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## Summary

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On 19 July 2021, I started an inquiry, using my own initiative investigation powers, into whether, in accordance with Rule 14 of the 2019 House of Commons Code of Conduct, Ms Solloway MP should have registered her acceptance of a ticket to the  
5 BRIT Awards 2021 on the Register of Members' Financial Interests. The inquiry was based on information brought to my attention following the publication of an on-line Politico article - 'Spotted at the BRITS' dated 12 May 2021, which detailed Ms Solloway's attendance at the event, and a subsequent review of the Register of Members' Financial Interests, which found no record of the event on Ms Solloway's  
10 register entry.

During my investigation, I sought comments from Ms Solloway. I also sought advice from House Authorities about the rules and guidance on the Registration of Members' Financial Interests.

Having considered the information available to me, I concluded that Ms Solloway  
15 had received the invitation to attend the BRIT Awards 2021 in her capacity as Minister with responsibility for Intellectual Property Office (Trade Marks, Patents, Copyright, Designs, Law and Practice and IP Crime and Infringement). Therefore, Ms Solloway was not required to register her acceptance of the ticket on the Register of Members' Financial Interests, because it will be recorded on the Register of  
20 Ministerial Interests.

In view of the above, I found no evidence of a breach of the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament and take no further action in this matter.

## Written evidence

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### 1. Extract of article from Politico, 12 May 2021

#### **POLITICO London Playbook: Spotted at the Brits — The COVID Chilcot — Top billing**

5 BY EMILIO CASALICCHIO

May 12, 2021 7:59 am

...

10 **FIRST WESTMINSTER NIGHT OUT:** MPs, aides and hacks were glitzing it up at the Brit Awards last night — marking the first time a significant chunk of the Westminster bubble has found itself at one big event since the pandemic struck. The Brits formed part of the COVID-19 trials on mass gatherings, meaning 4,000 people packed into the O2 arena with no face masks or social distancing.

...

### 15 2. Letter from the Commissioner to Ms Amanda Solloway MP, 19 July 2021

I would welcome your help with an inquiry I have started on my own initiative, in accordance with the authority given to me by Standing Order No. 150, about your compliance with paragraph 14 of the House of Commons Code of Conduct for Members. I enclose a copy of an on-line article<sup>1</sup>, published by Politico on 12 May 2021, which was recently brought to my attention.

#### **The scope of my inquiry**

25 My inquiry will focus on whether you have acted in breach of paragraph 14 of the House of Commons' Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament. Specifically, I will consider whether you should have registered your acceptance of a complimentary ticket for the Brit Awards, which took place on 11 May 2021. If the scope of my inquiry changes, I will update you in writing.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/london-playbook/politico-london-playbook-spotted-at-the-brits-the-covid-chilcot-top-billing/>

## The relevant rules of the House

The overarching rules are found in the House of Commons' Code of Conduct for Members.<sup>2</sup>

Paragraph 14 of the Code states:

5           *"Members shall fulfil conscientiously the requirements of the House in respect of the registration of interests in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. They shall always be open and frank in drawing attention to any relevant interest in any proceeding of the House or its Committees, and in any communications with Ministers, Members, public officials or public office holders."*

10           Further to the Code, the *Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members*, which is appended to the Code, states the following in *Chapter 1: Registration of Members' Financial Interests*

### Requirements of the House

15           2. The House requires new Members, within one month of their election, to register all their current financial interests, and any registrable benefits (other than earnings) received in the 12 months before their election. **After that, Members are required to register within 28 days any change in those registrable interests.** Such a change includes both the acquisition of a new interest and the ceasing of any registered interest, for example because an employment has ceased or because a holding has reduced in value or been sold. **[My emphasis]**

### Category 3: Gifts, benefits and hospitality from UK sources

#### 25           Threshold for registration

22. Members must register, subject to the paragraphs below, any gifts, benefits or hospitality with a value of over £300 which they receive from a UK source. They must also register multiple benefits from the same source if these have a value of more than £300 in a calendar year.

30

### Requirements for registration

**23. Under this category Members must register:**

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<sup>2</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmcode/1882/188201.htm>

Any benefits which relate in any way to their membership of the House or political activities, if provided by a UK source either free or at concessionary rates, including:<sup>3</sup>

a) event or travel tickets;

5           b) hospitality in the UK, including receptions, meals and accommodation;

...

