

8th August 2016

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about EDM 278 and a proposed new 'Office of Electoral Integrity'.

In general, political campaign material in the UK is not formally regulated, and it is a matter for the press and public to decide on the basis of such material whether they consider it reasonable and accurate.

While the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is the UK's independent regulator for advertising across all media, political adverts are not within its remit. The ASA suggests that anyone with concerns about a political advert could contact the party responsible and exercise their democratic right to tell them what they think. The free press also has an important role in holding politicians and campaigners to account.

Of course, the wider law does generally apply to political campaign material, including the law of defamation and public order offences. Electoral law also makes it a criminal offence to publish false statements about a candidate: the courts do enforce this legislation, as illustrated during the April 2015 election court ruling which disqualified the mayor of Tower Hamlets for a litany of illegal practices.

Electoral law also requires for parties and other campaigners to include an 'imprint' on their campaign material, identifying its source, to ensure transparency and accountability.

However, I cannot support the conclusions of EDM 278, which calls for the establishment of a new quango to regulate political campaigning, as I believe this would have a negative impact on freedom of speech. I think it is crucial that, during election campaigns, those involved must feel free to make their case robustly and passionately. Differences of opinion and interpretation will inevitably arise when politicians campaign and communicate their point of view. The proposed regime would be likely to fuel malicious and partisan complaints (and counter-complaints), which would undermine, rather than strengthen, confidence in the democratic process.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me about this issue.

Yours sincerely,



Alok Sharma MP

Follow Alok on Twitter: @AlokSharma_RDG

**Please reply to: Alok Sharma MP, House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA
e: alok.sharma.mp@parliament.uk w: www.aloksharma.co.uk t: 0118 941 3803**