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Summary

- 5 I investigated whether the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Maritime and Ports should have registered as a financial benefit the secretariat services provided by a lobbyist/lobbying company; and whether the secretariat had used the APPG logo and the crowned portcullis in a way which was contrary to the House's rules. I did not find that the group should have registered the benefit they receive by way of secretariat services because I did not find evidence that the value of those services exceeded the registration threshold. I found that the APPG logo and crowned portcullis had been used in a way which was contrary to the House's rules.
- 10 The chair of the group accepted my finding, apologised for the breach of the rules and agreed to take the steps I recommended to avoid a recurrence. I considered that to be an appropriate outcome to my inquiry.

Written evidence

1. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Maritime and Ports, 14 March 2017

5 I would welcome your help, as chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Maritime and Ports (the group) with an inquiry I have initiated into potential breaches by the group and by the group's secretariat of the Guide to the Rules on All-Party Parliamentary Groups.¹

10 Paragraph 3 of the Guide to the Rules on All-Party Parliamentary Groups (the Guide to the Rules) says that "Each Group's Chair and Registered Contact, who must be a Member of the House of Commons, is responsible for ensuring that the group complies with the rules of the House, and that if any person or organisation provides a secretariat or support services, that person or organisation is aware of and complies with those rules."

15 Before explaining the scope of my inquiry, I should first say that I am beginning this inquiry on my own initiative in accordance with the authority given to me through Standing Order No 150. The concerns I raise below first came to my attention as a result of an enquiry made of my office by a member of the public about a related but different issue about the secretariat's activities.

Background

20 The group's register entry shows a Mr John Stevenson as providing the group's secretariat. No registrable benefits are recorded. This implies that the value of the secretariat services provided is £1,500 or less in the calendar year; or else that the services are provided by a volunteer acting in a purely personal capacity.

25 The website of Mr Stevenson's lobbying company, T&I Communications, says that Mr Stevenson provides "pro bono secretariat support services to an infrastructure-focused all-party parliamentary group" and that

"The team also supports individuals, charities, campaign groups, companies and all-party parliamentary groups on a pro bono basis, including:

30 All Party Parliamentary Maritime and Ports Group...."

T&I's website refers to a seminar it organised in Parliament. Since the APPG logo is reproduced on that page, this appears to be a reference to an APPG seminar. I enclose a copy of a print-out of the T&I website produced on 6 March 2017.

¹ <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/pcfs/all-party-groups/guide-to-the-rules-on-appgs.pdf>

The scope of my inquiry

My inquiry will be focused on two issues:

- whether the group should have registered the secretariat services provided by a lobbyist/lobbying company; and
- 5
- whether the secretariat has used the APPG logo and crowned portcullis in a way which is contrary to the House's rules.

I also have a wider concern that the secretariat arrangements may have provided a platform for a lobbyist and/or his clients which would not have been transparent.

The relevant rules

10 Paragraph 17 of the Guide to the Rules lists the information which each group must provide in order to be included in the Register of APPGs. Among other items, the following is required:

15 "17(h) The name and details (including the web address) of any external organisation providing the group's secretariat (if these services are of registrable value)

The definition of registrable value is found in paragraph 17(m):

20 " 17(m) Details of any benefits (whether financial or in kind) which the group has received from any source other than Parliament, or from the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, if the total value of the benefits from that source exceeded £1,500 in the calendar year."

25 Paragraph 8 of Appendix 1 to the Guide to the rules says that "When registering staff services, the value given in the Register should be based wherever possible on the full costs met by the employer, including accommodation, pension contributions and other costs for which figures are available and based on hours worked." Paragraph 9 of that appendix says that groups do not need to register services provided by volunteers who donate their own services.

Paragraph 26 of the Guide says:

30 "26. APPGs who wish to use the crowned portcullis must use the bespoke APPG portcullis emblem which is available on the APPG page of the parliamentary website. Unregistered groups must not use the crowned portcullis in any form."

Paragraph 32 of the rules says:

5 “Each group’s Chair and Registered Contact is responsible for
ensuring if any person or organisation provides a secretariat or
support services, that person or organisation is aware of and
complies with the rules of the House. In particular, if a consultancy
provides such services and the value of those services exceeds the
threshold for registration, it must be prepared to disclose
information about its clients; if a charity or other not for profit
organisation provides such services, it must be prepared to disclose
information about its donors. The organisation providing the
10 services must either publish this information online as a matter of
routine or make it available within 28 days if any person or
organisation asks them to do so. The information which must be
made available is as follows:

15 a If a consultancy provides a secretariat or support services whose
value exceeds the threshold for registration: a list of any commercial
organisation who were clients of the company during the preceding
twelve months; or, if providing the information on request, during
the twelve months immediately before the month in which the
request was made.