### Next steps

10 I would welcome your comments on whether your actions have amounted to a breach of paragraph 14 of the Code of Conduct for Members. I would also be grateful for you answers to the following questions:

1. Are you aware of the requirement to register all new financial interests within 28 days of acquisition?

15 2. Did you consider whether you should have registered your complimentary ticket to the Brit Awards?

a) Please let me know your reasons for not doing so.

3. If, on reflection, you accept that this interest was not registered within the deadline as set by the House, please explain what steps you will now take to prevent any further late registrations?

20 It would be helpful to receive any evidence to support your responses when you reply to this letter. Any other points you wish to make to help me with this inquiry would also be welcome.

### Important information

25 My inquiries are conducted in private. However, following the decision taken by the House on 21 April 2021, I will shortly publish on my webpages the fact that I am conducting an inquiry about your alleged breach of the Code of Conduct. If contacted, my office will not comment on any aspect of this specific inquiry to third parties. They will answer direct factual questions about the processes I follow, and the standards system more generally, but will not provide any comment or details  
30 about the particulars of this inquiry.

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<sup>3</sup> FN31 A concessionary rate should be valued by reference to the nearest equivalent commercial rate.

This letter and any subsequent correspondence between us in connection with this inquiry is protected by parliamentary privilege. It should be kept confidential until the outcome of my inquiry is published.

5 The Members' Services Team (MST) can support and signpost you and/or your staff to appropriate support services. You can contact them confidentially on [details redacted] for a range of issues, including support with handling the impact of media attention.

### **Procedure**

10 I enclose a copy of the Commissioner's Information Note, which sets out the procedure for inquiries. Please note that this has not yet been updated to reflect the changes flowing from the decision of 19 July 2018.

15 While I do not, at this stage, know whether it will be necessary to interview you about this matter, it would be open to you to be accompanied at any such interview. I am, of course, very happy to meet with you at any stage if you would find that helpful.

I should say now, as a matter of courtesy, that I may seek the advice of the House authorities and others as part of this inquiry. If I do so, I will share that correspondence with you.

20 Information provided to me during the course of my inquiry will be retained, and disposed of, in accordance with the House of Commons' Authorised Records Disposal Policy.

### **Potential outcomes**

25 Inquiries are generally concluded in one of three ways. If the evidence does not substantiate the allegation, it will not be upheld. If the evidence demonstrates a breach of the rules, I may, in circumstances defined by Standing Order No. 150, uphold the allegation and conclude the inquiry using the rectification procedure, without making a referral to the Committee on Standards. Where an allegation is not upheld or is rectified, the investigation material, including our correspondence, will be published on the Parliament website.

30 If I uphold the allegation, and it is either unsuitable for the rectification procedure, or you do not accept my decision, I must make a referral to the Committee on Standards. My memorandum to the Committee will be published as an appendix to the Committee's own Report.

35 Regardless of the outcome of my inquiry, I must emphasise that all the relevant evidence, including our correspondence, will be published when this inquiry is concluded. I routinely redact the personal data of third parties unless it is relevant

to my decision. Please tell me if you provide sensitive material that you think I should redact. I will consider carefully any such request.

### Action

5 I would be grateful to have your response to this letter as soon as possible and no later than Friday 30 July 2021. Please let me know before that date if you require more time to respond.

If you would prefer me to communicate with you via a different postal address, please give the details when you reply to this letter. It would also be helpful if you were willing to provide a telephone number through which I might contact you.

10 Due to the ongoing pandemic restrictions, my team are working from home only, so I would be grateful if you could send your response electronically to; standardscommissioner@parliament.uk

Thank you for your cooperation with this matter.

*19 July 2021*

### 15 **3. Letter from Ms Amanda Solloway MP to the Commissioner, 21 July 2021**

I'm writing in response to your inquiry in regard to paragraph 14 of the House of Commons Code of Conduct for Members following my attendance to the BRIT Awards on Tuesday 11th May 2021.

