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## Summary

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5 On 19 July 2021, I started an inquiry on my own initiative into whether, in accordance with Rule 14 of the 2019 House of Commons Code of Conduct, Ms Dinenage MP should have registered her acceptance of a ticket to the BRIT Awards 2021 on the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

10 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 Dinenage'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 Dinenage's register entry.

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

15 Having considered the information available to me, I concluded that Ms Dinenage had received the invitation to attend the BRIT Awards 2021 in her capacity as Minister of State for Digital and Culture. Therefore, Ms Dinenage 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 Ministerial Interests.

20 In view of the above, I found no evidence of a breach of the Code of Conduct 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 BY EMILIO CASALICCHIO**

5 May 12, 2021 7:59 am

...

**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.

...

### 2. Letter from the Commissioner to Ms Caroline Dinenage MP, 19 July 2021

15 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**

20 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.

#### 25 **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:

*"Members shall fulfil conscientiously the requirements of the House in respect of the registration of interests in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.*

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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/>

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

*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.”*

5

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**

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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]**

15

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

#### **Threshold for registration**

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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.

#### **Requirements for registration**

25

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

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;

30

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

...

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

### Next steps

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 your answers to the following questions:

- 5 1. Are you aware of the requirement to register all new financial interests within 28 days of acquisition?
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.
- 10 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?

15 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

20 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 about the particulars of this inquiry.

25 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.

30 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

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.

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.

- 5 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.

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  
10 Disposal Policy.

### **Potential outcomes**

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,  
15 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.

If I uphold the allegation, and it is either unsuitable for the rectification procedure,  
20 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.

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  
25 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**

I would be grateful to have your response to this letter as soon as possible and no  
30 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.

35 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

### 3. Email from Ms Caroline Dinenage MP to the Commissioner, 23 July 2021

- 5 Thank you for your letter dated 19 July 2021 regarding your inquiry into the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament and in particular suggesting my attendance at the Brit Awards on 11 May 2021 had breached the Code.

10 I attended the event in my capacity as the Minister for Digital and Culture. The Brit Awards was an Events Research Programme (ERP) pilot jointly run under the coordination and legal exemption from Covid-19 legislation by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Department for Health and Social Care. I was the responsible minister from DCMS in attendance.

In response to your specific questions.

- 15 1. Yes, I am aware of the requirement to register new financial interests within 28 hours (*sic*) of acquisition in my position as a Member of Parliament and take this obligation seriously.
2. My attendance at this event was in a departmental capacity and as such I did not consider my attendance as equating to accepting a gift or financial interest in my capacity as a Member of Parliament.
- 20 3. My attendance at the Brit Awards will be declared in the normal way via the ministerial transparency process run by the Cabinet Office. This process runs quarterly and transparency returns have so far only been processed and published on [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) up until the end of April 2021.

23 July 2021

### 25 4. Letter from the Commissioner to the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests, 28 July 2021

30 I would like to ask your advice on an investigation I have recently initiated into Caroline Dinenage MP. Specifically that, contrary to paragraph 14 of the Code of Conduct for Members, Ms Dinenage 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 23 July 2021. I have also enclosed a copy of the supporting evidence which led to me initiating this inquiry for your information.

5 In response to my enquiries, Ms Dinenage said that she was invited to the event in her capacity as Minister for Digital and Culture. Ms Dinenage said the Brit awards were part of the Events Research Programme and as the responsible minister from the DCMS in attendance, she did not see her presence as equating to accepting a gift or financial interest in her capacity as a Member of Parliament. Ms Dinenage said her attendance at the event would be declared via the ministerial transparency  
10 process, which runs quarterly.

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

- Was Ms Dinenage required to register her acceptance of the ticket in the Register of Members' Financial Interests?
- 15 • Is any additional information required regarding Ms Dinenage's ministerial register entry?
- It would be very helpful to have your reply by 11 August 2021.

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

*28 July 2021*

20 **5. Letter from the Commissioner to Ms Caroline Dinenage MP, 29 July 2021**

Thank you for your email dated 23 July 2021, and for the information you provided.

25 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. 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.

30 *29 July 2021*



## 6. Advice from the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests, 5 August 2021

Thank you for your letter of 28 July asking about the Register entry of Caroline Dinenage MP. Ms Dinenage has not registered her acceptance of a ticket for to the Brit Awards.

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

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

10 Ms Dinenage tells you that she received the ticket in her Ministerial capacity, as Minister for Digital and Culture. On that basis I would have advised her that she was not required to register it in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Paragraph 16 of the Introduction to the Guide to the Rules, which I have reproduced below, explains this. (I have highlighted the most relevant sentence.)

### Ministers of the Crown

15 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  
20 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.

25 2. Is any additional information required regarding Ms Dinenage'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.

