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HONOURS: RECOGNISING CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE BIG SOCIETY

As you will know, the Prime Minister provides the key strategic direction to the UK honours system. I am writing to let you know that he has written to Cabinet colleagues asking them to highlight the important link between work in support of the Big Society and the honours system.

The aim of building a bigger, stronger society where individuals and communities do more for themselves and others involves a culture change for us all. The Prime Minister has asked that Honours Selection Committee Chairs and Members give increasing weight in their deliberations to candidates who are actively engaged in work to encourage stronger, more integrated communities. He has specifically asked that the vast majority of honours go to individuals who have gone beyond excellence in playing their part to create a Big Society. The Prime Minister is clear that merit must remain the over-arching criterion for judging whether an individual deserves an honour but he would like to see this change of emphasis in place for the next Honours round at New Year 2011. The Secretariat is working to ensure that this point is brought out in the briefing for the Committees.

Examples of work of the sort the Prime Minister has in mind could take the form of giving particular priority to:-

- People working to strengthen communities in deprived areas
- Community organisers
- People running neighbourhood groups
- People working for voluntary and charitable organisations
- Community fundraisers



- People tackling any extremism which promotes violence or hatred
- People supporting green enterprise at a local level
- People working towards a zero-waste society, and
- People working to improve the natural environment.

The Prime Minister has also asked that greater prominence is given in the honours system to philanthropists who are making a difference to the Big Society through a sustained personal engagement.

Where awards are merited for achievement in other areas, for example in the sporting field, in business, or in the arts world, the Prime Minister would also like the Honours Selection Committees to give increasing weight to how and whether the individual in question has contributed to helping others and building a bigger, stronger society. The Committees should now give more consideration to how our top sports stars, actors, business people etc are also using their prominence and profile for the greater good through giving back to society in any number of ways.

I fully realise that you can only work with the nominations that you receive and I will be asking my Heads of Departments to ensure that a good supply of nominations, that reflect this agenda, are submitted through the independent Committee process.

I am very grateful to you and to your Committee members for your vital input to the UK honours system and look forward to your support in reflecting this change of focus in your future meetings.

Yours ever,
Gus

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