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Summary

- 5 I began an inquiry on my own initiative into whether the All Party Parliamentary Group on American Football had acted in breach of the *Guide to the Rules on APPGs* after I became aware of the late registration of a financial benefit, of £13,532.54, received by the Group from the Jacksonville Jaguars.
- In the course of my inquiry I found the Group had not been compliant with the rules for APPGs regarding the publication of minutes, financial statements, and disclaimers on the Group's website and social media feeds.
- 10 When these breaches of the rules were brought to his attention, the Chair cooperated fully with my investigation and took prompt action to rectify the late registration and the omissions from the website. The Chair acknowledged and apologised for the errors and has described the steps taken to avoid any future recurrence. He has also assured me that the register entry for the APPG on American Football is now up to date.
- 15 While I identified breaches to four of the rules for APPGs, I found they were at the less serious end of the spectrum and I concluded the matter using the rectification procedure available to me through Standing Order 150.

Mr Peter Bone MP: Resolution letter

Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Peter Bone MP, 26 November 2020

5 Thank you for your letter of 19 November 2020, agreeing to the proposal to conclude my inquiry by way of the rectification procedure, and for your unreserved apology on behalf of the APPG for American football.

I note you have implemented the various steps recommended by the Registrar, and that an online workshop has been booked for your staff member who is now acting as secretariat for the Group.

10 I will publish the enclosed evidence pack here <https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/complaints-and-investigations/allegations-the-commissioner-has-rectified/> in the next few days, and I will inform the Committee on Standards of the outcome in due course.

15 Thank you for your full co-operation with this inquiry and your prompt and helpful replies. I confirm that the matter is now closed.

26 November 2020

Written evidence

1. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Peter Bone MP, 24 June 2020

5 I am writing to you as Chair of the APPG on American Football, to seek your help with an inquiry I have initiated into potential breaches to the rules for APPGs, by the group during the 2017-19 Parliament.

10 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 in March 2020, when the Assistant Registrar forwarded to me her email exchange with you; a copy of which I enclose. In your email to the Assistant Registrar you explained that the Group secretariat had notified you of an error in registering a benefit for the Group. Due to the complications presented by the Covid-19 pandemic, and the requirement for my office to work remotely, I decided to delay initiating this inquiry until now.

15 My inquiry will consider whether the group has breached rules 17, 21, 24 and 28 of the *Guide to the Rules for All Party Parliamentary Groups* (the Guide to the Rules).

20 **Paragraph 3** of 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.*”

The scope of my inquiry

My inquiry will focus on whether the group registered, within 28 days of receipt, a financial benefit of £13,532.54, from the Jacksonville Jaguars.

25 Having also looked at the APPG American Football’s website and social media feeds, I am concerned that the group may not have followed the House’s rules on maintaining transparency, and the rules regarding the operation of the group’s website and social media more generally.

The relevant rules of the House

30 **Paragraph 17** of the Guide to the Rules for APPGs 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:

“(a) ...

(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.”

5 Paragraph 6 of Appendix 1¹ to the Guide to the rules says that:

Benefits in kind may include:

- *one-off benefits such as overseas visits, hospitality, event or travel tickets, receptions or other events...*

Paragraph 21 of the Guide to the Rules for APPGs says;

10 *“Groups must be transparent about their nature, membership and funding. In particular, they must avoid presenting themselves in a way which could lead to confusion with Select Committees. They must make full disclosures of any support received for their publications. An APPG must:*

15 *a) Use the group’s full registered name, including the term ‘All-Party Parliamentary Group’,² in all its communications. This helps distinguish registered groups from unregistered groups and from other bodies such as select committees;*

b) ...

20 *c) Publish on its website (or provide on request) the following information*

i) ...

ii) Dates of meetings, both past and future;

iii) Minutes of past formal meetings (which should record both attendance and decisions”;

25 *iv) ...*

¹https://www.parliament.uk/documents/pcfs/all-party-groups/guide-to-rules/guide.html#_idTextAnchor026

² Groups which existed before the 2015 General Election may, exceptionally, retain earlier titles which do not meet these conditions.