20 I was invited to the event in my capacity as Minister for Science, Research and Innovation in the department for BEIS where I checked at the time that they will be declaring my attendance on the transparency register, hence why this had not been registered with the Office of Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards as the ministerial code states 'Departments will publish quarterly details of hospitality received in Ministerial capacity. Hospitality accepted as an MP or Peer should be  
25 declared in the register of Member Interests Respectively'.

As this was a Ministerial invite and is therefore registered quarterly, the transparency register for May, June and July which includes my attendance to the BRIT's will be published in autumn this year.

30 I sincerely hope this clarifies that my attendance will be registered following the appropriate ministerial code, why this isn't published yet and why it hasn't been registered as a matter of Parliamentary Commissioner Standards.

*21 July 2021*

#### 4. Letter from the Commissioner to the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests, 26 July 2021

I would like to ask your advice on an investigation I have recently initiated into Ms Amanda Solloway MP. Specifically that, contrary to paragraph 14 of the Code of Conduct for Members, Ms Solloway failed to register her acceptance of a ticket for the Brit awards 2021 in the Register of Members' Financial Interests under Category 3: "Gifts, benefits and hospitality from UK sources" as required by the House.

I enclose a copy of my letter to the Member, dated 19 July 2021, and their reply of 21 July 2021. I have also enclosed a copy of the supporting evidence which led to me initiating this inquiry for your information.

In response to my enquiries, Ms Solloway said that she was invited to the event in her capacity as Minister for Science, Research and Innovation. Ms Solloway also said that she had checked with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) that her attendance would be declared on the transparency register, which is due to be published in the autumn.

Given the above, I would welcome your view on the following:

- Was Ms Solloway required to register her acceptance of the ticket in the Register of Members' Financial Interests?
- Is any additional information required regarding Ms Solloway's ministerial register entry?

It would be very helpful to have your reply by 9 August 2021.

If you require further information from Ms Solloway before giving your advice, I would be happy for you to contact her directly.

*26 July 2021*

#### 5. Letter from the Commissioner to Ms Amanda Solloway MP, 27 July 2021

Thank you for your letter dated 21 July 2021, and for the information you provided.

In my letter to you of 19 July 2021, I said that I may seek the advice of the House authorities as part of my investigation. Today I have written to the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests and a copy of that letter is included for your information (minus the enclosures previously shared with you).

Once I have received the Registrar's reply, I will write to you again regarding the next steps. In the meantime, this matter remains protected by Parliamentary Privilege and should continue to be kept confidential.

27 July 2021

5 **6. Email from the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests to the Commissioner, 3 August 2021**

Thank you for your letter of 26 July asking about the Register entry of Ms Amanda Solloway MP. Ms Solloway had not registered her attendance at the Brit Awards on 11 May.

10 I shall respond to your questions in the order in which you asked them.

1. Was Ms Solloway required to register her acceptance of the ticket in the Register of Members' Financial Interests?

15 Ms Solloway tells you that she received the ticket in her Ministerial capacity. On that basis I would have advised her that she was not required to register it in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. If I had spoken to Ms Solloway I would have reminded her of paragraph 16 of the Introduction to the Guide to the Rules, which I have reproduced below. (I have highlighted the most relevant sentence.)

**Ministers of the Crown**

20 16. Ministers of the Crown who are Members of the House of Commons are subject to the rules on registration and declaration of interests in the same way as all other Members (although Ministerial office is not registrable and salaried Ministers may still speak in support of Government policies without breaching the restrictions on lobbying for reward or consideration). **Members are not required to register either Ministerial office or benefits received in their capacity as a Minister.** But Ministers are subject to the further guidelines and requirements laid down by successive Prime Ministers in the Ministerial Code, available from the Cabinet Office. These are not enforced by the House of Commons and so are beyond the scope of this Guide.

35 However, even if Ms Solloway was not required to register her ticket for the Brits (and she does not say who gave her this), I would have advised her that under chapter 2 of the Guide to the Rules she is still required to draw attention to [declare] it under the House's rules on ad hoc disclosure. She should do so on any occasion when others might consider it to influence her. This requirement will apply for the 12 months following the event.

2. Is any additional information required regarding Ms Solloway's Ministerial register entry?

I would not normally ask a Member for information about what they had disclosed to their department about benefits they had received.

