

Fresh intake 'will improve standards'

Geraldine Scott Political Reporter

Standards of behaviour and conduct in parliament will markedly improve when senior and more elderly MPs retire at the next election, Westminster's sleaze watchdog has said.

Daniel Greenberg, parliamentary commissioner for standards, said that an influx of new MPs would give parliament a fresh start because they would bring with them experience of modern workplaces.

There has been a string of allegations of rule-breaking over declarations of interest, lobbying and sexual harassment, to name only a few.

In an interview with *The Times*, Greenberg said the new intake would probably come from "exciting workplace environments where they will be used to the very best in modern standards of how a workplace works and how colleagues treat each other".

He said: "It's an absolutely vital opportunity that we need to embrace

and to make sure that we really take advantage of that."

Greenberg took over as standards commissioner from Kathryn Stone in January, and has opened 15 investigations, including one into Rishi Sunak, the prime minister, which is ongoing.

There are four other open investigations, including one into Chris Pincher started by Greenberg's predecessor. Only one of the finished investigations has not upheld allegations. Six have been settled through a rectification process, such as issuing an apology, and four have been referred to the Standards Committee, which recommends sanctions.

Greenberg admitted that he had been both "surprised and disappointed" by the behaviour of some MPs.

He has the power to call MPs in for formal and informal conversations without necessarily opening an investigation. The methods are not new, but their publication on parliament's website in recent weeks has suggested

that he is using them more often. The powers allow Greenberg to advise an MP that if certain behaviours continue there may be an investigation, or to indicate concern about actions even if they would not meet the threshold for an investigation.

Too many MPs still saw the standards system as "a series of landmines you mustn't step on", he said, rather than as a code of professional practice they should expect to abide by.

One part of the standards system, the privileges committee, has come under particular fire in recent weeks over its investigation into Boris Johnson, the former prime minister, and whether he misled the Commons. The committee, which is Conservative-led, has been accused by Johnson of being a "kangaroo court" and carrying out a "hit job". MPs are due to debate its report today. The committee is expected to publish a report on the attacks on its investigation. **MPs should take inspiration from Glenda Jackson, Libby Purves, page 21**