- v) *Income and expenditure statements (if required: see paragraphs 28 and 29)*

5 **Paragraph 24** states; *A group's website and its social media feed (if any) must give the contact details for the group's chair, and secretariat and/or public enquiry point (if it has one). All such websites and media feeds must carry a disclaimer as follows:*

10 *"This is not an official website [or feed] of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has not been approved by either House or its committees. All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of Members of both Houses with a common interest in particular issues. The views expressed in these webpages are those of the group."*

Paragraph 28 states; *A group which has received over £12,500 from outside Parliament, in money or in kind, in its reporting year must undertake the following actions.*

- 15 a) Complete an income and expenditure statement, in accordance with the requirements at Appendix 2; and
- b) Arrange to have this approved at its AGM (or, if not possible, at another General Meeting);
- 20 c) Publish the approved statement on the website within 28 days of its approval and within four months of the end of the relevant reporting year; and
- d) Publish a closing income and expenditure statement, approved by the officers of the group, within four months of the end of a Parliament – or within four months of the group's decision to cease to exist. Detailed instructions are at Appendix 2³;

25 **Next steps**

I would welcome your comments on the following questions regarding possible breaches of the rules for APPGs.

- 30 1. Whether you were aware of the requirements in paragraphs 17, 21, 24 and 28 above, as set out in the Guide to the Rules which was approved by the Standards Committee on 24 February 2015?

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https://www.parliament.uk/documents/pcfs/all-party-groups/guide-to-rules/guide.html#_idTextAnchor033

2. Please could you detail the steps you have taken to ensure the secretariat is aware of, and complies with, the Guide to the Rules.
- 5 3. The Assistant Registrar emailed you on 16 March 2020, about a financial benefit of £13,532.54, received by the APPG from the Jacksonville Jaguars. I understand from the exchange of emails that this was not registered within the 28-day deadline set by the House. Is there any additional information or evidence which might help me to understand how that came about? (If so, please provide it when replying to this letter.)
- 10 4. Why the group's website is named the Parliamentary American Football group and not the All-Party Parliamentary Group for American Football?
- a. Who approves the content and who maintains the group's website and social media feeds?
5. Why the information listed in paragraph 21(c) does not appear on the APPG's website, and
- 15 a. if the information listed in c (ii, iii and v) above is already in the public domain, where it can be found?
6. Whether the disclaimer set out in paragraph 24 of the Guide to the Rules appears somewhere on the group's website or social media feeds? (I cannot find it.)
- 20 7. Why the information listed in paragraph 28 (a) to (d) does not appear on the APPG's website, and
- a. if the information listed in (a) to (d) above is already in the public domain, where it can be found?

25 It would be helpful to receive any evidence to support your responses when you reply to this letter. You can consult the Group's secretariat insofar as is necessary for you to answer the questions above but please do not discuss the matter or my investigation with him, as I may need to write or speak to him myself. Any other points you wish to make to help me with this inquiry would also be welcome.

Important information

30 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 of an alleged breach of the APPG rules. 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
35 confirm nor deny that I have begun an inquiry.

Procedure

Please find a link here⁴ to 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.

This letter and any subsequent correspondence between us in connection with this inquiry is protected by parliamentary privilege. You should not discuss this with any third party except in so far as seeking answers from the group's secretariat, as outlined above. Our correspondence should be kept confidential until the outcome of my inquiry is published.

While I think it is unlikely at this stage that I will need to interview you about this matter, if it does become necessary, 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.

Potential outcomes

Inquiries are generally concluded in one of three ways. If the evidence does not substantiate the allegation, it will not be upheld. If the evidence demonstrates a breach of the rules, I may – in certain circumstances – 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 material is published on the Parliament website, on my webpages.

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 would be published, as an appendix to the Committee's own Report.

I should make clear 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). If you provide sensitive material which you think I should consider redacting, please tell me. I would give careful consideration to any such request.

⁴ <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/pcfs/New%20Website%20Documents/PCS-Information-Note.pdf>

Action

I would be grateful to have your response to this letter as soon as possible and no later than **3 July 2020**.

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

Thank you for your cooperation with this matter.

24 June 2020

2. Letter from Mr Peter Bone MP to the Commissioner, 27 June 2020

Thank you for your letter of the 24 June 2020.

- 15 You have explained to me why there has been a delay in initiating this enquiry due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This is completely understandable, and I apologise that the actions of the APPG have caused you additional workload at this difficult time. I hope you and your staff are all safe and well.

- 20 I can confirm that I have not spoken to any third party about your enquiry, though I have spoken to the Group Secretariat to assist me in answering your questions.