20 b.....”

While not a part of the Guide to the Rules, the House’s Rules for the use of stationery and postage-paid envelopes provided by the House of Commons, and for the use of the Crowned Portcullis² are also relevant. At paragraph 9 of those rules the following information about the crowned portcullis can be found:

25 “The principal emblem of the House is the crowned portcullis. It is a
royal badge and its use by the House has been formally authorised by
licence granted by Her Majesty the Queen. It should not be used
where its authentication of a connection with the House is
inappropriate, or where there is a risk that its use might wrongly be
30 regarded or represented as having the authority of the House. It may
be used by Members on their stationery provided by the House or
used for their parliamentary functions; by registered All Party
Groups (APGs) on their official stationery, reports and websites
(provided that it is appropriate to demonstrate a connection with the
House in this way and that there is no risk that its use might suggest
35 that the Group or its communications have the authority of the
House¹³) and by organisations that have a direct association with
the House and have obtained permission to use it. It may not be used

² <http://www.parliament.uk/documents/facilities/Accommodation-and-Logistics/Stationery-rules-March-2015.pdf>

³ All-Party Parliamentary Groups who wish to use the crowned portcullis must use the bespoke APPG portcullis emblem as specified in the Rules for All-Party Parliamentary Groups. Unregistered groups must not use the crowned portcullis in any form.

5 by unregistered APGs, by ex-Members during the Dissolution of Parliament, or in an inappropriate form. Websites of APGs and other organisations using the crowned portcullis must carry a disclaimer to make it clear that the House of Commons does not take responsibility for the content of that website.”

Next steps

I would be grateful to have your comments on the two issues I have raised and, in particular, it would be helpful to have the following information (with supporting evidence where possible):

- 10 • Whether you were aware of Mr Stevenson’s role as a lobbyist with T&I Communications and if so whether you took any steps to ensure that his role in support of the group did not involve promoting clients of T&I Communications.
- 15 • The details of the services that it has been agreed Mr Stevenson/T&I Communications will provide to the group. (It would be particularly helpful to have a copy of any written agreements made with Mr Stevenson/T&I Communications).
- The basis on which it was decided that the group had no registrable benefit arising from the provision of free secretariat services.
- 20 • Minutes of every meeting of the group since May 2015.
- The arrangements made to ensure that the group’s secretariat were aware of the Guide to the Rules and to monitor their compliance with those rules;
- 25 • Whether you approved the copy relating to the APPG’s activities published on the T&I website, and the use of the crowned portcullis;

30 While my inquiry is in progress, this matter is protected by parliamentary privilege. I would be grateful if you would answer the questions above without consulting Mr Stevenson/T&I Communications, as I may need to seek evidence direct from Mr Stevenson in due course. You also should not share this correspondence with anyone else other than those with whom it is strictly necessary in order to answer my questions and on the understanding that they too must observe the confidentiality requirements.

I will be asking the Registrar to provide copies of all the relevant records held by her team and it is possible that I may seek her advice at a later stage.

I will, in the next few days, include on my parliamentary web-page the fact that I am conducting an inquiry into this complaint about the APPG. I will, as far as possible, follow my usual procedures, which are set out in the enclosed Commissioner's Information Note (copy enclosed).

5 I would be grateful to have your response to this letter by 28 March 2017

14 March 2017

2. Letter from the Commissioner to the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests, 15 March 2017

10 I would like to ask for your help concerning my inquiry into the possible breach of the Guide to the Rules on All-Party Parliamentary Groups by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Maritime and Ports (the group).

My inquiry will focus on:

- whether the group should have registered the secretariat services provided by a lobbyist/lobbying company; and
- 15
- whether the secretariat has used the APPG logo and the crowned portcullis in a way which is contrary to the House's rules.

I also have a wider concern that the secretariat arrangements may have provided a platform for a lobbyist and/or his clients which would not have been transparent.

20 I initiated this inquiry yesterday and I am, therefore, awaiting the response of the group's chair to these concerns. I am not, at this stage, seeking your advice on the application of the rules to this group's activities, although I may do so later. In the meantime, it would be helpful to have a copy of any records you hold concerning this group and/or its meetings during the 2015 Parliament. It would also be of assistance to have a copy of any correspondence and notes of exchanges between

25 representatives of the group and you/your staff since May 2015.

