to one single example where he personally has improved standards in public life?

The Prime Minister

How about deciding to honour the wishes of the people and deliver Brexit in spite of the Opposition's attempts to subvert democracy?

Rob Roberts (Delyn) (Ind)

Delivery is key. The Prime Minister delivers. He delivered on Brexit. He delivered with furlough and with the self-employment income support scheme, which ensured that businesses were able to survive. [Interruption.] The Opposition shout it down because they do not like it; that is fine. He delivered one of the best vaccination programmes in the world. He delivered a country that is coming out of a pandemic and an economy that is thriving, with people who sadly lost their jobs in the last two years having more vacancies than ever to choose from. Nobody talks about those things, however, because all—

Mr Speaker

Order. I think the Prime Minister has a grip of what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

The Prime Minister

We will deliver on the people's priorities. We will deliver and keep delivering for

Wales.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall) (Lab/Co-op)

One of the hardest things I have had to do as an MP is speak to the family of Ismail Mohamed Abdulwahab, who was 13 years old when he died on 30 March 2020. He was one of the youngest people to lose his life to covid. I will admit that when I spoke to his mother, I broke down on the call.

Ismail's family, like so many other constituents in Vauxhall, followed the rules. Many of them were scared to go out; many of them had to bury their loved ones without being there; many of them walk past the covid memorial wall in my constituency with that heart showing their loss. Does the Prime Minister now understand, and does he not feel ashamed, that his actions have brought disrepute to the office that he holds?

The Prime Minister

Of course I share the hon. Lady's grief for Ismail.

I sympathise with his family. I understand the pain and loss that everyone has experienced throughout this country. All I can say is that I will continue to do my best to fight covid, as I have done throughout this pandemic, and to deliver for the British people. I cannot say more than that.

Marco Longhi (Dudley North) (Con)

Having the required management expertise to run dozens of offices with hundreds of people within, is one thing. Running the country and getting the big decisions right is quite another. I welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to have a look at what is happening at No. 10 and those management structures, so we can deliver on the Brexit promises we made to the people of this country.

The Prime Minister

I thank my hon. Friend. That is why we are taking up the findings of the Sue Gray report. We want to make sure that No. 10 works better and that the whole of the Government work better. It has been focused very much on covid, but we now need to deliver exclusively on the great priorities of the people.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP)

Last summer, my team and I said goodbye to our colleague through the window of her hospice as she died of cancer. We did not get to hug her, and we were just like many millions of people across the UK. We followed the rules, while the Prime Minister and his colleagues did not.

It makes me sick to my stomach that we will not get the findings of the report because the police were so late to the party—the same Met police who were happy to arrest women who were protesting the murder of Sarah Everard. It makes me sick to my stomach that he does not understand the anger, fury and upset of millions of people across the UK. Sometimes, an apology will not cut it. It is time for action. It is time for a clear out. It is time for him to resign.

The Prime Minister

Again, I sympathise very much with the experience of the hon. Lady's constituents and all the pain that people have gone through throughout this pandemic. I must say to her, though, that she is prejudging the issue in question. I do not think that is the right thing to do. I have a great deal of respect for the police and they should be allowed to get on with their job.

Paul Howell (Sedgefield) (Con)

I think we have to remember that we are all talking about the breaking of the rules. Clearly, the rules and what happened are under question here. The rules that were put out by this Government have got this country to where it is. We have to remember that the rules did the right thing. Yes, there must be consequences in No. 10 for any rules that have been broken, but the right thing was done by instigating the rules in the first place. When I talk to my constituents, they say, yes, we need to ask the question about what happened, but can we stop making that the only sore subject, and can the Opposition talk about something else? We need to move on and level up this country.

The Prime Minister

My hon. Friend is right. The rules are important. It was amazing to see the way people pulled together throughout the pandemic. I thank people very much. But what we need to do, if we possibly can—I think the Opposition would agree—is to focus on the issues that matter above all to the British people: fixing the cost of living, rebuilding our economy and clearing the covid backlogs. That is what

this Government are doing.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op)

I have known the Prime Minister a long time, and we have always got on quite well. He is not a wicked man, but he is a man who, for years and in every job, has got by flying on the seat of his pants. He has a chaotic management style, and that is a question of character. I ask him really to look in the mirror, as he said this morning, and say, “Am I the man for this challenging time for our country abroad, at home and in every sense?” Has he the character to carry on and do that job properly?