You asked for a telephone number in case you wished to speak to me. [Details redacted]. If you think it would be helpful to meet up with me at any time, I would be more than happy to do this.

Turning to your specific questions, I will reply as follows:

- 25 1. I was not aware of all the requirements in paragraphs 17, 21, 24 and 28 in the Guide to the Rules. After the General Election in 2017, it was decided to reform the APPG on American Football. Unfortunately, at the 2017 election, [name redacted], our previous Chairman, had lost his seat. Therefore, it was suggested that I become Chairman.
- 30 I was conscious that I did not know all the rules and regulations governing the running of an APPG, in addition, there was a desire to increase the activity of the APPG. It was clear to me that we would need a proper Secretariat for this to happen. They would be able to know all the rules and regulations, file all the

required returns, yet at the same time, expand the activities of the Group, with more meetings, events and even a website.

I investigated who would be best suited as our Secretariat and discussed this with colleagues. The strong view was that it should be run by [name redacted].
5 They were Secretariat for around 12 sport APPGs, [details redacted]. On the 6th September 2017 they were appointed as the Secretariat. It was my understanding that they would be fully aware of all the regulations in the Guide to the Rules.

10 2. In light of the Secretariat bringing matters to my attention and to the attention of the Assistant Registrar, I instructed the Secretariat to undertake a full review of the Guide to the Rules to ensure full compliance. The Secretariat has confirmed to me that the review has taken place and that the APPG complies with the Guide to the Rules. In particular, the Secretariat has confirmed the Group's website has been updated specifically to ensure all elements relating
15 to questions 4-7 below are met.

3. The 28-day deadline set by the House was not met due to the Secretariat being unable to complete duties at the time due to a combination of lead staff having left the organisation, and the new lead contact within the organisation being unwell and having other serious personal matters that required attention. It
20 was therefore missed. However, in preparing a finance statement for the Group in the new Parliament, this error was spotted and immediately highlighted, and it was at this point it was reported by the Secretariat to me and to the Assistant Registrar.

25 4. I can confirm the website has been renamed All-Party Parliamentary Group for American Football. This was, unfortunately, not used previously due to the format of text on the Group's website. Further, I can confirm this moniker is used throughout, including in published communication shown on the news section. I have final approval of any content that is updated on the website. The website is maintained by the Group Secretariat. The Group's Twitter feed is
30 maintained by the Group Secretariat.

5. A list of Active Members (both Parliamentary and external) has always appeared on the Group's website. The Group has no external members at this time. Dates of meetings, past and future, have been published. However, I am
35 informed that an update of the website meant the meetings page could not be seen. This has been corrected. The Group has not produced any reports. Income and expenditure statements have only been required in one year, the last, as the Group had not received the total amount of monetary or in-kind support until that time. However, statements have been produced by the Secretariat in each of the years they have supported the Group using the template provided in the Guide to the Rules. These have been placed on the
40 website in the Meetings section.

6. I have checked the website, and the disclaimer does now appear on the footer of the website across all pages. However, I do not know whether there was a technical issue with the site which stopped this appearing before. The Group's only social media feed is on the Twitter platform. It is not possible to include the disclaimer on the Groups Twitter profile due to the character limitations. The Twitter profile states currently: "The All-Party Parliamentary Group for American Football. Full details and contact on the website."

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7. Prior to last year, the Group had not received money or in-kind support to the £2,500 threshold. However, since their engagement, the Secretariat created finance statements using the template provided, which were reviewed at AGMs. I can confirm these appear on the website in the meetings section.

I hope this is the information that you require, but please do not hesitate to get in contact with me if there is anything further that you require from me.

27 June 2020

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3. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Perter Bone MP, 5 August 2020

Thank you for your letter of the 27 June 2020, and the information this provided about the APPG for American Football. I'm sorry it has taken longer than usual to reply.

20

There are a few points I would like to clarify with you and some further information that would be useful to have at this time.

1. From your letter I am not clear whether you knew that the Jacksonville Jaguars payment had been received and assumed that it had been registered; or whether you did not know that it had been received. Please clarify this for me.

25

2. Into which bank account was the sum of £13,532.54 paid, and who controls the account?

3. Were these donations intended as general support for the group, or were they specifically intended to pay the secretariat for its services?

