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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, the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey 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 Dr Coffey's attendance at the event, and a subsequent review of the Register of Members' Financial Interests, which found no record of the event on Dr Coffey's register entry.

During my investigation, I sought comments from Dr Coffey and witness evidence from her Special Adviser. 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 Dr Coffey had received the invitation to attend the BRIT Awards 2021 in her capacity as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Therefore, Dr Coffey 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 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 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.

...

*12 May 2021*

### 15 2. Letter from the Commissioner to the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey 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**

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  
20       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

#### Threshold for registration

25           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> FN 31 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 the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP to the Commissioner, 26 July 2021**

Thank you for your letter. I have spoken to officials in your office and they asked me to write to you directly regarding your questions.

1. Yes, I am aware

20 2. I will be declaring this through the Ministerial Transparency publications as hospitality, as I was invited and attended in my role as Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions. These are published via the Cabinet Office on gov.uk on a quarterly basis.

*26 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 the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP. Specifically that, contrary to paragraph 14 of the Code of Conduct for Members, Dr Coffey 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 her reply of 26 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, Dr Coffey said she had attended the event in her capacity as the Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions and that she intended to declare her attendance on the transparency register, which is published on a quarterly basis.

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

- 10
- Was Dr Coffey required to register her acceptance of the ticket in the Register of Members' Financial Interests?
  - Is any additional information required regarding Dr Coffey's ministerial register entry?

15 It would be very helpful to have your reply by 11 August 2021. Please note that, in accordance with the investigation process, your advice will be shared with Dr Coffey.

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

Thank you for your assistance.

*28 July 2021*

20 **5. Letter from the Commissioner to the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, 29 July 2021**

Thank you for your letter dated 26 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. Email from the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests to the Commissioner, 5 August 2021

Thank you for your letter of 28 July about the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP. Dr Coffey has not registered her acceptance of a ticket to the Brit Awards.

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

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

10 Dr Coffey tells you that she received the ticket in her Ministerial capacity, as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. 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 Dr Coffey about this I would have drawn her attention to 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

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*  
 20 *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*  
 25 *enforced by the House of Commons and so are beyond the scope of this Guide.*

2. Is any additional information required regarding Dr Coffey's ministerial register entry?

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

35 Dr Coffey has not told you who paid for her visit to the Brits, or why she believes this benefit was received in her capacity as a Minister. If I had spoken to her I would have asked her about these things. It is not immediately obvious to me how the invitation related to her Ministerial portfolio, and I might for example have asked her to which of her offices the ticket was sent, and how it was addressed. If for example the ticket was received by Dr Coffey's private office in her department of state, this suggests that it was received in her Ministerial capacity.

I would also have reminded Dr Coffey that, whether or not she decided to register this benefit, she ought to bear in mind the possible need to draw attention to the interest in proceedings, in discussion or in correspondence; in fact on almost any occasion when others might reasonably consider it to influence her. This  
5 requirement applies for 12 months after it was received. Full guidance on such ad hoc disclosures (declarations) is in Chapter 2 of the Guide to the Rules.

Please let me know if you need anything else.

*5 August 2021*

10 **7. Letter from the Commissioner to the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, 6 August 2021**

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.

15 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.
- 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  
20 the view that the invitation had been made to you in your capacity as Secretary of State for Work and Pensions?

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.

25 *6 August 2021*

**8. Letter from the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP to the Commissioner, 10 August 2021**

30 I have read your further letter and the advice from the Registrar. As she sets out under the code, members are not required to register benefits received in their capacity as a Minister.

I received the invitation to the BRITS through my Special Adviser (a ministerial appointment).

You should see that I have previously declared hospitality as an MP and as a Minister as published publicly. I used my judgement on this occasion to declare this through my holding office as a Minister as I assume this due to my role about jobs and it came through my special adviser. I trust this will bring your investigation to a close.

5 10 August 2021

#### 9. Letter from the Commissioner to the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, 24 August 2021

Thank you for your letter received 17 August 2021. I have now had an opportunity to consider your response.

10 In your letter, you referred to the advice provided by the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests, specifically, that Members are not required to register benefits received in their capacity as a minister. However, you may also recall that the Registrar also advised:

15 *“Dr Coffey has not told you who paid for her visit to the Brits, or why she believes this benefit was received in her capacity as a Minister. If I had spoken to her I would have asked her about these things. It is not immediately obvious to me how the invitation related to her Ministerial portfolio, and I might for example have asked her to which of her offices the ticket was sent, and how it was addressed. If for example the ticket*  
20 *was received by Dr Coffey’s private office in her department of state, this suggests that it was received in her Ministerial capacity.”*

Having regard for the Registrar’s advice, my letter dated 6 August 2021 also included a request for the following information:

- A copy of the invitation to the BRIT Awards 2021, and your response.
- 25 • A copy of the notification 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 Secretary of State for Work and Pensions?