- 5 Finally, Ms Solloway has not explained why she believed that her invitation to the Brits was a "ministerial invite". It is not immediately obvious to me how this invitation related to her Ministerial portfolio. It may help you to know that in the past when Members have told me that they did not know whether a particular event ticket was given to them in their capacity as an MP or in their capacity as a Minister, 10 I have often asked which of their offices received the ticket, and how it was addressed. For example, if the ticket was received by the Minister's private office in their department of state, this suggests that it was received in their Ministerial capacity. In some cases I might also ask how the Member became acquainted with the donor, what previous contact they had had with them, and what form of address 15 was used on the invitation.

I trust this is helpful. Please let me know if you need anything else.

*3 August 2021*

### **7. Letter from the Commissioner to Ms Amanda Solloway MP, 6 August 2021**

- 20 In my letter of 27 July 2021, I explained that I would be seeking the advice of the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests. I have now received the advice, and I enclose a copy of the response dated 3 August 2021 for your information.

In view of the Registrar's advice and comments, I would ask that, in order to assist me further, you provide the following information:

- 25
- A copy of the invitation to the BRIT Awards 2021 from BPI, and your response.
  - A copy of the notification from BPI of the value of the ticket.
  - What action did you take to clarify the capacity in which you had been invited to the event? If no action was taken, please explain why you took the view that the invitation had been made to you in your capacity as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Science, Research and Innovation)?
- 30

Please could you reply by 20 August 2021. In the meantime, our correspondence remains protected by parliamentary privilege, and I must ask that you continue to maintain the strict confidentiality of the inquiry.

*6 August 2021*

5 **8. Letter from Ms Amanda Solloway MP to the Commissioner, 9 August 2021**

Thank you for your response dated 6th August requesting more information.

Firstly, please see attached to this email, the original invite from BPI (British Phonographic Industry) received by my ministerial office in the BEIS department.

10 Secondly, I have asked the department to confirm the cost of the ticket and I will let you know this in due course.

15 Finally, in regard to what action was taken to ensure this was a Ministerial invite, my Ministerial Private Office spoke with BPI about the invitation who confirmed I was invited in my capacity as the Government Minister with responsibility for Intellectual Property Office (Trade Marks, Patents, Copyright, Designs, Law and Practice and IP Crime and Infringement).

**Enclosure Email from Chief Executive, BPI, BRIT Awards & Mercury Prize to Ms Amanda Solloway MP, 27 April 2021**

From: [name redacted]

Sent: 27 April 2021 11.32

20 To: Solloway Minister (Private Office) [details redacted]

Subject: Events Research Programme: invitation to the BRIT Awards 11 May 2021

25 We are delighted that the BRIT Awards, taking place on 11 May 2021, will take part in front of a live audience as part of the Government's Events Research Programme (ERP). We would like to invite you to join us at this special event as a guest of the BPI.

Most of those attending this celebration of live music and British talent will be an audience of invited key workers, recognising the extraordinary contribution of those working on the frontline during the COVID-19 emergency. A ballot for the 2500 tickets being gifted by record labels has been run.

30 The BRIT Awards - always a great celebration of British music talent - will be the first major indoor music event to welcome back a live audience. We hope that by

running this pilot event we will support the return of live music at a scale, after a year in which live music has been so badly hit.

5 We hope that you will be able to join us to share in this significant moment for British music and for the reopening of the economy. We will be able to brief you on the work we've done to ensure the BRITs can take place safely, and what we're doing to help the Government's ERP learn from the event so that more live events can return safely.

10 **The event is on Tuesday 11 May 2021 at the O2 Arena. Detailed joining instructions will be shared closer to the event;**

**Doors open: 1800hrs // Show end: 2230hrs**

15 Please RSVP to [REDACTED] confirm your attendance. Regrettably, given capacity issues, we will be unable to extend this invitation to friends or family and it is non-transferable.

I look forward to hopefully seeing you there.

*9 August 2021*

**9. Email from Ms Amanda Solloway MP to the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, 12 August 2021**

20 As promised in my letter, I have been advised that the cost of the BRIT Award ticket was £750 + VAT.

*12 August 2021*