The Prime Minister

Yes, because quite frankly I think it was absolutely indispensable that we had a strong No. 10 that was able to take us out of the EU, in spite of all the efforts of the Labour party to block it, and not only that but a booster campaign and a vaccine campaign that were led by No. 10 and have made a dramatic difference not just to the health of this country, but to the economic fortunes of this country. Whatever the hon. Gentleman says about me and my leadership, that is what we have delivered in the last year alone.

Scott Benton (Blackpool South) (Con)

When I was knocking on doors in Blackpool at the weekend, I spoke to Julie, who said: “This Prime Minister has had the most difficult job in living history. He’s been dealing with a pandemic in which he nearly died. He’s been dealing with a media who haven’t forgiven him yet for delivering Brexit. And he hasn’t had a chance to crack on and deliver yet for the British people on their priorities.” The report has come out today and the Prime Minister has apologised. Let us allow him to get on and—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker

Order.

The Prime Minister

I want to say how passionately, vehemently and emphatically I agree with my hon. Friend’s remarks, which I could not quite hear. He is completely right. That is the priority of the British people and that is the priority of the Government.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)

As limited as the Gray report is, the findings are still incredibly damning. There are multiples issues related to failures of leadership and judgment. Given that the Nolan principles and standards of public life describe the centrality of integrity, honesty and leadership, how can the Prime Minister continue?

The Prime Minister

I really think that the hon. Lady needs to read the report carefully. I am afraid that the conclusions she has drawn are not ones that I support. We are following Sue Gray's advice and changing the way that No. 10 runs. We are going to do things differently, but I cannot agree with what the hon. Lady says.

Katherine Fletcher (South Ribble) (Con)

On Saturday, I was out and about in Lancashire enjoying ice cream—as I know you and your family do, Mr Speaker—in some of the finest ice cream parlours in the north of England. People said to me, “He’s a wally, but 100,000 Russians have just turned up. What the bloody hell are we doing talking about cake?” Does the Prime Minister agree with that statement?

The Prime Minister

I thank my hon. Friend very much. What the country needs and what the west needs—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker

Order. If Members do not want to carry on the questioning, I am happy to pull stumps now. If we are going to have questions, I am going to hear the answers as well as the questions. [Interruption.] There is no use in the Member keeping standing up; you are going to have to sit down for a bit.

The Prime Minister

What the country needs now is the UK Government working with our friends and partners to stand up to Vladimir Putin and to make sure that we have a strong package of sanctions. That is what we are doing.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab)

The Prime Minister sets the culture at No. 10. Why does he think staff members there felt unable to raise their concerns about the bad behaviours reported

today?

The Prime Minister

That is one of the recommendations of the Sue Gray inquiry that we are going to take up to make sure that nobody should feel that in No. 10. That is why we are going to review the code to ensure that nobody feels that they have any inhibition on coming forward with any complaint that they may have.

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Lab)

The Prime Minister and his allies are trying to distract and deflect from the truth, but here are the indisputable facts: the Prime Minister attended Downing Street parties; he told this House and the people we represent that he attended no parties and, in fact, that there were no parties. The rules were clearly broken and the ministerial code has been violated, so when will he stop insulting the intelligence of the British people, do the right thing and resign?

The Prime Minister

I really think the hon. Lady has got to let the Metropolitan police get on and do their job.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)

Does the Prime Minister not recognise that the public are rapidly losing faith in the institutions that they must be able to trust if our democracy is to survive? It appears that there is no individual, no organisation, no group and no force whose reputation will not be sacrificed on the altar of saving this Prime Minister. Does he consider the erosion of public trust and the foundations of our democracy a price worth paying to ensure his personal survival?

The Prime Minister

I believe that among the foundations of our democracy are due process and the rule of law, and allowing the police to get on with their job, and that is what we are going to do.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op)

Paragraph iv of Sue Gray's general findings states that there is a culture of "excessive consumption of alcohol" and that it is "not appropriate". Is there also a culture of excessive drug taking in Downing Street?

The Prime Minister

Any drug taking would be excessive. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman should direct that question to the Labour Front Bench.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab)

We have heard a lot about prejudging things today, but we only have to look at paragraph iii of the general findings for mention of

“failures of leadership and judgment by different parts of No 10 and the Cabinet Office... Some of the events should not have been allowed to take place. Other events should not have been allowed to develop as they did.”

