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Summary

5 In February 2016 the Member was found to have breached the House's rules on the registration of financial interests through the late registration of remuneration from employment. On 15 January 2019 the Member registered a change in his financial interests which had occurred on 1 September 2018, outside the 28-day time-limit set by the House for such matters. I began an inquiry on my own initiative, seeking to understand why a further breach had occurred.

10 The Member immediately acknowledged his breach of the rules, apologised and explained that as soon as he had identified his oversight he had written to the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests to apologise.

15 In view of the Member's proactive steps to acknowledge and apologise for his breach of the rules, which arose from a "one-off change", I concluded that it was appropriate to conclude my inquiry by way of the rectification procedure available to me under House of Commons Standing Order No 150, and to ask the Registrar to italicise the relevant entry in the Register for a period of 12 months to indicate that the late registration had been identified and investigated.

Written evidence

1. Letter from the Commissioner to Rt Hon Geoffrey Cox QC MP, 4 February 2019

5 I would welcome your help with an inquiry I have started concerning your compliance with the House of Commons' Code of Conduct for Members in connection with the registration of your financial interests (paragraph 14 of the Code). It concerns your registration on 15 January 2019 of a change which occurred on 1 September 2018.

10 I have decided to begin an inquiry on my own initiative using the powers available to me under House of Commons' Standing Order No.150.

The Code of Conduct for Members

Paragraph 14 of the current Code of Conduct for Members states:

15 *"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."*

The Guide to the Rules relating to the conduct of Members – on registration

20 The main purpose of the Register of Members' Financial Interests (the Register) is

"to provide information of any pecuniary interest or other material benefit which a Member receives which might reasonably be thought by others to influence his or her action, speeches or votes in Parliament, or actions taken in his or her capacity as a Member of Parliament".

25 After the publication of the first Register of a Parliament, it is the responsibility of Members to notify changes in their registrable interests within 28 days of each change occurring.

30 The detailed rules on the registration of financial interests are found in chapter 1 of the Guide to the Rules relating to the conduct of Members (copy enclosed). Paragraphs 47-50 deal with Land and property (category 6).

Next steps

In the first instance, I would welcome your comments on this matter. It would be helpful if you would answer the following questions.

- 5 (1) Whether you consider you should have registered sooner your interest in the jointly-owned London residential property identified in the Register?
- (2) Why did you not register it sooner?
- (3) Whether, having reviewed your register entry (copy enclosed for ease of reference), you are satisfied that it is currently complete and accurate in all categories?
- 10 (4) If it is not, please contact the Registrar as soon as possible to make any necessary additions.
- (5) Please describe the steps you have taken to assure yourself of the completeness and accuracy of your register entry.

15 Any other points you may wish to make to help me with this inquiry would be most welcome.

Important information

20 As you will be aware, my inquiries are conducted in private. Following the decision taken by the House on 19 July 2018, I will not publish the fact that I am conducting an inquiry into an allegation into an alleged breach of the Code of Conduct. My office will not comment on any aspect of the inquiry to third parties. They will answer direct factual questions about the processes I follow and the standards system more generally but will neither confirm nor deny that I have begun an inquiry.

Procedure

25 You can see a copy of the Commissioner's Information Note, which sets out the procedure for inquiries via this link: [https://www.parliament.uk/documents/pdfs/New%20Website%20Documents/P CS-Information-Note.pdf](https://www.parliament.uk/documents/pdfs/New%20Website%20Documents/P%20CS-Information-Note.pdf). Please note that this has not yet been updated to reflect the changes flowing from the decision of 19 July 2018.

30 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. All the relevant evidence, including our correspondence, will be published when I have concluded my work.

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, as a matter of courtesy, say now that I may seek the advice of the Registrar on this matter. If I do so, I will share my correspondence with you and give you the opportunity to comment before I reach a decision.

Action

I would be grateful to have your response to this letter as soon as possible and no later than 11 February 2019.

10 *4 February 2019*

2. Letter from Rt Hon Geoffrey Cox MP to the Commissioner, 10 February 2019

Thank you for your letter dated 4 February 2019.

As you know I made a voluntary declaration of a change to my registrable interests on 15 January 2019.

15 This declaration related to a one-off change in my registrable interests (a decision to let out my former residence in London) brought on by my appointment to the Government on 9 July 2018.

20 I omitted to make this declaration within 28 days due to an oversight. As soon as I realised the error, I caused the interest to be registered and wrote to the Registrar, in a letter dated 16 January, to apologise for the time that had elapsed.

I should have made this declaration promptly and very much regret not having done so.

Having reviewed the requirements of the Members' Code of Conduct I am satisfied that my register of interests is complete and accurate in all categories.

25 Please let me know if there are any further details that might help your inquiry. I would be happy to discuss the matter with you.

10 February 2019

3. Letter from the Rt Hon Geoffrey Cox QC MP to the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests, 16 January 2019

30 I am writing to bring to your attention my voluntary registration of 15 January, which will be published in the Register of Members' Financial Interests on 21 January 2019.

I regret that due to an oversight I have omitted to make this declaration within 28 days of the change in my registrable interests, pursuant to paragraph 14 of the Code of Conduct for Members. This is a one-off change, which relates to the registration of a jointly owned property from which rent is received.

- 5 The oversight is an error made wholly on my part and I accept responsibility for failing to make this declaration promptly, for which I apologise.

Please let me know if there is any further information you require.

16 January 2019

10 **4. Letter from the Commissioner to Rt Hon Geoffrey Cox QC MP, 20 February 2019**

Thank you for your letter of 10 February 2019, acknowledging and apologising for your late registration of the letting out of your former London residence. As you are aware, the House requires registration of relevant changes within 28 days of the change, and your failure to do this has put you in breach of the rules of conduct.

- 15 I have considered carefully how I should conclude this inquiry. As you know, this is not the first time you have made a late registration and, while the circumstances are different on this occasion, it is another "oversight" on your part which has resulted in a breach of the House's rules. However, I am also conscious that it is now approximately three years since your first breach. The current Register of Interests
20 suggests that the arrangements you put in place then appear to be effective in respect of your earnings. I also note that you wrote promptly to the Registrar of Financial Interests to draw your late registration to her attention and to apologise.

I have taken the liberty of obtaining a copy of that letter from the Registrar and, as you will see, I have included it in the enclosed written evidence pack.

- 25 On balance, I have decided that it would be appropriate, having established the circumstances of the breach, and taking into account the factors outlined above, to conclude this matter by way of the rectification procedure available to me under House of Commons Standing Order No 150. If you agree, I will ask the Registrar to italicise the relevant part of your Register entry, so that is apparent to the reader
30 that the matter has been investigated. If you agree, I would then publish my decision, in the form of the written evidence pack, on my webpages and, in due course, notify the Committee on Standards of the outcome.

20 February 2019

35 **5. Letter from Rt Hon Geoffrey Cox QC MP to the Commissioner, 25 February 2019**

Thank you for your letter dated 20 February 2019.

I accept your determination and the proposal to conclude this matter by way of a rectification.

25 February 2019

