

PM statement to the House of Commons: 25 May 2022

Thank you Mr. Speaker With permission, I will make a statement.

I am grateful to Sue Gray for her report today

and I want to thank her for the work she has done,

and also to thank the Metropolitan Police for completing their investigation.

I want to begin by renewing my apology to the House and to the whole country,

for the short lunchtime gathering on 19th June 2020 in the Cabinet Room

during which I stood at my place at the Cabinet table,

and for which I received a Fixed Penalty Notice,

and I also want to say, Mr Speaker, above all, that I take full responsibility for everything that took place on my watch.

Sue Gray's report has emphasised that it is up to the political leadership in No10 to take the ultimate responsibility, and of course I do.

But since these investigations have now come to an end, this is my first opportunity to set out some of the context

and to explain both my understanding of what happened and also to explain what I have previously said to the House.

It is important to set out that over a period of about 600 days,

gatherings on a total of eight dates have been found to be in breach of the regulations,

in a building that is 5,300 metres square across five floors, excluding the flats,

Mr Speaker, I do think it is important, because this is the first time I've been able to set out the context

in which hundreds of staff are entitled to work,

and in the Cabinet Office, which has thousands of officials and is now the biggest it has been at any point in its 100-year history,

and that in itself is one of the reasons why the government is now looking for change and reform.

Mr Speaker, those staff working in Downing Street were permitted to continue

attending their office for the purpose of work
and the exemption under the regulations applied to their work
because of the nature of their jobs reporting directly to the Prime Minister.
These people were working extremely long hours,
doing their very best to give this country the ability to fight the pandemic,
Mr Speaker, I appreciate this is no mitigation but it is important to set out
the context.

[Intervention from the Speaker]

Mr Speaker I'm trying to set out the context, not to mitigate or absolve
myself in any way.

And the exemption under which they were present in Downing Street includes
those circumstances where officials and advisers were leaving the government,
and it was appropriate to recognise them and thank them for the work they
have done.

I briefly attended such gatherings to thank them for their service,
which I believe is one of the essential duties of leadership
and particularly important when people need to feel that their contributions
have been appreciated
and to keep morale as high as possible.

...I'm trying to explain the reasons I was there, Mr Speaker

It is clear from what Sue Gray has had to say that several of these
gatherings then went on far longer than was necessary,

They were clearly in breach of the rules and they clearly fell foul of the
rules.

I have to tell the house because the house will need to know this, and again
this is not to mitigate or extenuate

But I had no knowledge of subsequent proceedings because I simply wasn't
there,

and I have been as surprised and disappointed as anyone else in this House as
the revelations unfolded.

And frankly, Mr Speaker, I have been appalled by some of the behaviour,
particularly in the treatment of the security and the cleaning staff.

And I would like to apologise to those members of staff

and I expect anyone who behaved in that way to apologise to them as well.

And I am happy to set on the record now,

that when I said – I came to this house and said in all sincerity – the rules and guidance had been followed at all times

it was what I believed to be true.

It was certainly the case when I was present at gatherings to wish staff farewell,

and the House will note that my attendance at these moments – brief as it was – has not been found to be outside the rules.

But clearly this was not the case for some of those gatherings after I had left,

and at other gatherings when I was not even in the building.

So I would like to correct the record, to take this opportunity,

not in any sense to absolve myself of responsibility.

which I take and have always taken,

but simply to explain why I spoke as I did in this House.

Mr Speaker, in response to her interim report Sue Gray acknowledges that very significant changes have already been enacted.

She writes – and I quote –

“I am pleased that progress is being made in addressing the issues I raised.”

And she adds –

“Since my update there have been changes to the organisation and management of Downing Street and the Cabinet Office with the aim of creating clearer lines of leadership and accountability and now these need the chance and time to bed in.”

Number 10 now has its own permanent secretary charged with applying the highest standards of governance.

There are now easier ways for staff to voice any worries

and Sue Gray welcomes that – and I quote

“steps have since been taken to introduce more easily accessible means by which to raise concerns electronically, in person or online, including directly with the Permanent Secretary.”

The entire senior management has changed.

There is a new Chief of Staff

an elected Member of this House who also commands the status of a Cabinet Minister.

There is a new director of Communications, a new Principal Private Secretary and a number of other key appointments in my office.

And I am confident that with the changes and new structures that are now in place,

That we are humbled by the experience,

and we have learned our lesson.

And I want to conclude by saying that I am humbled, and I have learned a lesson Mr Speaker.

I want to say whatever the failings of No10 and the Cabinet Office throughout this very difficult period and my own,

and for which I take full responsibility

I continue to believe that the civil servants and advisers in question, hundreds of them, thousands of them – some of whom, Mr Speaker are the very people who have received fines – are good hard-working people,

motivated by the highest calling to do the very best for our country.

And I will always be proud of what they achieved,

including procuring essential life-saving PPE,

creating the biggest testing programme in Europe,

and helping to enable the development and distribution of the vaccine,

which got this country through the worst pandemic of a century.

And now Mr Speaker, we must get our country through the aftershocks of Covid, with every ounce of ingenuity and compassion and hard work.

So I hope that, today, as well as learning the lessons from Sue Gray's report to which I am glad I commissioned and I again, I repeat that I'm grateful to her

I hope very much that now she has reported, we will be able to move on and focus on the priorities of the British people,

standing firm against Russian aggression,

easing the hardship caused by the rising costs that people are facing,

and fulfilling our pledge to generate the high wage, high skilled, high employment that will unite and level up our whole United Kingdom.

That is my mission, that is our mission, that is the mission of the whole of the government

and we will work day and night to deliver it.

And I commend this Statement to the House.