30

4. I see that the group's accounts published on the website do not list any benefits in kind, even though the group had registered benefits in kind in the APPG Register during the reporting year ending 5 September 2019.

35

a. Please could you check whether any benefits in kind were received in the group's last complete reporting year, from 6 September 2018 to 5 September 2019. If so, please explain the nature and value of any benefits in kind received in that reporting year.

- b. Please give the nature and value of any benefits in kind received in the period between the end of that reporting year, and 5 November 2019, and
- 5 c. The nature and value of any benefits in kind received in the period between 6 November 2019, and the group's inaugural meeting on 29 January 2020.

Your letter also suggests that you selected the secretariat because you believed they would ensure the group followed the House's rules.

- 10 5. Please forward a copy of your contract with the secretariat for this group, and copies of any other documents which explain the services to be provided.
- a. It would be helpful to know how the value of those services is calculated.
- b. It would also be helpful for you to set out the financial management procedures the group has in place for money it raised in its name.
- 15 6. I was concerned to see that the group had a deficit of over £10,000 at the end of the last Parliament, which is being carried by the secretariat. Please forward a copy of the group's statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the last Parliament, which sets this out.
- 20 a. If not obvious from that statement, please could you explain how the deficit arose and when you first became aware of it.
- b. It would also be helpful to know what would have happened if the group had ceased to exist, and how the deficit will be made good.

Any other points you wish to make regarding my questions above would also be welcome at this time.

- 25 I would be grateful to have your email response to this letter as soon as possible and no later than 19 August 2020. 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.

5 August 2020

30 **4. Letter from Mr Peter Bone MP to the Commissioner, 11 August 2020**

Thank you for your letter of the 5th August 2020.

I quite understand that during these difficult times it takes longer than usual to deal with matters. I hope you and your staff are keeping safe and well. At the moment, I am forced to be at home as I am recovering from a major operation and know only too well how difficult it is to work remotely.

5 Turning to the questions you have asked. I would reply as follows.

1. In relation to the Jacksonville Jaguars reception, I was not the sponsor of the event, that was done by another member of the group. However, I was kept fully informed by the secretariat on matters relating to it. I was assured that all the necessary declarations relating to the event would be made. Including for the payment from the Jacksonville Jaguars.
10
2. The payment from the Jacksonville Jaguars was paid into the secretariat's bank account.
3. This was specifically intended to pay the secretariat for its services.
4.
 - a) The group received benefits in kind of £5,520.00 this includes VAT for the period 9th October 2018 - 5th September 2019. This was the cost incurred by the secretariat. These were shown in the APPG's accounts for that period.
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 - b) The single benefit in kind received during this period was the ongoing cost of the group's website, which was dormant during this period. This benefit in kind was of a negligible value.
20
 - c) The single benefit in kind received during this period was the ongoing cost of the group's website, which was dormant during this period. This benefit in kind was of a negligible value.
5. Please find enclosed a copy of the prospectus [name redacted] provided which formed the basis to appoint them as the secretariat in 2017. There was no formal written contract. However, when the secretariat was appointed at the AGM and reappointed at subsequent AGMs, the APPG decided what the requirements would be of the secretariat and how it would function for the forthcoming year.
25
30
 - a) The cost of the services provided by the secretariat were calculated in relation to the amount of time the secretariat spent on the APPG. These costs were agreed at each AGM.
 - b) There was very limited amount of financial activity within the group. All financial activity undertaken by the secretariat had to be done with mine
35

and the officers of the group's approval. As an example, any approach made by the secretariat to arrange sponsorship had to be first discussed with me and approved by me.

The group had only two sources of income.

