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Summary

On 19 July 2021, I started an inquiry on my own initiative into whether Mr Conor McGinn MP failed to register his receipt of a ticket to the BRIT Awards 2021 on the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

5 Following a reference to Mr McGinn's attendance at the BRIT Awards in an on-line Politico article, 'Spotted at the BRITS' dated 12 May 2021, I undertook a review of the member's entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. My review found that, although Mr McGinn had registered his attendance at the event, he had failed to meet the 28-day deadline set by the House. Mr McGinn's registration entry
10 was made 28 days after the 28-day deadline set by the House.

During my investigation, I sought comments from Mr McGinn, who promptly provided a full explanation and apology. Mr McGinn also outlined the action he had taken to ensure the timely registration of any future interests.

15 Having considered the information available to me, I concluded that Mr McGinn had a duty to register his ticket to this event on the Register of Members' Financial Interests within 28-days of acceptance. I found that by failing to meet the 28-day deadline set by the House, Mr McGinn had breached paragraph 14 of the House of Commons' Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament.

20 In my view, this breach is at the less serious end of the spectrum. I have therefore concluded my inquiry by way of the rectification procedure available to me under Standing Order No 150. I have asked the Registrar to arrange for the relevant entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests to be placed in bold italics, so it would be clear it had been the subject of an inquiry.

Written evidence

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

2. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Conor McGinn MP, 19 July 2021

15 Following the publication of an on-line article by Politico on 12 May 2021¹ and my review of the Member's Register of Financial Interests, I have decided to open a formal inquiry on my own initiative into your compliance with paragraph 14 of the House of Commons Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament, using the authority given to me by Standing Order No. 150. I have enclosed a copy of the article with this letter.

20 **The scope of my inquiry**

My inquiry will focus on whether by failing to register your acceptance of a complimentary ticket for the Brit Awards, which took place on 11 May 2021, within 28 days of receipt, you have acted in breach of paragraph 14 of the House of Commons' Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament.

25 If the scope of my inquiry changes, I will update you in writing.

¹ <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.² 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 The Guide to the rules relating to the conduct of Members, which is appended to the Code, contains more detail about registration. Chapter 1, paragraph 2 states:

Requirements of the House

15 2. The House requires new Members, within one month of their election, to register all their current financial interests, and any registrable benefits (other than earnings) received in the 12 months before their election. After that, **Members are required to register within 28 days any change in those registrable interests**. Such a change includes both the acquisition of a new interest and the ceasing of any registered interest, for example because an employment has ceased or because a holding has reduced in value or
20 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.*

Requirements for registration

23. Under this category Members must register:

² <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:*³

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 the allegation that your alleged 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 specific questions:

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

- 15 1. Please can you outline the circumstances that caused this interest to be registered outside of the 28-days as set by the House, and what prompted you to register your acceptance of the ticket to the Brit Awards 2021 on 30 June 2021?
- 20 2. 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?
3. 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
30 the standards system more generally, but will not provide any comment or details about the particulars of this inquiry.

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

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

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

Procedure

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

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

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

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

Potential outcomes

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

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

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

to my decision(s). 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.

10 If you would prefer me to communicate with you by email, or 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.

Due to the Current health crisis, 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.

15 *19 July 2021*

3. Letter from Mr Conor McGinn MP to the Commissioner, 19 July 2021

I would firstly like to apologise to you, as I have done the Registrar, for the delay of some 20 days in registering this item.

20 I attended the BRIT Awards on Tuesday 11th May 2021. I receive an email from UK Music on 29th June 2021 (see attached)⁴ informing me of the cost and apologising for the delay in outlining it. I received this in my weekly correspondence file and then contacted the Registrar, [details redacted], by telephone to explain the circumstances, apologise and ask for her advice on registering my attendance at the event in question. I then registered this under the relevant section of the Register
25 of Members' Interests using the form [the Registrar] provided via email.

As you have pointed out, my attendance at the BRIT Awards was already in the public domain and as the Secretary of the APPG on Music my work with the music industry is well-known.

30 I fully understand the requirement to register any interests within 28 days, and should have ensured that I did this. Regardless of the delay in being provided with the declarable amount by UK Music. I can fully accept that it is my responsibility to

⁴ See enclosure below

comply with this. The Registrar has informed me that I can provide an estimate in advance of any final figure if this was to occur in future.