I do not think that that is prejudging anything; it is very clear. There is only one person in charge at No. 10 in totality, and that is the Prime Minister. Let me remind the Prime Minister why this rule breaking and the way No. 10 behaved matters. Let me quote a constituent. This is from one of a number of emails I have had from constituents who have lost loved ones. She said:

“We received a call at 11.15pm on 29th May saying mum was deteriorating. Both my sister & I drove to the home and I spent the night sat on a chair outside her bedroom window watching her die! All I could do was sob & shout to her and tell her that I loved her. I couldn’t even hold her hand”.

That is why you should go, Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister

I totally understand the feelings of the hon. Gentleman’s constituents, and I accept that things could have been done better in No. 10, as I have told the House before, but I must ask him to study what Sue Gray has said. We are acting on all her recommendations.

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab)

Can the Prime Minister explain how changing the civil service hierarchy would have prevented him from breaching the covid regulations, as he has admitted in this House? When will he take responsibility for his own actions and stop hiding behind other people? My constituents do not want another Government Department; they want him to resign.

The Prime Minister

The hon. Lady is wrong in what she says and I direct her to what I said earlier.

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab)

It has been revealed that in April 2021, as the Prime Minister partied, he swiftly rejected the idea of bereavement bubbles for those who had lost loved ones or suffered miscarriages, stillbirths or a child neonatal death. Far from getting it, he has deflected, laughed and smirked his way through this statement. He is a disingenuous man, isn't he?

The Prime Minister

No. This has been a harrowing and tragic experience for the entire country. We have done our best to deal with it. As for what the hon. Lady says about what has been going on in No. 10, I ask her to look at the report but also to wait for the police inquiry.

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP)

This afternoon we have heard distraction, deflection and confusion, and we cannot even get an answer to the simplest of questions about whether the full report will be published when available. May I therefore ask the Prime Minister whether we are now looking at a situation of hobble, hobble, quack, quack?

The Prime Minister

Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to publish everything that we currently have, but the fact is that there are legal impediments and we have to wait until the police inquiry has concluded.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con)

I accept entirely what the Prime Minister has just said. It is absolutely essential that we wait until we hear the next stage in these proceedings in relation to any future investigations. I would also like to draw attention to the historic achievements of this Prime Minister in relation not only to delivering Brexit but to the vaccine roll-out and to his dealings with Mr Putin. I believe that everybody should take that most firmly into account.

The Prime Minister

I thank my hon. Friend very much, and I think he is completely right. He might

have added that we have the fastest economic growth in the G7, thanks to the steps that this Government have been taking.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab)

We have established that there were parties, so we are just arguing about who is responsible. As the hon. Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price) said, that is a Minister. If it is not the Prime Minister, is it the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), who should be facing the sack?

The Prime Minister

I remind the hon. Lady of what Sue Gray says in paragraph 12, that no such conclusion can be drawn so far. The hon. Lady must wait for the conclusion of the inquiry.

Janet Daby (Lewisham East) (Lab)

The Prime Minister announced at the weekend that he will be calling President Putin to urge de-escalation of the situation in Ukraine. The Daily Mirror has just reported that the call has been cancelled because the Prime Minister has been dealing with the Sue Gray report. Can he confirm that, on a matter of such grave importance, the report is correct and that he will be speaking to Vladimir Putin as soon as he leaves the Chamber?

The Prime Minister

I will be speaking to President Putin as soon as I can.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD)

I have read the report in full, and I think this is the most striking sentence:

“There were failures of leadership and judgment by different parts of No 10 and the Cabinet Office at different times.”

My constituents have been writing to me while the Prime Minister has been speaking to say that he should resign, but they also want to know the full facts. Once the Met has concluded, why could he not then publish the full, unredacted report?

The Prime Minister

We will have to see where the police get to, we will have to see the conclusion of their inquiry, and we will have to see what the legal position is then.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab)

My constituents are deeply troubled and angered by the frequent scandals that are engulfing the Prime Minister's Administration. It is not just PartyGate and the ongoing cover-up but all the other things: the proroguing of Parliament, the treatment of the Queen, the £3.5 billion of crony covid contracts, the writing off of £4.3 billion of covid loan fraud and the Russia report, to name but a few. Sussex University researchers have warned that this Administration is more corrupt

“than any UK government since the Second World War.”

