

Leader of the Council

CLLR MARK BRUNT

Mr. Crispin Blunt
Member of Parliament for Reigate
38-40 Bell Street
Reigate
Surrey
RH2 7BA

27 September 2022

Our ref: MB/TB/spj

Dear Mr. Blunt,

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council received a petition earlier this year, which received over 400 signatures. The petition called for the Council to 'condemn the offensive, dismissive and potentially dangerous media statements recently made by Reigate MP Crispin Blunt about widespread public failure to follow Covid-19 restrictions and about their lack of importance'.

In accordance with the Council's petition scheme, the petition was debated at a meeting of the full Council on 28 July 2022, where it was resolved that the Council publish a letter to you condemning those remarks.

As Leader of Reigate & Banstead Borough Council, I am therefore writing to you to convey the condemnation of the Council towards your remarks, as made on Radio 4's PM programme on Tuesday 25 January and on BBC Question Time on 3 February 2022, regarding public behaviour during the pandemic. The comments disregard and undermine the efforts made by the vast majority of the population, including the residents of this borough, to adhere to the COVID-19 safety regulations and to protect the health of the nation.

Whilst the restrictions have now been lifted, and the pandemic has diminished, such remarks from a Member of Parliament risk a corrosive effect upon public trust and confidence in the government and the institutions of state. As a long-serving Member of Parliament, I would have hoped that you would have more regard for the effects of your public statements, intentional or otherwise.

I acknowledge the context within which the comments were made, and the Council has noted your written statement offered in response to the petition received by this Council. However, it is not clear that these factors serve to either justify the remarks, or to reflect a true understanding of their harmful nature.

When speaking during the PM programme, you stated '...it may very well be that probably inside most homes and inside most businesses, and inside most places of public administration, people may not have kept absolutely to the rules.' Whilst this statement contains a degree of qualification, the repeated use of terms referencing 'most' and high probabilities implies a belief that the majority of the population did not effectively comply with regulations.

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Overall, your comments indicate a lack of trust in (and respect for) the efforts of the public, and those residents of this borough whom you represent. It is this aggregate sentiment which is harmful, which disparages and detracts from the diligence of the British public, and which the Council has condemned.

Your comments also drew comparison between breaches of COVID-19 restrictions and speeding offences. Both behaviours have the potential to put the lives of others at risk, however, your use of this example in this case was framed to minimise the significance of the health regulations and the importance of following them. Such presentation again serves to impugn the conduct of the clear majority of the population who observed the restrictions, sometimes at considerable personal cost.

As a Member of Parliament, you have served the residents of your constituency and many of those within this borough for over fifteen years. It is therefore disappointing that I now have cause to write to you in this manner. The pandemic and its consequences underscored the need for a nation which takes account of all its people, which acts so as to give those people confidence in their government, and which treats all of them with fairness and compassion.

I am saddened that your comments on this occasion did not live up to those standards, but I trust that you will continue to have regard for them in future. The Council has recently publicly thanked the residents of the Borough for the tremendous community support they demonstrated throughout the pandemic, as well as for adhering to the national coronavirus (COVID-19) rules. I would therefore invite you to apologise to our residents for the comments disregarding their efforts, and join us in thanking them for their support.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Mark Brunt

Leader, Reigate & Banstead Borough Council

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