I have since had cause to make an unrelated entry in the Register of Members' Interests and have ensured this was done fully and within the timeframe.

5 I hope this fully answers the questions you have raised.

Enclosure: Email from Deputy CEO & Director of Public Affairs, UK Music to Mr Conor McGinn MP, 29 June 2021

From: [details redacted]

Sent: 29 June 2021 5.22 PM

10 **To:** Conor McGinn MP

Subject: BRITS

Many thanks again for being our guest at the BRITS in May. I hope you agree that it was an excellent event and a much needed boost as we look forward to the eventual return to live music.

15 I must apologise for the delay in confirming with you the cost of the ticket. Up until today I would only be able to provide a provisional figure but we have now had all the invoices in and I can confirm the value as £750+VAT.

Do please let me know whether you require any further information at this point.

19 July 2021

20 **4. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Conor McGinn MP, 3 August 2021**

Thank you for your letter dated 19 July 2021, and for the helpful information you have provided in response to my initial enquiries.

25 I note in your response you said that, having received an email from UK Music on 29 June 2021 detailing the cost of the ticket to the BRIT awards, you contacted the Registrar for Members' Financial Interests directly for advice on registering your attendance at the event.

In view of the above, I would ask that you assist my enquiries further and provide the following information by 18 August 2021:

- A copy of the correspondence from UK Music inviting you to the BRIT awards 2021 and your response.
 - Copies of any correspondence between you/your office and UK Music requesting information about the value of the ticket.
- 5
- A copy of your correspondence with Registrar for Members' Financial Interests, including any records you have made of your telephone conversations with the Registrar regarding this matter.

Once I have received and considered the information I have requested, I will contact you to update you on my next course of action.

- 10 In the meantime, this matter remains protected by Parliamentary Privilege and should continue to be kept confidential.

3 August 2021

5. Letter from Mr Conor McGinn MP to the Commissioner, 10 August 2021

Thank you for your letter.

- 15 1. Please see attached the invitation to the BRIT Awards and my response.⁵
2. I verbally asked UK Music on the night of the event about the cost. They said they would confirm the details and let my office know any declarable amount. I assumed that had happened and was surprised to find out that it hadn't. I fully accept it was my responsibility to pursue the matter and ensure it was resolved. I have since put in place systems in my office to make sure that this type of inadvertent error does not happen again; namely that, where possible, the cost of any similar tickets/hospitality is ascertained prior to the event, and, where that is not possible that it is obtained quickly as possible afterwards and, if required, the Registrar is informed of an estimated value while awaiting the confirmed cost. I have also set up a more robust email filing system to ensure correspondence relating to any similar matters in the future are centrally held by my office manager, labelled as high importance and brought to my immediate attention.
- 20
- 25
- 30 3. Please see the attached correspondence from the Registrar⁶ confirming our phone call and attaching the required documentation to register an interest, and my response. I did not make a record of my phone call but as you will see from the email it took place on 6 July, subsequent on my receiving and reviewing the correspondence from UK Music. In my contact with the Registrar since being elected, I have always found [details redacted] and her

⁵ See enclosure below

⁶ See enclosure below

staff to be helpful, courteous and straightforward, and this occasion was no different.

You will also wish to know that I amended this entry on 19 July to reflect that the declarable amount, including VAT, was £900.

- 5 As I have previously acknowledged, I completely accept responsibility for the delay in submitting this entry to the Register of Interests, wish to apologise for that and have now taken steps to prevent any such occurrence in the future.

Enclosure: Email from Chief Executive, UK Music to Mr Conor McGinn MP, 30 April 2021

10 **From:** [details redacted]

Sent: 30 April 2021 9.14 AM

To: Conor McGinn MP

Subject: INVITE: BRIT Awards, Tuesday 11th May, 6pm

- 15 I'm writing to invite you to be our guest at The BRIT Awards on Tuesday 11th May at The O2 Arena. The event will form part of the Government's scientific Events Research Programme aimed at enabling the safe and rapid return of major sporting and live music events at scale.