Any other comments you may wish to make would be most welcome. It would be very helpful to have your response to this letter within the next two weeks.

Thank you for your assistance.

15 March 2017

30 **3. Email from the Registrar to the Commissioner, 15 March 2017**

Thank you for your letter of today's date.

I am forwarding the forms submitted by All-Party Parliamentary Group for Maritime and Ports in the summer of 2016 and 2015. These are the only records we have of contact with the group.

5 We do however hold the All-Party Notices which would have given advance notice of each of the group's meetings. I have arranged for these to be made available to you.

15 March 2017

Enclosures 1 & 2:

Text not included, as the content is not relevant to my inquiry

10 **4. Email from Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP to the Commissioner, 15 March 2017**

I am writing to confirm receipt of your letter of March 14th enquiring about the Secretariat arrangements for the Maritime/Ports All Party Parliamentary Group. I have to immediately apologise for not complying with your request not to share this correspondence with anyone. On opening your envelope as I was about to head over
15 to PMQs, my immediate reaction was to ask a member of my team to copy the papers to my Co-Chair Lord Greenway and to Mr Stevenson the Group Secretary asking for their assistance in answering your questions. On re-reading now I see that you requested I alone should respond and I shouldn't share the letter, my apologies for this careless reading on my part. I will endeavour to answer your questions to the
20 best of my ability as soon as possible and by tomorrow at the latest,

15 March 2017

5. Email from Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP to Lord Greenway and Mr Jim Stevenson, 15 March 2017

25 I have just fully read the letter from Ms Hudson. My immediate reaction on receiving was to copy to you and seek the information she requires, however, I now read I am not supposed to share this document with anyone. I will therefore respond to her enquiries directly to the best of my knowledge, which I am sure won't be very helpful to her as I don't think I have that which she requires. I will also own up to having copied you into the correspondence,

30 15 March 2017

6. Email from the Commissioner to Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP, 15 March 2017

Thank you for your email and for your apology for sharing my letter with Lord Greenway and Mr Stevenson. I do understand how this happened and in the circumstances do not think any damage has been done.

I note that you have promised to respond to me by tomorrow. Given that your colleagues are aware of my letter I wonder whether it might be better for you to take a little longer over your response and use their help as you had originally intended. Part of the reason for this suggestion is that I shall be away from my office from
5 tomorrow until about 27 March and will not be able to consider your response in detail until that time. Nothing will therefore be gained by an earlier reply particularly if it is not able to cover all the issues. I will of course be in touch with you again as quickly as possible after my return.

10 If you have any questions in the meantime please do not hesitate to contact my complaints manager, [redacted].

15 March 2017

**7. Letter from Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP to the Commissioner, 16 March 2017
(received 21 March 2017)**

15 In response to your questions contained in your correspondence please find my answers listed below. Again though, I apologise for not following the request in your letter to not share the papers. I have emailed all the material requested rather than print due to the volumes involved.

In response to the questions you ask in the order they were put:

- 20 • I was aware Mr Stevenson worked for an outside organisation. I have known him in this particular role for some time and I assumed his work involved public/government relations and "lobbying" could well be part of his responsibilities. I have no idea what he does for clients but he has never to my knowledge used his role in support of the group to promote their business interests. Shipping/Maritime/Ports is a significant industry
25 in the UK but it is a 'tight' community and I have no knowledge of Mr Stevenson abusing his position.
- 30 • I am not aware of any written agreement with Mr Stevenson nor with T&I Communications. His role is to take the minutes, circulate them and deal with any correspondence received for myself/Lord Greenway in conjunction with my office.
- As Mr Stevenson is experienced in the rules and procedures, I had no reason to believe that there was any need to register any benefit (see Mr Stevenson's letter).
- 35 • I would need to request copies from Mr Stevenson. My office may have copies but the member of staff in my team responsible for my APPG roles has changed several times since 2015.

- Copies of the appropriate paperwork were sent to Mr Stevenson to ensure we complied with the registration procedures. Also, as mentioned he has been undertaking this role for some years and I have no reason to believe he failed to observe the requirements.
- 5
- Any use of the Portcullis logo would have been to demonstrate the status of the All-Party Parliamentary Group and not to endorse T&I Communications commercially.

I hope the above is of assistance. I am happy to do whatever I can to allow you to expedite your enquiry and I look forward to hearing from you in due course should you need any more clarification or information.