The Prime Minister knows this, doesn't he?

The Prime Minister

The hon. Gentleman's point is completely ridiculous. He mentions what we did to get Brexit done, which was crucial to restoring public trust in democracy.

Mr Richard Holden (North West Durham) (Con)

Like me, many of my constituents have been appalled by the reports of what has been happening in No. 10 and will welcome that my right hon. Friend has come to the House today to apologise as a first step in responding to this. Will he assure me that he will continue to keep the House updated on the implementation of the measures he is taking in response to the report? Will he also ensure that the whole No. 10 team fully co-operates with the Met's inquiries so that they conclude as swiftly as possible?

The Prime Minister

Yes, of course I will keep the House updated, and of course everybody in No. 10 will co-operate with the Met to the full.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab)

This is surely a new low: a Prime Minister of our country forced to come here to the mother of Parliaments to plead the fifth in a criminal investigation because,

if the truth were told, he knows it would incriminate him. Let me ask a simple question. If he cannot get his facts straight on whether he was at a party in his own flat, how will anyone in this House ever again believe a word he says, and how will our partners around the world ever put their trust in him?

The Prime Minister

I am not going to dignify that question with an answer, except to say that the right hon. Gentleman has to wait. Everything he said is completely prejudicial.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)

I thought the people of Lancashire were supposed to be straight speaking, but I can assure people that my constituents are calling the Prime Minister a lot more than a wally—words I cannot repeat. We have staff who were too frightened to raise concerns about behaviour that they knew was ongoing. Half the staff invited to the bring your own booze party did not turn up, because they knew it was wrong, yet the Prime Minister said he thought it was a work event and within the rules. His lack of leadership and judgment is also shown by the “let the bodies pile high” comment about a second lockdown. The one thing that the leader of the Scottish Tories has said that is true is that this Prime Minister is not fit for office. Given that the Prime Minister will do anything to save his own skin, does that mean that the leader of the Scottish Tories will get binned as well?

The Prime Minister

I direct the hon. Gentleman to what I have said earlier.

Mick Whitley (Birkenhead) (Lab)

No one has said in the House this afternoon that 155,000 people died of covid. That is why we introduced the rules. This is simply not the comprehensive report that the British public were promised for so long, but at least it is clear in its findings that there was

“a serious failure to observe not just the high standards expected of those working at the heart of Government but also of the standards expected of the entire British population”

at the height of the pandemic. Does the Prime Minister accept responsibility for his failure to live up to the standards that the rest of us were expected to

uphold?

The Prime Minister

I take responsibility for everything that happened in No. 10 and that the Government did throughout the pandemic.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab)

The Gray report is clear that there should be no excessive consumption of alcohol in a workplace. Can the Prime Minister therefore assure the House that his own consumption of alcohol was not excessive and in particular that his judgment was at no time so clouded that he was in danger of telling the truth?

The Prime Minister

I could not quite hear the end of the hon. Gentleman's question, but the answer is no. If he thinks I drunk too much, no.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op)

The Prime Minister wants my constituents to suspend their disbelief and wait for the Met police to report. In which case, will he at least give them clarity that should the Metropolitan police issue him with a fixed penalty notice for participation at his party, he will resign?

The Prime Minister

The hon. Gentleman really needs to wait and see what the Met decide.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab)

We have had excessive what-aboutery, bluster and bravado from the Prime Minister. I suggest to him politely that we need a lot more humility from him, given that while the Gray report might be paper thin, it is very clear about the serious failings at No. 10. A fish rots from its head. May I suggest to the Prime Minister that it is not a new Prime Minister's office that we need, but a new Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister

I hear the hon. Gentleman, and I simply repeat what I have said earlier. I am grateful to Sue Gray. We are taking action following her report, but he needs to wait for the conclusion of the inquiry.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP)

Sue Gray has made it clear that this is not a report, but an update on the investigation into covid breaches in Downing Street. Indeed, in her update she says that she is “extremely limited” in what she can say and that

“it is not possible at present to provide a meaningful report”.

