

Joint Biosecurity Centre: Greens sound alarm over civil liberties, data protection and scientific expertise



Green Party

28 May 2020

Jonathan Bartley, co-leader of the Green Party of England and Wales, has written to Health Secretary Matt Hancock raising a series of concerns about the role of the Joint Biosecurity Centre. [1]

It follows the announcement yesterday of the need for local lockdowns and the role the centre would play. [2]

It has previously been reported that centre would closely follow the UK's anti-terrorism national security system. [3]

Bartley said:

“Rather than relying on the established expertise of Public Health England, Matt Hancock has chosen to establish a totally new body, the Joint Biosecurity Centre, about whom we know next to nothing but would play a significant part in local lockdowns.

“Such lockdowns would clearly impact fundamental civil rights and so it is vital that there is clarity and political accountability about who is making decisions about when and how such restrictions should be imposed and then lifted, and how they will be scrutinised

“It is essential that its membership is made public, together with information about its members, how they have been selected, on what basis and particularly whether they have scientific or medical expertise.

“So far the only public information is that the body will be led by Tom Hurd. We know very little about him, other than that he is a leading candidate to take over as the next director general of MI6.

“Putting this together with concerns about the acquisition and storage of highly personal health data rings alarm bells about our civil liberties.”

ENDS

Notes

1

A copy of the letter is [available to view here](#).

2

On Wednesday 27 May, the Health Secretary raised the issue of local lockdowns in response to flare-ups of the Coronavirus and the role of the Joint Biosecurity Centre in deciding when they should be implemented in particular settings..

3

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/12/former-counter-terror-official-tom-hurd-put-in-charge-new-uk-biosecurity-centre-coronavirus>

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[Public should also be applauded at tonight's Clap for Carers, says Green Party MP Caroline Lucas](#)



Green Party

28 May 2020

- Caroline Lucas MP calls for tonight's Clap for Carers to also be for the public, in recognition of the huge sacrifices people have made to keep others safe
- Lucas says coronavirus crisis has shown our extraordinary capacity for compassion and generosity as she calls for green recovery and renewal
- Lucas: "If we the people show the lead, we can force even this Government to do the right thing."

Green Party MP Caroline Lucas has said the public should also applaud each other at what is expected to be the final weekly Clap for Carers tonight [Thursday 28 May], in recognition of the huge sacrifices people have made to keep others safe.

In a speech to launch the party's campaign for a green recovery from the coronavirus crisis, [1], Lucas said that the courage and solidarity of the British public throughout the crisis has stood in sharp contrast to the country's leadership.

The coronavirus crisis has seen people make huge, often harrowing, personal sacrifices. And it has also seen hundreds of thousands of volunteers willing to risk their lives to help out millions of key workers putting duty and compassion above their own safety and the mutual aid movement bringing together communities up and down our land.

Lucas said this collective effort has changed us as a nation and shown we can build the better future the public deserve, one where the climate is safer. The inclination to goodness is hard wired in humanity. Despite the danger, fear and terrible sadness caused by the pandemic, we can now finally demolish the miserable mythology of human selfishness. And we can harness this new energy to tackle the even bigger crisis we face, the climate crisis.

In the speech Lucas said:

"The courage and solidarity of the British people stands in stark contrast to the leadership our country has suffered during this crisis.

"And I think that's why we all feel so angry over the actions of Dominic Cummings. It's as if all those sacrifices are being thrown back in our faces.

"I share your fury in the face of the complacency, incompetence and dishonesty we have endured.

"But just as we have changed as a nation, as communities, as individuals we have to believe that if we apply the right pressure, if we the people show the lead, we can force even this Government to do the right thing."

The Green Party will be setting out its proposals in the coming weeks as part of the campaign. It is calling for:

- A commitment to a green recovery including investment energy efficiency and clean transport in order to get people back to work and to modernise our economy
- Tapping into the energy and generosity shown by the people of Britain to give every part of the country the tools they need to build inclusive and sustainable places and communities.
- Putting people back at the heart of our democracy by ensuring all of us are partners in designing a better future for our nation.
- Extending the connections we have made in our communities so that we work together whatever our political beliefs

ENDS

Notes

1

The speech is available to watch on the [Green Party's Facebook page](#).