10

In conclusion since our email exchanges I have spoken to Mr Stevenson and he has supplied more detail of his activities for the APPG and about his business. I have attached a copy of his email to this letter. He has also supplied copies of the minutes as requested; and filled the gaps in my answers to your questions. I have emailed

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copies of the minutes to your office as I felt they, and the copies of correspondence between Mr Stevenson - my office - [the Assistant Registrar] are too voluminous to print and send. I hope the material we have supplied covers your requests in full but if we haven't, do please let me know and I am sure we can comply.

Enclosure 1: Email from Mr Stevenson to Mr Fitzpatrick, 16 March 2017

20 I attach the emails from [the Assistant Registrar], which deal with compliance. Each year, I discuss their contents, the AGM and registration with your office and, as you know, make sure I'm compliant with the latest version of the APPG rules.

The APPMPG minutes from May 2015 are attached. Over the last three years, the Group has received presentations from 17 organisations over 10 sessions. Four have

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been from three of my clients. From when I began supporting the Group nearly eight years ago, a further one former client has presented. The next three sessions will receive presentations from six organisations, none are my clients.

All of T&I Communications' past and present clients can be found here - <http://www.ti-communications.co.uk/clients.html> . In the

30

maritime/marine/shipping space, I currently work for Forth Ports (including the Port of Tilbury), Port of Dover, Port of London Authority, Port of Milford Haven and the Port of Tyne.

Including travel, the five APPMPG sessions per calendar year require a maximum of 13.75hrs of support (minutes and issuing correspondence). This is below the £1,500

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per annum registrable threshold for consultancies to declare the value in kind and therefore requiring the company to list their website, etc, in compliance with the APPG rules.

I use the APPMPG Gmail email address to keep my secretariat support separate from my work. I am happy to use my work email address for future APPMPG correspondence and list my company website in the APPG register.

5 On checking once again, I have used the APPG logo on the T&I Communications' website in violation of the APPG rules. This is a mistake and I will remove it.

Enclosure 2: Minutes of All-Party Parliamentary Maritime and Ports Group dated 30 June 2015, 14 July 2015, 13 October 2015 and 15 March 2016

Text not included as content of minutes not relevant to my inquiry

8. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP, 30 March 2017

10 Thank you for your letter of 16 March 2017. The information provided, including that from Mr Stevenson, is very helpful. Having considered the material carefully, I do have some additional questions. I would be grateful if you would answer these questions without consulting Mr Stevenson/T&I Communications.

15 • You have told me that there was no formal agreement detailing the services Mr Stevenson was to provide but in practice his role is to take the minutes, circulate them and deal with any correspondence for you and Lord Greenway in conjunction with your office.

— Who decides the agenda for the meetings and which external speakers to invite?

20 — Approximately how much correspondence does Mr Stevenson deal with on behalf of the APPG and are you able to provide any estimate of the time commitment this involves?

• Were you aware that some of the invited speakers are clients of T&I (Port of Dover, and Port of London Authority)?

25 • The All-Party Notices advertise meetings of the group occurring on 30 June 2015; 14 July 2015; 13 October 2015; 15 March 2016; 7 June 2016; 19 July 2016; 30 January 2017 and 6 March 2017. Mr Stevenson has provided minutes for the first four of those meetings; how would these routinely be made available to anyone wishing to see a copy of the
30 minutes?

• May I have copies of the minutes for the second four meetings please?

— If minutes for any of those meetings are not available, please say why.

- Were you aware before I began my inquiry that reports of the APPG's meetings had been posted on T&I website?

5 It would be most helpful if you would reply as soon as possible and no later than 11 April. It is possible that I will need to seek some further information from Mr Stevenson, but I hope to be in a position to decide how to conclude my inquiry shortly after that.

30 March 2017

9. Letter from Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP to the Commissioner, 3 April 2017

Further to your letter of 30 March, the answers to your questions are:

10 I consult with Lord Greenway to decide what is on our agenda. Usually we have bids from outside organisations volunteering to speak.

My assessment is not much correspondence and therefore little time spent, but he would be better placed to answer.

No, I didn't check PLA/Dover but they would be top targets for us to invite.

15 Anyone can email me for minutes and I would pass any such request on to John Stevenson. I do not remember any such requests.

20 John Stevenson would be able to supply. I could waste staff time here trying to locate copies but as I have explained my staff member responsible for APPG work changed 6 months ago, [name]. He may have 30.01.17 and 06.03.17, I'll check and append if so.⁴

No.

I hope the above is helpful, do let me know if you need more.

3 April 2017

25 **Enclosure 1: Minutes of All-Party Parliamentary Maritime and Ports Group dated 30 January 2017 and 6 March 2017**

Text not included as not relevant to my inquiry.