- 5 1. The annual subscription for associate members. The group agreed that these should be £25, £50, £100 and £500 depending on the type of associate member. At the AGM in 2020, the group ceased this form of income.
2. The Jacksonville Jaguars reception donation, which was to cover the cost of the event.
- 10 The group would only seek to raise money in its name with the express permission and approval of the officers of the group. This has always been the case since I have been chairman and the secretariat understands this principle. In addition, efforts have been made to raise sponsorship for the group which so far have not been successful.
- 15 6. Please find enclosed a copy of the accounts to the 5th September 2019 these account show there were no assets or liabilities. There was a contingent liability of £10,481.50 but this only becomes a liability if the APPG receives sponsorship. If the APPG doesn't receive any sponsorship, then this amount does not become a liability. Since the 5th September 2019 the APPG has
- 20 incurred no liabilities or raised any assets. The contingent liability has only increase by a negligible amount.
- a) The deficit arose because of work undertaken by the secretariat, which the group did not have funds to cover. This was in line with the agreement with the secretariat when originally appointed. They had agreed at their
- 25 own risk to carry out work for the APPG on the understanding that this would be recouped from any sponsorship they arranged. Therefore, from the outset of the agreement with the secretariat there was likely to be an initial deficit. In September 2018, I spoke to the secretariat and asked them whether they wished to continue in the role as we had not arranged
- 30 any sponsorship. They wished to continue to be the secretariat on the basis that if they raised sponsorship in the future their costs would be reimbursed. If no sponsorship was arranged, then those costs would be written off by the secretariat.
- b) The secretariat would write off the debt as per the APPG agreement with
- 35 them.

I hope this information is helpful, but please do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything else you require.

11 August 2020

5. Letter from the Commissioner to the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests, 9 September 2020

I would like to ask for your advice on an investigation I am conducting into the APPG for American Football, the Chair for this group is Mr Peter Bone MP. As you are
5 aware, I was notified by your office that Mr Bone had contacted you about the late registration of a financial benefit of £13,532.54, received by the Group from the Jacksonville Jaguars on 22 May 2019.

I enclose a copy of my most recent letter to Mr Bone, dated 5 August 2020, as well as his reply dated 11 August 2020.

10 It would be helpful to receive your advice on this matter and specifically the answers provided by Mr Bone in his most recent letter.

It would be very helpful to have your reply as soon as possible.

9 September 2020

15 6. Letter from the Registrar for Members' Financial Interests to the Commissioner, 15 September 2020.

APPG for American Football

1. Thank you for your letter dated 9 September, in which you ask for my comments on the information you forwarded.

20 2. I have read the exchanges of correspondence and consulted this group's website as well as the Registers.

Money owed to the Secretariat

25 3. I am surprised to see that this APPG has a contingent liability. I would always advise APPGs against such arrangements. It is well known that APPGs are impermanent and can cease with very little notice, for example when a General Election is called, when officers resign or when (as in the spring of 2020) it is not possible to hold the necessary formal meetings. Secretariats can also be changed. Because of the informal nature of APPGs, an individual officer could become liable for any money due.

30 4. Mr Bone's letter suggests that this liability is documented. It would be helpful to know the terms agreed, as I will need to consider whether it requires notifying to the Electoral Commission. Unless I am mistaken, it seems that the secretariat costs noted as a donation in the Registers appear as a contingent liability in the accounts.

Summary

5. It is agreed that this APPG has broken the rules in failing to register the money for the Jacksonville Jaguars reception within the 28 days required.

5 6. In my view the APPG also broke the rules when it did not publish all the required information on its website. It should have published income and expenditure statements for each reporting year when these were required, and details of all past meetings together with their minutes and a full current membership list (NB I am not certain whether the one shown when your inquiry started was complete.) There should have been a disclaimer clearly visible on the website, and it should have borne the group's correct title.

10 7. I hope this is helpful. As explained above, I would be grateful to receive details of the contingent liability, so that I can consider whether the Electoral Commission needs to be informed.

Please let me know if you need anything else.

15 September 2020

15 **7. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Peter Bone MP, 24 September 2020.**

20 Thank you for your letter of 11 August 2020, and the information it provided. I hope that you have recovered well after your recent surgery. In my letter of 24 June 2020, I explained as part of my investigation I may seek the advice of the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests. I wrote to the Registrar on 9 September, and I enclose a copy of her response, dated 15 September 2020, for your information.

It would be helpful to have your comments regarding her advice, and particularly on the matters she identifies in paragraphs 3 and 4, under the sub heading of **Money Owed to the Secretariat**.

25 The Registrar also highlighted her concerns, regarding the information available on the Group's website at the start of my investigation. In your letter of 24 June 2020, you told me you had instructed the secretariat to conduct a full review regarding the rules on APPGs. You said, "...the Secretariat has confirmed the Group's website has been updated...". You also explained, "I have final approval of any content that is updated on the website".

30 The **Guide to the Rules on All-Party Parliamentary Groups** states;

32. 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.

