

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Independent Investigation into alleged discrimination within the Conservative and Unionist Party releases final Report**

The Independent Investigation into alleged discrimination within the Conservative and Unionist Party (the Investigation), chaired by Professor Swaran Singh, has today released its final report. The full document is attached and can be accessed at <https://singhinvestigation.co.uk/>

**Media are strongly advised to refer to this document and to the Terms of Reference of the Investigation**, which can be accessed at <https://www.conservatives.com/investigation>

A summary of the principal findings and recommendations is included below.

Professor Swaran Singh said:

*“Racism and other forms of discrimination have a long-lasting and pernicious effect on individuals and communities. We were tasked with scrutinising how the Conservative Party dealt with allegations of such discrimination and whether its policies and processes to deal with complaints of discrimination were fit for purpose. Our report should make for uncomfortable reading for the Party and, more importantly, spur it into action. I hope the Party will fully accept our recommendations and implement the changes needed in a transparent and timely manner.”*

#### **Summary of findings**

The Investigation has found:

##### **Nature and extent of complaints into discrimination:**

- Over the six years 2015 to 2020 (inclusive), the Party’s central database recorded 1,418 complaints concerning 727 incidents of alleged discrimination;
- Two-thirds of all incidents reported to the Complaints Team at Party headquarters (“**CCHQ**”), related to allegations of anti-Muslim discrimination;
- Three-quarters of all incidents recorded in the complaints database at CCHQ involved social media activity;

- Of those people interviewed by the Investigation who had one or more Protected Characteristics (as defined by the Equality Act 2010), most denied any personal experience of discrimination. Where such discrimination was experienced, it was most likely to have occurred at the level of a local Party association;
- Anti-Muslim sentiment has been evidenced at local association and individual levels, as demonstrated by a number of social media complaints against Party members which were upheld by the Complaints Process;
- Many of those interviewed by the Investigation agreed that Islamist extremism should not be conflated with Islam, and that concerns about Islamism should not prevent the Party from significantly improving its community outreach efforts into Muslim communities.

### **Complaints Handling:**

- There is clear evidence of a Party complaints system in need of overhaul. The Party has an under-resourced and inadequately trained Complaints Team and a weak data collection system, and communications between the Complaints Team and complainants and respondents have been poor. When compared to best practice as recommended by organisations such as the EHRC, the Party complaints processes falls short;
- There has been a lack of transparency in the complaints process, with no clear decision-making process as to how complaints should progress; and no specified time frames for resolution;
- Systems for identifying discrimination and the handling of complaints at local Party association level are weak, with no common understanding of the process, and with association chairs expressing low confidence in the system;
- There is no evidence that complaints related to Islam are treated differently from those related to other forms of discrimination;
- Neither is there evidence of attempts to pressure or interfere with the handling of individual complaints, and no evidence that Party chairs have overturned decisions made by the CCHQ Complaints Panel;
- There is clear evidence that, in relation to the Party's Codes of Conduct for members, social media rules are not widely known or adhered to. Minimal training is given to members on compliance, and there is at present no requirement to read the Codes as a condition of membership.

### **Appropriateness of Sanctions:**

- Complaints related to a Protected Characteristic were more likely to result in a sanction than complaints not related to Protected Characteristics;
- There are no clear guidelines as to which behaviours should attract which sanctions;

- Sanctions applied in the specific cases reviewed by the Investigation appeared reasonable, proportionate and appropriate;
- The time taken to investigate and conclude the cases reviewed ranged from a resolution on the same day to an investigation that lasted seven months. Since the information relating to the duration of the investigation was not available for almost half (nine) of the cases studied, it was not possible to determine the average time taken for cases to be resolved;
- CCHQ has not published guidelines on how long investigations into certain types of complaint should reasonably be expected to take.

