

Leveson inquiry witness statement:

1. Who you are, including your full name, and a brief summary of your career history.

- Rt. Hon Keith Vaz MP
- Member of Parliament for Leicester East since 1987
- Since 2007 – Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee
- Formerly Minister for Europe
- Prior to that I was a practicing solicitor – first for Islington Council and then at Highfields Law Centre in Leicester

General questions about the culture, practices and ethics of the press

2. *From your perspective, to what extent has it been established that the public has, and has not, been well served by the press?*

The public is well serviced by a free, unfettered press. However, it is vital that the press is seen to be fair when dealing with the public. That means immediately correcting information that is wrong.

3. *In the light of what has now transpired about the culture, practices and ethics of the press, and the conduct of the relationship between the press and the public, the police, and politicians, are you prepared to offer a view as to reform that would be most effective in addressing public concerns and restoring confidence and, if so, what is your view?*

Statutory regulation of the press would be the most effective measure. A voluntary body consisting entirely of members of the press is not necessarily the right approach. There has to be system in place which combines members of the press alongside stakeholders, for example lawyers and elected or appointed members of the public.

General questions about the relationship between politicians and the media

4. *In your view, what are the specific benefits to the public to be secured from a relationship between senior politicians and the media? What are the risks to the public interest inherent in such a relationship? In your view, how should the former be maximised, and the latter minimised and managed? Please give examples.*

There has to be a relationship between senior politicians and press. But it must always be open, fair and transparent.

5. *Would you distinguish between the position of a senior politician in government and a senior politician in opposition for these purposes? If so, please explain how, and why.*

No

6. *What are the specific benefits and risks to the public interest of interaction between the media and politicians in the run up to the general elections and other national polls? Do you have any concerns about the nature and effect of such interactions, or the legal, regulatory or transparency framework within which they currently take place, and do you have any recommendations or suggestions for the future in this regard?*

See above – answer to Q3 and Q4.

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7. What lessons do you think can be learned from the recent history of relations between politicians and the media, from the perspective of the public interest? What issues should the Inquiry consider when making recommendations for the future, in relation to the conduct and governance of relationships between politicians and the media, in order that the public interest should be best served?

The Leveson inquiry is in my view conducting a thorough, far reaching and important examination of the issues that are the subject of this question. I am very happy to wait for its recommendations. There are clear, precise terms of reference which I think is in the interest of press, public and the community at large.

8. Would you distinguish between the press and other media for these purposes? If so, please explain how, and why.

The broadcast media is very clearly regulated. It has a clear code by which reporting is judged. This appears to ensure it retains its duty to be fair. In my opinion if the press had the same code, this situation would never have arisen.

The transparency of the broadcast media and their duty to fairness and accuracy is best portrayed by its very clear complaints systems. The public appear to have a clear idea of how to issue a complaint and retractions are aired at peak time.

This is, in my opinion, a better system and the press would benefit by looking to the broadcast media for an example.