- Please could you provide details on the steps you have in place, or will put in place, to maintain oversight of any future content due to be published on the Group's website?

5 Any other comments you would like to add regarding the Registrar's advice would also be welcome.

I am due to take some time away from the office and would be grateful to have your email response by 5 October 2020. In the meantime, our correspondence remains protected by parliamentary privilege and I must ask that you continue to maintain the strict confidentiality of the inquiry.

10 *24 September 2020*

8. Letter from Mr Peter Bone MP to the Commissioner, 1 October 2020

15 Thank you for your letter of the 24th September 2020 and your best wishes regarding my surgery. I am pleased to say the surgery has gone well and I am hopefully on the way to a full recovery. Please also pass on my thanks to [name redacted], Registrar of Members' Financial Interests for her views on the current matter.

20 First, may I advise you on a significant event that has happened in the last week. On the 28th September 2020, [name redacted] resigned as the secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for American Football. Please find attached a copy of the email from [name redacted].

I am also able to confirm that the website, twitter account and bank account have all been closed down.

In addition, [name redacted] have made it clear in their email that the APPG does not owe them any money.

25 Turning to the specific questions you asked me in your letter.

In relation to paragraph 3 & 4 of the letter from the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests, it is clear from [name redacted] email that the group does not owe any money to the Secretariat.

30 In relation to the group's website, as this has now been shut down your question appears to be now redundant.

As the Secretariat has now resigned, the running of the APPG will be done from my office. The group will revert to its previous model of operation. It will not have a twitter account or website, there will be no financial expenditure or financial

receipts. The group will concentrate on meetings within Parliament with Parliamentarians.

5 However, I would appreciate any advice you might be able to give my office as to how the group should be run to ensure we comply with all Parliamentary regulations. My Senior Parliamentary Researcher, [name redacted], will be the contact in my office for the APPG. [Details redacted]

I hope this is all the information you require, but please do not hesitate to contact me should you require anything else

1 October 2020

10 **Enclosure: Email from the Secretariat for the APPG American Football to Mr Peter Bone MP, 14:22 28 September 2020**

I hope you are keeping well, and the times in which we find ourselves are not keeping you from your constituents or Parliamentary responsibilities.

15 I write to tend [name redacted] resignation as Secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for American Football. There is a lot the Group can do to support American Football in the UK and it is unfortunate that circumstances prevented the Group from doing so.

20 I am writing-off any claim [name redacted], I, or anyone associated with [name redacted] has against the Group, you, or other officers of the Group. I also want to make clear that I entered our supporting the Group knowing the operational matters it required, the cost associated with them, and that there was no guarantee the Group could cover our costs.

25 There remains £700.24 in the Group's bank account, which was accounted for in the last financial statement. Other assets are the Group's domain name and twitter account. I would be grateful if you could let me know what arrangements you want me to make and I will action as quickly as possible.

I will send all the minutes and papers to you for your records, so you have those available as needed.

It has been a pleasure working with you and the team in your office.

30 *28 September 2020*

10. Letter from the Commissioner to the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests, 12 October 2020

5 Thank you for your recent advice, given in connection to my investigation into the APPG for American Football, chaired by Mr Peter Bone MP. After sharing your advice with the Member, he has written to inform me of the secretariat's resignation from this group. I have attached a copy of his letter, dated 1 October 2020, for your information.

10 I would like to invite your comments on the information in Mr Bone's letter, and it would be helpful to know what advice you would routinely give to a group if a secretariat resigns from their role. I would also like to know whether there are any official steps the group, or the secretariat, are required to take, as a result of such a change taking place during the reporting year.

15 Finally, in your advice you indicated your surprise that this APPG had a contingent liability, and you said you would need to consider "*...whether it requires notifying to the Electoral Commission*". I would like to ask whether you have had any further thoughts on this matter, and whether this recent development has any bearing on this matter?

It would be very helpful to have your reply by 23 October 2020.

12 October 2020

20 11. Letter from the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to Mr Peter Bone MP, 12 October 2020

25 Thank you for your letter to the Commissioner of 1 October 2020. I am writing to let you know that the Commissioner has decided to seek some additional advice from the Registrar, [name redacted]. She has written to [name redacted] today, and will share with you [name redacted] response, before deciding how to conclude her investigation.