- 20 The show will be hosted by Jack Whitehall, with the coveted BRITs trophy being awarded to those Artists who have been honoured in the category they've been nominated in. Nominees and Guest Presenters will be present and there will be a series of stunning live performances on the night, including Dua Lipa, Griff, Headie One, Arlo Parks, Rag'n'Bone Man with P!NK and the NHS Choir, and more superstar names to be announced soon. There will also be some additional pre-recorded performances. The show is live to air on ITV1 from 8pm.

- 25 Attendance is conditional on a negative Lateral Flow test result taken in person at your local NHS Trust testing centre no more than 36 hours before the event. You will need to take a test even if you have been vaccinated. You can find your nearest testing centre here – there are a number available in Westminster, including at Church House (off Millbank) and Broadway by St James Park station.

- 30 Because of the controlled nature of the event and the need to submit names to the BRITs asap, I would be grateful if you could please confirm your attendance by midday today and to please make us aware of any dietary requirements you might have.

Event timings:

6pm – Doors.

8pm – Show start

10.30pm – Show end

- 5 Being a pilot event as part of the Government's Events Research Programme, there will be specific requirements that each guest needs to be aware of and adhere to:
1. You must come to the event with a negative Lateral Flow test result, taken IN PERSON at your local NHS Trust testing centre no more than 36 hours before the event. The test can take place from 7am on Monday 10th May. You need to
10 take the Test even if you have been vaccinated.
 2. You must come with photo ID (NHS badge, passport or drivers licence)
 3. Ahead of the event, you will be emailed a link to enter your data. Here you will consent and agree to be part of the Government study. You may be asked to take a PCR test on the day of the event and five days after the event – this is a
15 voluntary step, and the PCR test results will be used for the Events Research Programme to better inform future testing regimes.
 4. Your email address will be forwarded to The O2 so you can receive your digital seat ticket, which will gain you entry to the event.
 5. There will be no social distancing in place within the arena. Face coverings
20 will need to be worn in communal areas, but these can be removed upon entry to the Suites.

Please confirm attendance as soon as possible, and I hope to see you on the 11th!

Chief Executive, UK Music

25 **Enclosure: Email from Mr Conor McGinn MP to Chief Executive, UK Music, 30 April 2021**

From: Conor McGinn MP

Sent: 30 April 2021 11.54 AM

To: [details redacted]

Subject: Re: INVITE: BRIT Awards, Tuesday 11th May, 6pm

Many thanks for this and delighted to confirm

Conor McGinn MP

**Enclosure: Email from the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests to Mr
Conor McGinn MP, 6 July 2021**

5 **From:** [Registrar of Members' Financial Interests]

Sent: 6 July 2021 2.42 PM

To: Conor McGinn MP

Subject: BRIT awards

Thanks for your call about this. I attach the form for you to use.

10 Registrar of Members' Financial Interests

**Enclosure: Email from Mr Conor McGinn MP to the Registrar of Members'
Financial Interests, 6 July 2021**

From: Conor McGinn MP

Sent: 6 July 2021 3.21 PM

15 **To:** [Registrar of Members' Financial Interests]

Subject: Update to Register of Members' Financial Interests

Please find attached an update to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Please do not hesitate to let me or my office know if you need any more information.

20 Conor McGinn MP

10 August 2021

6. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Conor McGinn MP, 15 September 2021

5 Thank you for your letters of 19 July 2021 and 10 August 2021, and the additional information you have provided in response to my questions. I am grateful for the promptness of your replies.

10 I now have sufficient information to make a decision on whether, by failing to register your acceptance of a complimentary ticket for the Brit Awards, which took place on 11 May 2021, within the 28-day timeframe set by the House, you have acted in breach of paragraph 14 of the House of Commons' Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament.

My decision

15 Having considered our correspondence, the evidence and the published rules and guidance, I have decided that by registering your ticket to the BRIT Awards outside of the 28-days set by the House, you have breached paragraph 14 of the House of Commons' Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament. Outlined below is an explanation of how I have reached my decision.

The House of Commons Code of Conduct and Guidance

Paragraph 14 of the House of Commons Code of Conduct states:

20 *"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."*

25 The Guide to the Rules states that Members are required to register any new registerable interests within 28-days of receipt. With respect to 'gifts, benefits and hospitality from UK sources' Category 3 adds that Members must register any gifts, benefits or hospitality with a value over £300. For the purposes of Category 3, 30 hospitality includes event or travel tickets as well as receptions, meals and accommodation.