⁴ Two sets of minutes appended

10. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP, 4 April 2017

Thank you for your letter of 3 April 2017, including the enclosure of two sets of minutes. I will consider carefully the information I have collated and then decide whether I need to approach Mr Stevenson for any additional information. As I am
5 out of the office next week, it may be towards the end of the month before I contact you again.

4 April 2017

11. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP, 3 May 2017

I wrote to you on 4 April to say that I would consider your letter of 3 April and then
10 decide the next step in my inquiry into the alleged breach of the rules by the Maritime and Ports APPG.

Unfortunately, I was not able to do that before Dissolution and I am, therefore, writing to let you know that I have now suspended my work on the inquiry. I will resume the inquiry after the General Election if you are re-elected. In the meantime,
15 the APPG will continue to be listed on my webpages, as an inquiry opened before 3 May.

I will write to you again after 8 June to confirm the status of my inquiry.⁵

3 May 2017

12. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Jim Stevenson, 13 June 2017

20 I am writing to seek your assistance with my inquiry into the Maritime and Ports APPG. Before setting out the specific information I require, I hope it will be helpful if I first explain a little about my work and the rules that apply to my investigations.

My role includes the investigation of alleged breaches of the rules for All-Party Parliamentary Groups where I am provided with sufficient evidence to justify
25 beginning an inquiry. My work is conducted in private and protected by parliamentary privilege until such time as any report is published. At that point, all the relevant evidence, including correspondence relating to the inquiry is usually placed in the public domain.

I may make inquiries of third parties where it is relevant to do so. Mr Fitzpatrick,
30 the chair of the Maritime and Ports APPG is aware that I am approaching you and I will share our correspondence with him in due course. (I have not copied this letter to him and I must ask that you do not discuss its contents with him until I have completed my work.) I do not generally disclose the names of third parties when publishing my decision at the end of an inquiry unless it is of particular relevance to

⁵ Letter not reproduced here as it is not relevant to the inquiry

the decision. I do not know whether it will be necessary to disclose your name in my report on this matter.

I am concerned about a possible breach of the transparency rules for APPGs in particular and I would be grateful if you would provide the following contextual information:

5

- Your comments on the basis for considering the provision of a secretariat function to the Maritime and Ports APPG as a voluntary donation on your part, rather than as a donation from T&I Communications;
- How it came about that on its own website, T&I Communications claims credit for two meetings which appear to be APPG meetings (including whether you sought the approval of the chair of the group before publishing that material – see copy enclosed);
- Whether the online descriptions of these meetings were informed by notes or minutes you took for the group;

10

15

- Your charge-out rate for consultancy work through T&I Communications
- Your role in the collation of bids from external organisations to speak at/attend the group's meetings;
- Copies of the minutes for the Group's meetings on 7 June and 19 July 2016;

20

I would be grateful if you would provide this information as soon as possible and, in any case, no later than 26 June 2017.

13 June 2017

13. Email from Mr Jim Stevenson to the Commissioner, 7 July 2017

Please accept my apologies for my delayed response. I have explained the circumstances to your office. Below are my answers to your questions.

25

1. This is part historical and part circumstance. When I left my previous employer in March 2014 and was asked by the former Chairman to continue to provide secretariat services, I was operating as a sole trader. This is when the APPMPG Gmail email address was established and registered with the House authorities.

30

T&I Communications Ltd was established in mid -September 2014, with my wife and I as directors and sole employees of the company. Although I do use other consultants on a project-by-project basis, I am the sole communications and public affairs consultant.

My work has been voluntary. No payment is made or received for any of my time in support of the APPMPG, either directly or indirectly.

5 There has been no registrable benefit in kind from March 2014 to now because, thus far, my time - three hours per session maximum - has fallen below the registrable amount per calendar year. I have spoken over the telephone to [the Assistant Registrar] about this issue in the past.

10 On 6 March 2017, I asked [name] of [name] MP's office to confirm this approach, i.e. using a separate designated Gmail email address, as opposed to my work email address - with the House authorities in relation to secretariat support of the All-Party Parliamentary Rail Group.

2. The events referenced on the T&I Communications' website are APPMPG meetings that I helped to organise.

15 I did not seek the Chairman's approval. I apologise unreservedly if I should not have summarised and listed the two APPMPG sessions on the T&I Communications' website. I have now removed the APPG logo.