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[Jonathan Bartley calls for investigation into potential breach of special advisers' code of conduct by Dominic Cummings](#)



Green Party

26 May 2020

Green Party co-leader Jonathan Bartley has called for an investigation into whether Dominic Cummings broke the special advisers' code of conduct by editing a blog post which he claimed predicted the risk of coronavirus.

In the press conference held yesterday in the Downing Street garden, Cummings claimed he had written about "the possible threat of coronaviruses" last year.

It has since emerged that a post on the aide's personal blog from March 2019 appears to have been edited on April 14 this year to include a reference to coronavirus. This was the day he returned to work after self-isolating in Durham. [1]

Bartley has now written to the Head of the Civil Service and Cabinet Secretary Sir Mark Sedwill [2] to ask whether this action would be in breach of the special advisers' code of conduct which states "Special advisers must not take public part in political controversy, through any form of statement whether in speeches or letters to the press, or in books, social media, articles or leaflets." [3]

He has also asked for an explanation about who authorised the press conference, which itself also appears to be a breach of the code.

Bartley said:

"If Mr Cummings has gone back to edit blog posts while he was a special advisor to the Government, to make it appear he was predicting a coronavirus pandemic last year then that clearly needs investigating.

"This took place while he was taking part in meetings at the highest level to determine the Government policy on Coronavirus and it would appear to be a clear breach of the special advisers' code of conduct.

"The fact Mr Cummings was given the platform of the Downing Street garden to hold a press conference to try to explain his journey to Durham also raises serious questions over why this was permitted and whether any taxpayers' money was used.

"There must be clear boundaries to defend the independence of the civil service. It would be wholly inappropriate if any civil servant supported Mr Cummings yesterday.

"There must be an explanation about why the press conference was permitted, who was involved, what resources were used as well as an investigation into whether Mr Cummings himself broke the civil service code."

ENDS

Notes

1

<https://twitter.com/faisalislam/status/1265034438645293056>

2

A copy of the letter can be viewed [here](#)

3

Special advisers code of conduct is available to view here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/special-advisers-code-of-conduct>

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Green MP Caroline Lucas calls for Dominic Cummings to be sacked



Green Party

25 May 2020

Green Party MP Caroline Lucas has written to the Prime Minister this afternoon calling for the dismissal of Dominic Cummings.

The MP for Brighton Pavilion wrote:

Dear PM,

I am writing to urge you to sack your special adviser, Dominic Cummings, with immediate effect.

My constituents are deeply and rightly concerned by the lack of consistency between the responsibility they have tried to show in complying with the Government's clear instructions on social distancing and Mr Cummings reported actions. Whilst I acknowledge that each and every one of us have had to make difficult, often heart breaking, decisions in the last couple of months since lockdown, a situation in which there's perceived to be different rules for a select, privileged few is untenable, and ultimately dangerous.

Your refusal so far to hold Mr Cummings to account for breaching the guidelines designed to keep us all safe is undermining your Government's public health strategy. The price of your insistent denial and persistent

defence of his wrong doing is public trust – and that will have worrying short and long term consequences for our NHS, public safety and economy.

Mr Cummings actions are indefensible, illegal and reckless. Your Government's response shows utter contempt for so many people who have made sacrifices through this crisis and continue to do so. I therefore call on you to act decisively and to end this trial by media and public opinion, which has seen a young boy in particular brought into the spotlight through no fault of his own, and sack your special adviser, making clear that the rules apply to everyone and that none of your team are entitled to break them.

If this pandemic has taught us anything it's that our country has a huge capacity for compassion and kindness. This scandal is also a reminder of how much we value justice and fairness. It's high time for you to do what's right and take responsibility for Dominic Cummings poor judgement thus far, and insist he does the same.

I look forward to your prompt response, which I will share with my constituents.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline

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[Chancellor must guarantee support will continue as long as necessary, say Greens](#)



Green Party

12 May 2020

The Chancellor has today announced that the government's furlough scheme will be continued for another four months.

Green Party co-leader Jonathan Bartley said: "We welcome the government's commitment to extending this important scheme, but what we need to see now is a further guarantee that the level of support will not drop and will continue for as long as necessary.

"Nobody should be forced into poverty during a global pandemic yet we already know that the government's job retention scheme does not cover new starters and the self-employed.

"A Universal Basic Income would provide security to all those that need it and ensure workers and employers have greater flexibility in these precarious times."

ENDS

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