If it is a case of, “Nothing to see here, move on”, as the Prime Minister is desperately trying to convince us, why has he repeatedly refused to commit to publish the full report, even after the police investigation has concluded? What does it say about those populating the Government Benches if they still genuinely think he is the best among them to be Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister

That is not what I have said.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab)

The Prime Minister told Parliament and the British people that there were no parties. We now know that he attended several, including one at which he was ambushed with cake, in his most pathetic excuse yet. Given his previous statements, which we know to be patently false, how does he explain why this report says that at least 12 parties in his home warrant police investigation?

The Prime Minister

The hon. Gentleman has proved several times in that question that he has not got the faintest idea what he is talking about, and he should wait for the outcome of the inquiry.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab)

In the Prime Minister’s apologies up to now, he has explained these things away as one-offs—a work do, ambushed by a cake and all those kinds of things. But this report makes it clear that there was a repeated pattern of behaviour, with the booze-ups after work that nobody else was having—not all our constituents who followed the rules. The report says that there is an investigation of a Downing Street party on 13 November 2020. Why did the Prime Minister tell my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) on 8 December that no such gathering took place? Subsequently, he told my right

hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party that anyone who tells mistruths from that Dispatch Box should resign. Is he a man of his word?

The Prime Minister

The hon. Lady needs to look at what I said and she needs to look at the outcome of the inquiry.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD)

The Prime Minister said in his statement that he understands the anger of people in this country, but does he also understand that for many people in this country who are watching, their greatest fears about how this would be handled have been realised? They have seen an apology, yes, but they have also seen obfuscation, delay and tinkering, rather than an acceptance of responsibility. The Prime Minister says that he wants to get on and deal with the important issues facing this country. Perhaps the only way we will be able to do that is for him to accept that he has become an obstacle to it and resign.

The Prime Minister

No, we are going to get on with the job.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab)

The Prime Minister was wrong in something he said earlier: the Sue Gray update can be both damning and incomplete. Most of us can only guess how much more damning the full report will be. His colleagues should worry about that. I think he knows how bad it is going to be, because he knows what has gone on. Is that not the real reason why he will not commit to publishing the report in full when the police have completed their investigation?

The Prime Minister

No. The hon. Gentleman is totally prejudging the whole thing. He needs to contain himself and wait for the police to complete their inquiries.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP)

The Sue Gray update is not the report that this House deserves and it is not the transparency that the public were expecting, but it does make it very clear that there were “failures of leadership” at No. 10. The Prime Minister is the leader at No. 10, so will he now pack his suitcase, or will he leave it to his officials to carry

his cans?

The Prime Minister

The hon. Gentleman just needs to look at the report again and to wait for the conclusion of the inquiry.

Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab)

“Look her in the eyes and tell her you never bend the rules.” A lot of us remember that campaign. It cost of tens of millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money. On 13 November 2020, the Prime Minister bent the rules, didn’t he?

The Prime Minister

I refer the hon. Gentleman to what I said earlier in this House. Frankly, he needs to wait until the conclusion of the police inquiry.

Stephen Flynn (Aberdeen South) (SNP)

This morning, the Conservative party in Scotland issued a press release that stated:

“The pandemic sees rise in criminals getting away with crimes”.

Was it talking about the Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister

What we are actually doing is cutting crime by 14% and putting 20,000 more police on the streets.

Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab)

Week in, week out throughout the pandemic, I, like many of my colleagues, had to deal with constituents who could not see their dying relatives or grieve with their families. Some of us were directly affected when we lost family members and loved ones. The Prime Minister’s actions have made a mockery of the British people’s sacrifices during the pandemic, and now he is the subject of a criminal investigation. It is a new low for our country and it makes a mockery of our democracy to the rest of the world. If the Prime Minister takes responsibility for everything that has happened, as he has said, is it not time that he puts his party, this Parliament and the country out of their misery and steps down, so that we

can move on and focus on the national interest? At the moment, that is not possible because of the crisis that he and No. 10 have created.

The Prime Minister

No.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP)

It is clear that the Prime Minister has used these parties, like many an under-par manager, to buy popularity and favour. Can the Prime Minister tell us if he is using the same techniques when negotiating treaties and trade deals with international leaders?

The Prime Minister

No.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op)

Today should have been about contrition and remorse, but it seems that the Prime Minister does not understand the meaning of “sorry”; instead, it has insulted the people who have suffered and sacrificed for the last two years. One question many people want to know is: who is paying for these investigations—the police and Sue Gray’s report—and who is paying for his legal advice? Is it the taxpayer?