3. The on-line descriptions were drafted from my memory and after reviewing trade media coverage of the sessions.

4. My charge out rate for consultancy work for T&I Communications is £[redacted]⁶ per day.

20 5. In conjunction with the officers of the APPMPG, I help to coordinate enquiries made by and approaches to external organisations to speak and attend where they have suitable experience and knowledge to share. This is in line with what officers have indicated they are interested in or where the subject matter is topical, provided there is space in the programme. Details of the sessions are advertised on the Whip
25 and relayed through APPMPG emails or on request.

6. Please find enclosed the minutes of the Group's meetings on 7 June and 19 July 2016.

Please let me know if I can assist you further on any aspect of your enquiries. If I have broken any of the transparency rules, please accept my utmost apology.

30 *7 July 2017*

⁶ Figure redacted - commercial in confidence

14. Letter from the Commissioner to the Registrar, 12 July 2017

5 I would like to ask for your advice on a matter concerning the Maritime & Ports APPG (the group), of which Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP is the chair. (I first wrote to you about this inquiry on 15 March, when I sought copies of records held by the Registration team in connection with the group.)

As you know, I am investigating whether the group should have registered the secretariat services provided by a lobbyist/lobbying company; and whether the group has used the APPG logo and crowned portcullis in a way which is contrary to the House's rules.

10 I enclose a copy of the relevant correspondence, which I have exchanged with Mr Fitzpatrick and with Mr John Stevenson of T&I Communications Ltd.

I would be grateful to have your comments on the following points:

- 15 • Whether for registration purposes you would regard Mr Stevenson or T&I Communications as the donor in respect of the benefit in kind which the provision of secretariat service represents;
- If, relevant, your advice on the calculation of the value of the benefit in kind and whether, in your view, the donation should at any point since 2015 have been registered;
- 20 • Whether the text published on the T&I website about the two APPG meetings was appropriate in the context of the Guide to the Rules for APPGs;
- Whether, had your advice been sought, you would have raised any concerns about the use of the APPG crowned portcullis on that website; and
- 25 • Whether you would have offered any other advice in respect of the transparency rules for APPGs.

I would, of course, be happy to receive any other advice or information which you consider relevant to this inquiry. It would be helpful to have your advice as soon as possible.

30 Thank you for your assistance.

12 July 2017

15. Letter from the Registrar to the Commissioner, 20 July 2017

Thank you for your letter of 12 July. I shall reply to your questions in order.

Whether I regard Mr Stevenson or T&I Communications as the donor of the secretariat services provided for this APPG.

- 5 On the website of T&I Communications, two APPG meetings are mentioned and the profile of Mr Stevenson says that he provides the secretariat “pro bono” (implying that he was not paid for this). Taken together, these things suggest that the secretariat was provided under the umbrella of the company. I would have advised making the company’s role clear in the Group’s register entry. If Mr Stevenson
10 provided these services as a private individual I would not expect to see them mentioned on the website of his company.

The calculation of the value of this benefit in kind

- 15 Mr Stevenson says in his email of 16 March that the five APPG sessions in each calendar year “require a maximum of 13.75 hrs of support (minutes and issuing correspondence)”. If so, Mr Stevenson spends the equivalent of less than two days each year on his secretariat duties. If asked, I would have advised valuing Mr Stevenson’s services by reference to his normal charge-out rate of £[redacted] a day. 13.75 hours at a daily rate of £[redacted] would however still fall below the level at which registration would be needed (services with a value of over £1,500 a year).

- 20 However, 13.75 hours across five meetings seems low if attendance at those meetings is factored in. But perhaps the group has met less than five times a year?

Whether the text published on the T & I website about the two meetings was appropriate

- 25 The item on the T & I website headed *Brexit: Short-Term uncertainty, Long Term Opportunity* refers to a “seminar in Parliament organised by T & I”. I think this is inappropriate; despite the APPG badge on that page, this sounds as if this event was a T & I initiative rather than an APPG event led by parliamentarians but administered by T & I Communications.

- 30 I assume that the second meeting to which you refer was that of 13 October 2015. Again, this is presented on the T & I website as if it was a T & I initiative, which I think is inappropriate. (The text says: “The T & I team was honoured to organise a seminar for a delegation of 13 parliamentarians with [name redacted], Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), 13 October 2015.”)

- 35 The second article does not mention the many non-parliamentarians who attended the meeting. And I am puzzled by the heading: *Head of United Nations Agency addresses Parliament*. The minutes do not mention any address to Parliament.

Any concerns about the use of the crowned portcullis

As I have explained above, I think that it was inappropriate to include the two articles above, in that form, on the webpages of T & I Communications. And I think that the first article should not have carried the APPG portcullis badge, since this might imply some sort of parliamentary authority for the article.