Ms Dinenage has said that the occasion formed part of the Events Research Programme, but she has not told you who paid for her ticket to the Brits.

30 Had I spoken to Ms Dinenage, I would also have reminded her that, whether or not she decided to register this benefit, she ought bear in mind the possible need to draw attention to it in proceedings, in discussion or in correspondence; in fact on almost any occasion when others might reasonably consider it to influence her. Full  
35 guidance on such ad hoc disclosures (declarations) is in Chapter 2 of the Guide to the Rules.

*5 August 2021*

## 7. Letter from the Commissioner to Ms Caroline Dinenage MP, 10 August 2021

5 In my letter of 29 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 5 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:

- A copy of the invitation to the BRIT Awards 2021, and your response.
- A copy of the notification of the value of the ticket.
- 10 • 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 Minister for Digital and Culture?

15 Please could you reply by 24 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.

*10 August 2021*

## 8. Email from Ms Caroline Dinenage MP to the Commissioner, 12 August 2021

20 Further to your letter dated 10th August 2021 regarding your ongoing inquiry into the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament and the further evidence needed to prove that my attendance, as the responsible Minister, at the Brit Awards Event Research Pilot on 11 May 2021 had not breached the Code.

25 I'm afraid I do not have a copy of the invitation or any details concerning the cost of a ticket etc since the arrangements around my attendance at the event were all made between the DCMS Event Research Pilot team and my Ministerial Private Office at DCMS.

Since you have requested that this inquiry must remain confidential (although I note it has been subsequently listed on the website) It is difficult to obtain this information.

30 I suggest that you may wish to further your enquiry by contacting my DCMS Private Secretary; [REDACTED], who will no doubt be able to assist you with the details you have requested.

*12 August 2021*

### 9. Letter from the Commissioner to Private Secretary of Ms Caroline Dinenage MP, 17 August 2021

I am currently in the process of investigating concerns that the House of Commons Code of Conduct has been breached. During the course of my inquiries, I contacted Ms Caroline Dinenage MP and asked that she provide information and clarification on a number of points. Unfortunately, Ms Dinenage was unable to access the documents that I requested and suggested that I contact you, as her Private Secretary, directly, as you would be in a position to access and share the necessary information. In view of this, please provide the following:

- 10 • A copy of Ms Dinenage's invitation to the BRIT Awards 2021, and her response.
- A copy of the notification of the value of the ticket.

Please could you reply by 31 August 2021. In the meantime, this letter and any subsequent correspondence between us in connection with this inquiry is protected by parliamentary privilege and should be kept confidential.

*17 August 2021*

### 10. Email from the Private Secretary of Ms Caroline Dinenage MP to the Commissioner, 24 August 2021

Thank you for your letter dated 17th August 2021 regarding your inquiry into the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament and in particular Ms Caroline Dinenage MP's attendance at the Brit Awards on 11 May 2021.

Caroline attended this event in her capacity as the Minister for Digital and Culture as responsible minister for the Events Research Programme, of which this event was part of. This was organised in the usual way for ministerial events between officials in the department. I have attached an email from our Permanent Secretary's Office confirming that this is the view of the department.

In line with other events attended in a ministerial capacity, attendance at the Brits will be declared via the ministerial transparency process. This process runs quarterly and the last report ran up until the end of April 2021, therefore her attendance at the Brit Awards will be captured in the next report. As the minister was also invited by the BPI, she did receive hospitality in their corporate booth whilst in attendance and this will be reflected in the transparency return as well, in line with the usual process for declaring hospitality. We are awaiting confirmation from the BPI on the value of this, however do not believe this should affect your inquiry.

**Enclosure: Email from the DCMS Permanent Secretary's Office, to Ms Caroline Dinenage MP, 19 August 2021**

**From:** Permanent Secretary

**Sent:** 19 August 2021 12.06

5 **To:** [details redacted]

**Subject:** Attendance at BRIT Awards

Minister Dinenage attended the Brit Awards on 11 May 2021. The office of the Permanent Secretary can confirm that she was invited to this DCMS ERP event as the DCMS Minister with the relevant portfolio, and subsequently attended as such.  
10 In keeping with attendance at events in a Ministerial capacity, she was accompanied by a Private Secretary, and supported governmental priorities at the event, through engagement with stakeholders.

The office of the Permanent Secretary is content that the Minister has declared her attendance at the Brits via the proper departmental channels.

15 *24 August 2021*

**11. Email from the Private Secretary of Ms Caroline Dinenage MP to the Commissioner, 14 September 2021**

The BPI have let us know that their usual ticket price is £750+VAT. However, whilst the Minister made a visit to the BPI area, she was attending as a DCMS Minister, in  
20 the area designated for DCMS officials running the Events Research Programme event.

*14 September 2021*