The Prime Minister

I must say I think the hon. Member is wrong in what she says. As for who is covering the police costs, the police are covering the police costs.

Daisy Cooper (St Albans) (LD)

The Prime Minister has inadvertently referred to this as “the” Gray report when, if he had read as far as the front cover, he would see that it is called an “update”. It is because it is an update that it makes public trust in the Met’s investigation even more important. The public must know that the Met will investigate without fear or favour, so can the Prime Minister confirm that, not at any single stage, has anybody in No. 10 or the Cabinet Office sought to influence the Met’s decision on delaying its initial investigation, or was the delay the result of its own incompetence?

The Prime Minister

No, and the only people calling into question the Met's independence are I think those on the side opposite—on the hon. Member's Benches.

Anna McMorrin (Cardiff North) (Lab)

The Prime Minister has seriously misjudged the mood of the country, and indeed he has misjudged the mood of his own Back Benchers. My constituent wrote to me devastated and upset: he could not see his disabled son, his elderly mother with dementia and his newborn child, putting a serious toll on his mental health. Like millions across the country, he followed the rules, but the Prime Minister thinks he is above the rules. Instead, he blames his civil service and he restructures. Will he do the decent thing and resign?

The Prime Minister

I disagree with the hon. Member profoundly, because I do understand people's feelings and I do understand why this is so important for people. But I must say that I think the best thing now is for the inquiry to be concluded, and in the meantime for us all to get on with the work that I think everybody wants us to do.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans)

I call Marion Fellows.

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP)

Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I have enjoyed the exercise this afternoon. I also wanted to enjoy the Prime Minister's answers to questions, but unfortunately he has ducked and dived, and done everything but answer questions about a party on 13 November, about whether he will put out the final report—

Mr Deputy Speaker

Just ask the question!

Marion Fellows

Okay, I will ask the Prime Minister one more, which has been asked already. If he gets a fine—a fixed penalty fine—from the Metropolitan police after all this is over, will he pay it himself or ask a Tory donor to pay it for him?

The Prime Minister

There is a process, and we have to wait for it to conclude.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab)

Among those who were the most isolated during the pandemic were people with learning disabilities, cut off from visits by their families and not even allowed an advocate if they were admitted to hospital. For too many, restrictions to services and the awful isolation without visitors that the Prime Minister's rules expected them to follow were a matter of life and death. The mortality rate for people with learning disabilities from covid was eight times that of the general population. When he thinks about the damage done to all those groups who were so isolated and their families, and the serious failings of leadership and judgment in No. 10 found by this independent investigation, how can he think his position is tenable?

The Prime Minister

The hon. Member is entirely right about the suffering of people with learning disabilities, and indeed all vulnerable groups who were exposed to lockdowns for long periods. That is why, actually, we worked so hard to make sure that we could get this country out of lockdown and keep it out of lockdown, and that was our objective.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP)

I do not need to wait for the full Sue Gray report, because this one tells me one important fact: there were a heck of a lot of parties. At which point during this catalogue of frivolity, while the Prime Minister was clearing last night's empty wine bottles off his desk before settling down to work the following afternoon, did he conclude that having one rule for him and another for the general public was undermining his own health messaging and costing people's lives?

The Prime Minister

The hon. Gentleman is misrepresenting what Sue Gray says. He is also, perhaps inadvertently, completely mispresenting what happened.

Kim Johnson (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab)

This report confirms what we already know: the abject failure in leadership at No. 10. Will the Prime Minister take responsibility and do what the constituents

of Liverpool, Riverside are asking for—resign, so that we can get on and deal with the crisis facing this country?

The Prime Minister

No. I refer to what I said earlier.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab)

On 8 December, the Prime Minister told this House:

“I have been repeatedly assured since these allegations emerged that there was no party and that no covid rules were broken.”—[Official Report, 8 December 2021; Vol. 705, c. 372.]

Well, just who gave him those assurances? Given that he was at some of the parties, and at least one of them was in his own flat, he should not need anyone else to tell him what happened, so it looks like when the Prime Minister spoke those words he was fooling himself—or was he just trying to fool everyone else?