Any other advice

I note from the correspondence that you sent that the APPG has no written agreement with Mr Stevenson about the services he provides. It would be good practice to draw one up. I think it would be helpful if it required the group's chair or another officer to give advance approval to the text of any media article.

I see that over the last three years three of Mr Stevenson's clients have presented to this APPG. I am not suggesting that this was improper. The rules of the House do not prevent lobbyists from providing secretariats for All-Party Parliamentary Groups. But the details you have sent me illustrate the difficulty of maintaining proper boundaries. There is little to prevent someone registered as a consultant lobbyist from using the platform provided by an APPG to promote their client, or their client's cause; or to add to their own contact list. The Standards Committee may wish to consider whether any change to the rules is needed.

Please let me know if you need anything else.

20 *20 July 2017*

16. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP, 24 July 2017

When I wrote to you on 13 June 2017 I said that I was seeking information from Mr Stevenson of T&I Communications Ltd and that I would share his response with you in due course. I received a detailed email from him on 7 July. I enclose a copy of that exchange (my letter of 13 June and Mr Stevenson's email) for your information.

I have also sought and received the advice of the Registrar about the information you and Mr Stevenson have provided during the course of my inquiry. A copy of my letter to her and her response is also enclosed.

Before I make a final decision on this matter, I wanted to give you the opportunity to comment on the Registrar's advice to me, and to offer any further information you consider to be relevant. I would be grateful to receive any comments you wish to make by 7 August. If you have no comments or if that timetable is difficult for you, it would be helpful if you would telephone or email my PA, [name redacted], to let her know. (Her contact details are: [redacted].)

Once I have your response I hope to be in a position to make a decision on the matters under inquiry.

24 July 2017

17. Letter from Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP to the Commissioner, 25 July 2017

5 Thank you for your letter of 24 July inviting me to comment on [the Registrar's] letter in response to you.

I think Mr Stevenson has accepted in previous correspondence that he should more accurately represented his position and has apologised for the use of the Portcullis symbol.

10 In respect of responding paragraph by paragraph:

- Make clearer the role of T&I Communications as secretariat - I don't see this as a problem. It's never been hidden.
- 5 meets = 5 hours, therefore 8.75 hours in preparation and post activity seems reasonable to me. I'm not sure why [the Registrar] thinks not.

15 • T&I Seminar - not sure what this is.

• Portcullis - see above.

• Other advice - easily remedied.

20 As I think I stated in my original and subsequent correspondence, I believe this is all pretty thin stuff albeit improvements can be made. No one has sought to hide anything nor take commercial advantage. I have no information about the source of the complaint but I assume it originates from commercial competitors of T&I. I think the seriousness of the complaints need to be judged with that in mind.

I hope the above is of assistance and I am happy to come and discuss this should that be helpful.

25 *25 July 2017*

18. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP, 21 August 2017

30 I am sorry that it has taken a little longer than usual to reply to your letter of 25 July 2017. I have now had an opportunity to consider your comments and all of the other evidence I have collated in the course of my inquiry. I am now in a position to reach a decision.

My decision

When I wrote to you on 14 March 2017 as the officer responsible for ensuring that the group complies with the Guide to the Rules for APPG I said that my inquiry would focus on two issues:

- 5
- Whether the group should have registered secretariat services provided by a lobbyist/lobbying company; and
 - Whether the Secretariat has used the APPG logo and crowned portcullis in a way which is contrary to the House's rules.

10 In light of the information you and Mr Stevenson have provided, I have not found evidence that the group was required to register the secretariat services provided by T&I Communications. I have found evidence that the APPG logo and crowned portcullis was used in a way which was contrary to the House's rules.

Reasons for my decision

15 As you are aware, I first made enquiries about the basis on which Mr Stevenson has been providing secretariat services for the APPG for Maritime & Ports.⁷ I sought to establish whether Mr Stevenson was providing those services in a personal capacity or as a donation on behalf of his company, T&I Communications. It was important to establish this first because the registration requirements are dependent on that distinction. I have considered very carefully the advice I have received from the
20 Registrar on this point and, on balance, I have decided that the services were provided as a donation from T&I Communications.

25 Having reached that conclusion the question then arises as to the value of the benefit in kind the secretariat service represents. The Registrar has told me that a total of 13.75 hours seems to her a low figure for supporting five meetings if attendance at those meetings is factored in. I also find the figure quoted a little surprising, given that Mr Stevenson prepares the agendas and issues invitations after consultation with the group's officers, attends meetings, drafts and retains the notes of the meetings, and deals with any correspondence for you and the co-chair. (In his letter
30 of 7 July, Mr Stevenson told me that three hours per session would be the maximum amount of time he spent on one meeting.) However, I have no evidence that you and Mr Stevenson are mistaken in the figure of 13.75 hours you have provided and I have, therefore, no basis to doubt the calculation that the value of T&I Communications' provision of secretariat services fell below the registrable threshold.