## Summary of Recommendations:

### ***Nature and Extent of Complaints - Essential Action:***

- **Within six weeks**, the Party's leadership should publish an Action Plan laying out (1) how the Party and its leadership plan to tackle the failings highlighted, referencing all the recommendations in this report, and (2) the criteria against which the success of the Action Plan will be measured.
- **Within six months**, the Party should publish a six-month Progress Report, prepared by the Party.
- **After twelve months**, the Party should instruct a One-Year Review to be carried out by this Investigation or other appropriate body, to determine the extent to which the recommendations have been implemented.
- **Within six months**, the Party should produce and implement a single, easy to understand and mandatory Code of Conduct to be applied across the entire membership of the Conservative Party in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This new Code should bring all local Party associations into line with the practices and policies of the Party and into compliance with the Equality Act 2010. A notice that this new Code of Conduct will be deemed to be accepted by every person who remains a Party member beyond a certain date should be issued **within six months**, and the Code should be signed (or expressly be deemed to be accepted) by every new member as a condition of membership.
- **Within twelve months**, each Party association should have at least one named member who has received appropriate training on:
  - the *Equality Act 2010*, including Protected Characteristics and the various forms of discrimination, harassment and victimisation,
  - the Party's complaints and training processes, and
  - the Party's constitution, Code of Conduct and social media rules.
- Training courses should be offered on **an annual basis** to those who have not previously had the training. For those who have previously had the training, refresher

courses should be offered **every three to five years**, with records of completion kept.

***Complaints Handling and Appropriateness of Sanctions:***

- **Within six months**, the Party should publish a comprehensive policy and procedure describing how complaints are handled, including criteria on what types of behaviour will be subject to investigation, what sanctions (or range of sanctions) are considered appropriate for different types of behaviour, and clear timeframes for each stage of the complaints process. This should also include a dedicated online form for complaint submissions.
- **Within six months**, the Party should decide whether to handle all complaints centrally at CCHQ or enhance the capacity of local associations to handle complaints. Either decision requires increased staffing and training.
- **Within six weeks**, the Party should develop a strategy for how to improve the training it offers to local associations. **Within six months**, the Party should have developed training and have begun disseminating this to local associations.

***Specific Cases:***

- **Within six weeks**, the Party should review its investigations into the cases included in this Report where the Investigation has found that the complaints process has fallen short. **Within six months**, the Party should have identified lessons to be learned from these cases and, where appropriate, reached a resolution.

Assisting Professor Singh and his team on the Investigation were two Lay Advisers, Sarah Anderson CBE, and Wasiq Wasiq. Sarah is a former member of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and is now CEO of registered charity The Listening Place. She is currently a member of the State Honours Committee, having previously been a member of the Council of ACAS and the Women and Work Commission, and has extensive experience of running businesses. Wasiq is an academic and trustee for the charity Muslims Against Antisemitism (MAAS).

**ENDS**

## **Notes to editors:**

### **Media interviews**

This Independent Investigation was commissioned by the Conservative Party. The Report is addressed to the Party, which is now free to accept or reject the Findings and Recommendations as it sees fit. The Report is therefore not in essence a public document, but we have chosen to publish it given the strong interest in this process.

The Investigation believes that the focus of attention should now shift to the Conservative Party and its response to the Findings and Recommendations of this Report. Consequently we will not be making Professor Singh or other members of the team available for interview.

We would however like to draw your attention to an opinion piece by Professor Singh published by the Press Association, and to an interview with Professor Singh by David Hughes, Political Editor of the Press Association.

Regrettably, members of the Investigation team have been subjected to personal attacks on their competence and reputations during the course of the Investigation, and certain individuals and organisations worked to undermine the credibility of the Investigation before its work even began. We do not intend to amplify the voices of such antagonists by entering into public quarrels of the type that have blighted recent attempts to address issues of discrimination in the UK. We assume that the media will look to question the motives of anyone seeking to obstruct positive change.

### **Biographical note – Professor Singh**

Professor Swaran Singh is a Professor of Social and Community Psychiatry at Warwick University and a Consultant Psychiatrist with the Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership trust. He has served as a Commissioner for the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

### **The Independent Investigation**

The Investigation was set up by the Conservative and Unionist Party in May 2020, with a remit to consider and report upon the nature and extent of complaints against the Party, Party Members, Party Representatives and/or Volunteer Leaders (whether made formally or otherwise) of alleged discrimination because of a protected characteristic (including religion or belief), or of indirect discrimination, between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2020.

The Investigation examined evidence relating to allegations of discrimination and/or harassment and/or victimisation against the Conservative Party, Party Members, Party Representatives and/or Volunteer Leaders between 2015 and 2020 (inclusive), within the scope of the Terms of Reference of the Investigation, which may be read at [www.conservatives.com/investigation](http://www.conservatives.com/investigation).

The Investigation also considered and reported on any complaints of harassment and/or victimisation during the same period; and how the Party has investigated and dealt with such complaints, including any sanctions applied by the Party in circumstances where complaints have been investigated and upheld.

The Investigation covered England, Wales and Northern Ireland (but not Scotland).

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