



The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1A 2AA

07 June 2024

Dear Prime Minister,

### **Opposition costings**

I am writing following the events of the last few days and the claims made by yourself and ministers regarding the costing of opposition policies by “independent civil servants”.

Firstly, the civil service, as you well know, is not independent, it loyally serves the government of the day. This is clearly demonstrated by this very process of opposition costings. Ministers and advisers determine the factors they wish civil servants to calculate, and then civil servants act on these instructions.

Secondly, as was articulated by James Bowler, the Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, in his letter to Darren Jones, Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the day before your televised debate, the presentation of the figures contained in the Conservative Party document as having been calculated by civil servants was factually wrong and that no civil servants were involved in its production. The document itself contained additional data, collated by the party from a variety of sources and not just the opposition costings provided by the civil service.

The presentation of these figures by you and your ministers as having been produced by “independent civil servants” was a deliberate misrepresentation to add a veneer of credibility to the document. This is not only factually inaccurate, but has had the effect of dragging the civil service in to a party political row in the midst of a general election. What is even more disappointing is that it was done in the knowledge that concerns had already been raised about how this data was being presented by the Conservative Party from The Permanent Secretary to the Treasury.

Ministers have an obligation under the Ministerial Code to “uphold the political impartiality of the civil service”. As Prime Minister and sole arbiter of the code, your leadership on this issue is crucial. You are also the Minister for the Civil Service and your civil servants, who have served you and your predecessors with loyalty and commitment, frankly deserve better.

*from the General Secretary*  
*DAVE PENMAN*

The process of opposition costings almost inevitably leads to the scenario we have just witnessed, with claim and counter claim from government and opposition. It has been condemned by a number of commentators, including a former Cabinet Secretary and permanent secretaries who recognise that the process undermines the impartiality of the civil service at a crucial time when they may be asked to serve a new government within a matter of weeks.

When you became Prime Minister you said you wanted to lead a government of integrity. I would urge you now to reflect on that for the remainder of the election period and ensure there is clear separation between the actions of the Conservative Party and the actions of the government and the civil service.

I would also hope that the events of the last few days demonstrate to you that this entire process should now be abandoned and, if you form the next government after the election, you will agree to end the use of civil servants to cost the policies of opposition parties for all future elections. I am also writing to Keir Starmer, the leader of the Labour Party, to seek the same commitment from him.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dave Penman', with a small dot at the end of the line.