35 As you know, the chair and registered contact for an APPG is "*responsible for ensuring that the group complies with the rules for the House, and that if any person or organisation provides a secretariat of support services, that person or organisation*

⁷ This is the title under which the group last appeared in the Register.

is aware of and complies with the rules". When you first wrote to me about my inquiry, you said that *"as Mr Stevenson is experienced in the rules and procedures, I had no reason to believe that there was any need to register any benefit."* The Registrar has told me that it would be good practice for you to draw up an agreement with Mr Stevenson about the services he provides. I agree and I have understood your letter of 25 July as confirmation that this will be done. I recommend that you might also consider asking T&I Communications to adopt some form of contemporaneous time-recording for the work they do for the group.

It is clear from our correspondence that the APPG logo and crowned portcullis has been used on the T&I Communications website in a way which is contrary to the rules of the House. I am grateful to Mr Stevenson for his prompt acknowledgement, apology and corrective action.

If I have understood your letter of 25 July correctly, you accept this and you are, on behalf of the group, willing to act on the Registrar's advice that the chair or another officer of the group should give advance approval to the text of any media article. I am grateful to you for confirming your willingness to take this step. For the sake of clarity, I should say that I would include in the Registrar's advice, the text of any material published for, by or about the group. This would I hope help to avoid confusion.

Other matters

At the end of your letter of 25 July 2017 you raise some additional points which I should address. You say that no one has sought to hide anything or to take commercial advantage. I have no evidence that anything has been deliberately hidden or that commercial advantage has been gained. However, as I am sure you will appreciate, given that three of T&I Communications clients have been invited to address the group, others might have gained the impression that T&I Communications' clients may enjoy privileged access or that T&I Communications Ltd has gained a commercial advantage, especially in the light of the misuse of the APPG logo and crowned portcullis now identified.

You also comment on the source of the complaint. I hope it will be helpful to reiterate that I began this inquiry on my own initiative. In considering whether to investigate a different but related allegation, I looked at the group's register entry and T&I Communications' website. That gave rise to concerns of my own, which then became the focus of my inquiry. I should also add that the criteria for the initiation of an inquiry are that the matter should be within my remit and that there should be sufficient evidence to justify an inquiry. I do not attempt to assess the motive of an individual making an allegation and it is not a relevant factor in determining the outcome at the end of an inquiry.

This was not the focus of my inquiry but, for completeness, I would ask that in its future communications the group should use only its registered name, in compliance with paragraph 21(a) of the Guide to the Rules. I appreciate that this may appear to be a minor technical requirement but, aside from the fact that it is a rule approved

by the House, the use of variants of the registered name can impede internet searches and contribute to confusion about APPG status.

Resolving this inquiry

5 I need now to consider how best to resolve this matter. With your agreement, I would be ready to consider resolving this matter through the rectification procedure. Under Standing Order No 150, I am able to use this procedure without submitting a full and formal memorandum to the Committee on Standards. I would, instead, inform the Committee of the outcome and my decision letter, with all the relevant correspondence, would be published on my webpages in due course (here:
10 <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/complaints-and-investigations/allegations-the-commissioner-has-rectified/rectifications-2017-18/>).

15 Under the rectification procedure, the Committee would normally expect the relevant Member - in this case the chair of the group - to have acknowledged their breach of the [rules], apologised and taken any steps necessary to rectify the error. Since you have already acknowledged the breach that I have identified, it remains only for you to make an apology on behalf of the group (which you might do in your letter responding to this) and to confirm that the group will take the recommended
20 actions. I would then publish the enclosed evidence pack, adding to it the text of your reply to me. If you have any comments on the factual accuracy of the pack, please let me know at the same time.

I would be grateful if you would respond to this proposal as soon as possible and by no later than 8 September 2017.

25 *21 August 2017*

19. Letter from Mr Jim Fitzpatrick MP to the Commissioner, 22 August 2017

30 Thank you for your letter dated 21 August. As chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Maritime and Ports I would like to take the opportunity to formally apologise on behalf of the group for the breach of the [rules]. I would also like to confirm the group will take the recommended actions as laid out in your correspondence.

I hope now the matter can be resolved. Please do not hesitate to contact my office should you have any further queries.

22 August 2017