The Prime Minister

The hon. Gentleman needs to wait and see what the inquiry concludes. That is what due process demands. I stick by what I said.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans)

Order. I can see eight people standing, and they are the last eight I will take—just to let the House know.

Rachel Hopkins (Luton South) (Lab)

Section 5.1 of the ministerial code states:

“Ministers must uphold the political impartiality of the Civil Service, and not ask civil servants to act in any way which would conflict with the Civil Service Code”,

and finding vi. of Sue Gray’s report, which I have read, says:

“Some staff wanted to raise concerns about behaviours they witnessed at work but...felt unable to do so.”

Does the Prime Minister agree that if his staff—in fact, civil servants and workers everywhere—feel afraid to raise concerns about inappropriate behaviour at work, they should contact their trade union rep, or join a trade union?

The Prime Minister

That is why I have accepted the conclusions and Sue Gray's findings in full, and we will implement the changes.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans)

Order. I assume that everyone standing has been here for the opening statement and throughout.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con)

I have listened carefully to the statement, the questions and the answers, and indeed to my constituents, many of whom are devastated to hear that there may have been parties and some of whom have suffered great hardship. I am glad that the Prime Minister has come here to apologise and to take on board the recommendations, but I am concerned that this is taking time and attention from key issues. This statement alone has been going on for nearly two hours. The Prime Minister has achieved great things with Brexit and vaccines, but can he assure this House, me and my constituents that this ongoing investigation and the reorganisation of No. 10 will not take his laser-like focus away from the issues that matter to us?

The Prime Minister

Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that absolute assurance.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab)

Has a date been set for the Prime Minister to be interviewed by the Metropolitan police in connection with their inquiry?

The Prime Minister

The police are independent and they must get on with their inquiry.

Dave Doogan (Angus) (SNP)

This reads like a dreadful, poorly written soap opera—an unbelievable soap opera. I hear Government Members say how important it is to their constituents

to go into the detail, but my constituents are incandescent at the behaviour of this Prime Minister. Will he accept the damage he is doing to the office of elected representative—to all of us—and will he do the right thing and clear out?

The Prime Minister

No, for the reasons I have already given.

Steven Bonnar (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP)

We do know that staff were made to work in conditions that made them feel uneasy, and perhaps even unsafe, and they also felt that they were unable to say something. People were exposed to a potentially deadly virus, unable to say something about it, in their workplace, while parties were raging on around and about them, “At least some” of which, says Mrs Gray,

“represent a serious failure to observe...the high standards expected of those working at the heart of Government”.

Who is responsible for that, Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister

The hon. Member is completely misrepresenting what took place.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP)

Despite the omissions from Sue Gray’s update, it makes crystal clear that the office that the Prime Minister occupies and the Government that he leads behaved in a despicable and disrespectful way when the public faced the gravest of threats. Does he not accept that his personal conduct before becoming Prime Minister and since has been completely unacceptable and that if he had any respect for his own office and for the public—and, indeed, a scintilla of integrity—he would announce his resignation to the 1922 committee tonight?

The Prime Minister

No.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP)

When will the various statements made by the Prime Minister from the Dispatch

Box about parties and gatherings at Downing Street be investigated under the ministerial code? Is it not absolutely farcical that that is a question for the Prime Minister at all?

The Prime Minister

We have an investigation going on. That is the one that I think people should focus on, and they should allow the police to get on with their job.

Richard Thomson (Gordon) (SNP)

The Prime Minister said in his statement, “sorry for the things we...did not get right” and, “sorry for the way this...has been handled”, which is a generic non-apology that will mean absolutely nothing to anyone who heard it. What I and millions of others want to hear is: apart from getting caught out in all of this, what is the Prime Minister personally sorry and genuinely regretful for in his own conduct? If he just resorts to that tired, hackneyed form of words that he used to begin with, does that not show that it is not a new Office of the Prime Minister that we need but a new Prime Minister in office?

The Prime Minister

I have repeated several times how sorry I am for any misjudgements that I made, and I continue to apologise for them. All I can say is that we need to get on and await the outcome of the inquiry and allow the Government to deliver on the priorities of the country, which are: to unite and level up; to continue to cut crime; and to make colossal investments across our whole country. That is what we are going to do.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans)

Order. I thank the Prime Minister for his statement and for answering questions for just short of two hours.