Rationale

35 On 30 April 2021, you received an email from [details redacted], Chief Executive UK Music, inviting you to the BRIT Awards 2021. In his email, [details redacted] stated that the event, which was due to take place on 11 May 2021, would form part of the Government's scientific Events Research Programme. You confirmed your attendance the same day.

The Brit Awards took place on 11 May and you attended. This was reported in the Politico article London Playbook: Spotted at the Brits dated 12 May 2021.

5 On 29 June 2021, [details redacted] Deputy CEO & Director of Public Affairs at UK Music emailed you to apologise for the delay in confirming the cost of your ticket to the event. [details redacted] confirmed the ticket cost was £750+VAT.

On 6 July 2021 you contacted the Registrar for Members' Financial Interests about this matter. The Registrar emailed you at 2.42pm the same day with a registration form for you to complete. You submitted your completed form at 3.21pm.

10 In your letter dated 10 August 2021, you said that on 11 May 2021 you asked a representative from UK Music about the cost of the ticket. You said that you were told that UK Music would contact you to confirm any declarable amount, and that you were surprised when you found out that they had not been in touch.

15 Finally, I note you said that you have since put systems in place, such as a more robust filing system and checking the value of a ticket before the event, to ensure that such an error is not repeated in future.

20 Having considered the information available, it is clear that the value of the BRIT Awards ticket was over the £300 threshold for registration, and that it should have been registered on the Register of Members' Financial Interests within 28 days. Furthermore, whilst the ticket was subsequently registered, registration did not occur until 6 July 2021, 28 days after the 28-day deadline expected by the House. For these reasons, it is my decision that your registration under category 3, of the ticket to the Brit Awards on 11 May 2021, was outside of the 28-day timeframe set by the House and was, therefore, a breach of paragraph 14 of the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament.

25 It is clear from the information provided, that you registered this interest shortly after being notified that it was required, and you have given me assurances that you have amended your processes to ensure that, in future, you will register your interests in time.

Next Steps

30 I am satisfied there was no deliberate attempt to mislead, and I consider this breach to be at the less serious end of the spectrum. Standing Order No 150 makes provision for me to conclude an inquiry without making a referral to the Committee on Standards in certain circumstances. This process is called rectification and requires the entry in the current Register to be amended
35 to bold italic type and include an appropriate explanatory note. The amended entry will remain on the register for a period of one year.

In view of the above, I have decided that a referral to the Standards Committee is not necessary and that I can resolve this breach of the rules through rectification. To do so, the Committee would generally expect the Member to provide the following:

- a) Confirmation you have accepted my decision;
- 5 b) A clear acknowledgement that you have breached the rules;
- c) An apology for the breach; and
- d) Information of the steps you have taken to rectify the breach and to ensure there is no recurrence of the breach.

10 I note that you have already acknowledged and apologised for your breach of the rules and provided details of the action you intend to take to prevent further late registration of interests, for which I would like to thank you. Therefore, in order to progress this through rectification, I will require the following action from you:

- Carefully review my decision and confirm in writing that you accept it;
- 15 • Include with your response an undertaking that future registrations of financial interests will be made in line with the requirements of the Guide to the rules.

If you are content for me to conclude the inquiry in this way, please write to me with the above information by 29 September 2021.

20 If you accept my decision, I will share my written evidence pack with you, so that you can check its factual accuracy before publication. I will also report the outcome to the Committee on Standards in due course as a matter of routine. Finally, I will ask the Registrar to arrange to annotate the relevant information in the Register.

25 If you do not accept my decision, you should tell me the reasons for that by reply. After which, I will prepare a Memorandum to the Committee on Standards, so that they may consider the matter. I would give you the opportunity to see and comment on a draft of the Memorandum, but the content of it would, in the final analysis, be for me alone.

30 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.

As you know, due to the ongoing pandemic, my team are currently working from home only, so I would be grateful if you could please send your response electronically to standardscommissioner@parliament.uk.

15 September 2021

5 **7. Letter from Mr Conor McGinn MP to the Commissioner, 23 September 2021**

Thank you for correspondence of 15 September 2021.

I accept the decision you have reached and will ensure that any future registration of interests are made within the 28 day period specified.

10 *23 September 2021*