30 I note that whilst you have provided some comments on the Registrar’s advice, the information that I requested remains outstanding. Therefore, I ask that you provide the information by 7 September 2021 so that I may conclude my investigation.

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.

24 August 2021

5 **10. Letter from the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP to the Commissioner, 7 September 2021**

10 I have seen your further letter. I did tell you why I thought I had been invited as a Minister, as I was invited via my special adviser. I have government responsibility for jobs. The music industry is important. I do not have a copy of the invitation or response as this was done orally. I don't have a copy of the notification of the value of the ticket. It will be the same as the value of information provided by MPs invited by BPI. I do not have the ticket (which from recollection did not include the value) anymore.

15 Furthermore, this was a Government Research event in which I participated. My attendance at this event will be registered through the Ministers' transparency declarations.

7 September 2021

**11. Letter from the Commissioner to the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, 17 September 2021**

20 Thank you for your letter received 9 September 2021. I have now had an opportunity to consider your response.

In your letter, you said that you were invited to the BRIT Awards 2021 via your Special Adviser. You said that it was an oral invitation from BPI, and that the supporting information that I had requested was not available.

25 As I explained in my previous letter, the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests advised:

30 *"Dr Coffey has not told you who paid for her visit to the Brits, or why she believes this benefit was received in her capacity as a Minister. If I had spoken to her I would have asked her about these things. It is not immediately obvious to me how the invitation related to her Ministerial portfolio, and I might for example have asked her to which of her offices the ticket was sent, and how it was addressed. If for example the ticket was received by Dr Coffey's private office in her department of state, this suggests that it was received in her Ministerial capacity."*

35 In order to satisfy the inquiries that would have been made by the Registrar, please can you provide me with the name and contact details of your Special Adviser by 27

September 2021. As your Special Adviser was the officer in contact with BPI in this matter, they will be in a position to clarify the outstanding points, allowing me to resolve this matter as soon as possible.

5 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.

*17 September 2021*

**12. Letter from the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP to the Commissioner, 27 September 2021**

10 I have seen your most recent letter. I have provided what I think to be the most relevant information I have available. It does concern me that you now wish to check my word given to you, however please email [details redacted] with your query and the relevant special adviser will see it.

*27 September 2021*

15 **13. Meeting between the Commissioner and the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey, 18 October 2021**

20 An informal meeting was held in which the Commissioner and Dr Coffey discussed the Code of Conduct, the associated Guide to the Code of Conduct and the investigation process. During the meeting Dr Coffey took the opportunity to confirm that she had been invited to the event in her ministerial capacity, and, as such, registered the interest in the Ministerial Transparency Register. Dr Coffey also confirmed that her Special Adviser accompanied her to the event and provided the contact details of her Special Adviser.

*18 October 2021*

25 **14. Letter from the Commissioner to the Special Adviser to the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, 25 October 2021**

30 I am currently investigating concerns that the House of Commons Code of Conduct has been breached. During the course of my inquiries, I contacted the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP, and asked that she assist me by providing information and clarification on a number of points. Unfortunately, Dr Coffey was unable to provide the information that I requested and suggested that I contact you directly, as her Special Adviser, as you would be in a position to access and share the information necessary for me to conclude my inquiries. In view of this, please provide the following:

35

1. A copy of Dr Coffey's invitation to the BRIT Awards 2021, and her response. If this is not available, please outline what information you used to determine that Dr Coffey had been invited to the BRIT Awards in her capacity as the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Please provide a copy of the information if available.
2. Dr Coffey said that you attended the event with her. Please confirm your attendance at the event and provide the reason why you attended the event with Dr Coffey.

Please reply by 8 November 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.

*25 October 2021*

**15. Email from the Special Adviser to the Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP to the Commissioner, 8 November 2021**

I did not receive a formal invitation to the BRITs for Dr Coffey. The invitation came informally via [details redacted], who then worked at [details redacted]. [Details redacted] knows that as a Special Adviser I support the Secretary of State in her ministerial, not parliamentary, capacity. Were she being invited as an MP I would have expected the invitation to have reached her through her parliamentary office. Once the Secretary of State had confirmed her attendance, information was shared with her ministerial Private Office.

I can confirm I attended the BRITs with Dr Coffey. This is because I support the Secretary of State in her ministerial capacity.

*8 November 2021*

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