



James Cartlidge MP
Member of Parliament for South Suffolk

Ed Humpherson
Office for Statistics Regulation
Fry Building
1st Floor, 2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

3rd June 2026

Dear Sir,

COMPLAINT: MISLEADING USE OF STATISTICS BY THE WALES OFFICE – CLAIM THAT DEFENCE SPENDING HAS INCREASED BY £270 BILLION

I am writing to draw your attention to a post published on the official Wales Office account on X which contains a materially misleading statistical claim (X, Wales Office, 29 May 2026, ([link](#))).

The Wales Office post states that the government has delivered a £270 billion increase in defence spending over the course of this Parliament. This claim is factually inaccurate and misleading to the public.

The £270 billion is roughly the total projected spend of the Ministry of Defence between 2025-26 and 2028-29, not the cumulative total of year-on-year increases in spending. Presenting this figure as an ‘increase’ is arithmetically impossible: £270 billion is the total the government expects to spend on defence over the course of the Parliament, not how much spending will increase by.

To describe a cumulative budget total as an ‘increase’ implies that the baseline from which spending rose was effectively zero. The defence budget inherited by the Labour government for 2024-25 stood at £60.2 billion. Characterising the entire projected budget over four years as an ‘increase’ bears no relationship to any recognised definition of that word in a statistical or financial context.

This is not an isolated misuse. Defence minister Luke Pollard MP previously referred to this figure of £270 billion as the ‘total of the Ministry of Defence’s budget from financial year 2025-26 to 2028-29’¹ – an accurate description which the Wales Office post has abandoned in favour of the word ‘increase’. The current Prime Minister has himself made similar claims at liaison committee – misleading the House.

*“We have already committed to 2.5% in 2027, and we will hit that. That means that, in this Parliament, we will spend £270 billion more than we would otherwise have done on defence”.*²

The OSR’s own guidance and standards

The Office for Statistics Regulation’s guidance on intelligent transparency is clear that *“care should be taken to avoid selective use of data or use of data without appropriate context, as this damages public trust”*.³

¹ WPQ answered by Defence Minister Pollard, 9 February 2026 ([link](#)).

² Liaison Committee, Oral Evidence: Work of the Prime Minister, HC 1770, 23 March 2026 ([link](#)).

³ Office for Statistics Regulation: Regulatory Guidance, published September 2023 ([link](#)).



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The Deputy Chair of the UK Statistics Authority wrote to all ministers in November 2025, reminding them of their obligations under the Code of Practice for Statistics. That letter stated explicitly that *“Ministers can adhere to these standards by only quoting analysis which is already in the public domain; not using analytical evidence in a misleading way”*.⁴

I also draw your attention to the fact that this misleading statistical claim is being made at a time when the government has still not published its Defence Investment Plan (DIP), despite having promised to do so repeatedly. The continued delay means that the public, Parliament, and industry have no authoritative document against which to test the government’s claims about defence investment. The Conservative Party has put forward an amendment to the Armed Forces Bill that would require the plan to be released.

The absence of the DIP makes it harder for the public to scrutinise defence spending claims of this kind, and arguably makes accurate use of statistics by ministers more – not less – important.

I ask that the OSR investigate this complaint and, if it finds the claim to be misleading, write to the Wales Office and publish its findings, in line with the OSR’s published interventions policy. I also ask that the OSR consider whether the pattern of misuse of the £270 billion figure across multiple ministers and official government social media accounts warrants a systemic intervention.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

James Cartlidge MP
Shadow Secretary of State for Defence

⁴ Letter from Penny Young, Deputy Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, to Ministers, 19 November 2025 ([link](#)).