

**Parliamentary Candidate**  
**Uxbridge & South Ruislip Borough Constituency**

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The Committee on Standards in Public Life,  
1 Horse Guards Road,  
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2020 July 22

Dear Committee on Standards in Public Life,

**Review into the regulation of election finance**

I respond to Lord Evans' e-mail of yesterday and his request:

As an independent candidate at the 2019 General Election ... we would like to hear about your direct experiences in complying with the rules on accepting donations, spending money, keeping records and reporting after the election and any challenges you faced.

I refer to the rules outlined in The Electoral Commission's *Guidance for candidates and agents Part 3 Spending and donations*.

The relevant rules that affected me were:

**a) The regulated period.** As an independent candidate the beginning of the period wasn't completely clear. I took at as the day after I telephoned the Electoral and Registration Services Manager and announced my intention to stand.

**b) Spending limits.** This was way above what I, as an independent candidate, was going to spend. So the limit £600 limit on personal expenses did not really affect me, but as a candidate living in France the £600 limit would otherwise have been very tight given the cost of travel to the UK. To keep expenses down, I travelled by the cheapest means possible (coach, ferries).

**c) Who is responsible for candidate spending?** I should state that I acted as my own agent.

**d) What counts as a donation?** The fact that anything worth less than £50 did not count as a donation considerably simplified life (but see below concerning crowdfunding).

**e) Who can donate?** Concerning donations from individuals, *the fact that a candidate can only accept donations from those on the UK electoral register is the source of a great injustice*.

I stood to highlight the 7 million of us who are deprived of a say in our own future in UK elections and referendums, whether we be emerging adults, many permanently-resident foreigners in the UK or UK citizens excluded by the so-called 15-year rule (my case). It is scandalous that these people are not allowed to fight for their rights by donating to support candidates campaigning to enfranchise them. The same would also appear to apply to groups such as the *British in Europe*, who equally are prohibited from donating to candidates supporting the rights of British migrants.

As a consequence of this I had to ask people supporting the crowdfunder not to give more than £50; and to be truthful, I asked people to give less than this feeling that there are so many other causes that need support too. Through the crowdfunder I received monies from Belgium, France, Germany,

Hong Kong, the Netherlands, Spain and of course the UK. But I feel the fact that I would not have been allowed to accept more than £50 from any of these people is disgraceful.

**f) Deciding if a donation is acceptable.** A campaign has to check that all individuals' donations (in the > £50 sense) are from a UK registered elector. The only way to check that a person is eligible to donate is to consult the electoral roll. The UK donors came from all over the UK, so this would have involved obtaining electoral rolls from all over the country. This requirement is very burdensome.

As it happened I had only two donations that exceeded £50 (both were of £100). Luckily and unexpectedly I was saved from having to check their eligibility by the issue of (g):

**g) When do you receive a donation?** I had chosen to close the crowdfunder a week after election day. It was only after this that the monies were paid over to me. On account of this being outside the regulated period, I did not have to check the eligibility to donate. This was a welcome and unplanned surprise! Candidates with more experience of elections – and the ability to bankroll their campaign before donations are paid over – are perhaps well aware of this way out of the burdensome requirement of checking that a donation is acceptable... or exceeding the spending limits.

**h) Reporting campaign expenditure.** As I recall it, I had no particular difficulty in preparing the report, except that the provided Excel file had not been properly checked and had a number of inconsistencies in the section numberings.

However, what I felt most was that the donation and expenditure rules gave a misleading account of what my campaign actually cost. In the spirit of transparency, I therefore prepared a “Full statement of Election Expenses and Donations” aimed particularly at my crowdfunder donors. You can find this “Full statement” on my campaign web page:

<http://bit.ly/2cn7hrO>

and also in Appendix B of “I’m Standing!”, the account that I wrote of my candidacy, which can also be downloaded from the campaign web-page, or with no doubt greater permanence from:

<https://archive.org/details/tobin-w-im-standing-2020>

Also pertinent are my remarks on pp. 26-27 of “I’m Standing!”

Looking now at the introduction to Appendix B (p.83), I see that I wrote:

This leads to a loophole. The purpose of spending limits is surely to put candidates on a more-or-less equal footing, but if expenditure or income can be arranged outside the regulated period, for example by printing flyers or paying rents beforehand, or by receiving donations afterwards, they can remain secret. The electorate has no way of knowing that a candidate has enjoyed resources beyond what the legislator thought fair.

This is perhaps wrong in that I now see the Electoral Commission Guide states that expenditure “includes items or services bought before the regulated period begins, but used during it”. But no such restriction is mentioned once the regulated period has ended, and certainly the Electoral Commission has not objected to my accounts.

My conclusion is that the rules concerning donations and reporting need to be clearer, simpler to execute, to reflect real expenditure and not to exclude those who are currently disenfranchised.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William Tobin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

(William Tobin, Ph.D.)