12 October 2020

12. Email from the Registrar of Members' Financial Interests to the Commissioner, 27 October 2020

30 Thank you for your letter of 12 October. I apologise for the delay in replying.

Resignation of a Secretariat

You ask what actions we would expect if an APPG secretariat resigned. We have published no information on this, so what follows is our best advice.

First, the Chair should notify the Assistant Registrar, so that the group's register entry can be updated. I believe we have already amended the American Football Group's draft Register entry, and it will appear in the amended form in the next published edition.

- 5 Mr Bone has told you that the secretariat was not paid for its services, and the group owes it no money, so there is no settling up needed.

The other actions we would recommend are as follows:

- 10 **Personal data held.** In accordance with good data protection practice (see advice note 5⁵) the secretariat should return to the Chair, under secure conditions, all personal data held on behalf of the group, which may include minutes, correspondence, mailing and membership lists (past and present), information from surveys, cookies etc. It should delete any copies.

- 15 **Financial matters.** If the group had its own bank account to which the secretariat had access, Mr Bone should inform the relevant bank of the change of signatories and also change any passcodes. If the group did not have its own bank account, Mr Bone will need to establish one in order to hold the money it has, and then to arrange handover of the funds. I understand that setting up a new bank account can take some time.

- 20 If the secretariat has been involved in managing the group's assets, we would normally advise asking for a list of assets and liabilities at the time of the secretariat's departure. From the information [name redacted] has provided, it seems that this group's assets are limited to the money in the bank, plus the domain name and Twitter account.

Records

- 25 If the secretariat holds any of the Group's official records such as past publications and financial data, it should return these to Mr Bone, along with the minutes and membership lists which are also official records (see above).

Websites etc

- 30 Assuming that the secretariat administered the Group's website, Twitter account etc, it should cease to do so and should hand over full details and passcodes to the Chair. (Mr Bone will need to decide whether to keep the domain name, which may require payment.) And the secretariat should remove from its own website any mention of its role with the APPG. (I'm afraid not all secretariats remember to do this.)

⁵ <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/pcfs/all-party-groups/advice-notes/advice-note-5.pdf>

Contingent liability

If Mr Bone had a personal liability arising from his APPG role, this would need to be registered. From the information you have sent me this does not appear to be the case, so I do not believe any action is needed.

5 **Compliance with the rules.**

The Registry team offers regular online workshops on how to support an APPG. I have asked for [name redacted] to be informed of the next date.

Please let me know if you need anything else.

27 October 2020

10 **13. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Peter Bone MP, 16 November 2020**

Thank you for your letter of 1 October 2020, and the enclosed letter from the APPG's secretariat. The additional information is helpful. My office wrote to you on 12 October 2020, to explain I would seek further advice from the Registrar regarding the developments with the group's secretariat. I have now received that advice and
15 attach it for your information.

I have considered very carefully all our correspondence and the available evidence shared with my office, and I believe I now have sufficient information to make a decision.

My decision

20 While I am satisfied there was no deliberate attempt to mislead, I find that the APPG for American Football acted in breach of paragraph 17 of the *Rules on All Party Parliamentary Groups*.

As you will know, as well as investigating a possible breach to paragraph 17 of the rules, I also considered whether the Group had breached paragraphs 21, 24 and 28.
25 I will address each of the rules, and my decision, in turn.

Paragraph 17 (Register entry)

By failing to register within 28 days of receipt a financial benefit of £13,532.54 received from the Jacksonville Jaguars on 22 May 2019, I find the group was in breach of paragraph 17 of the rules for APPGs.

Paragraph 21 (Maintaining transparency)

Prior to my investigation, the APPG American Football's website did not meet all the requirements set out in paragraph 21 of the rules. The Group was not named consistently on its website and social media feeds, and the official Register of APPGs.
5 This was a breach of paragraph 21(a) of the rules.

My investigation also revealed the group had not consistently published the dates and minutes of formal meetings on its website. These omissions were breaches of paragraph 21(c) ii and iii) of the rules.

These inconsistencies were corrected during my investigation.

10 Paragraph 24 (Social Media)

The rules for APPGs also make it clear that a group's website and social media feed must carry a disclaimer setting out the informal nature of APPGs. When I started my investigation neither the website nor social media feeds for the group included the required wording. This was in breach of paragraph 24 of the APPG rules.

15 Paragraph 28 (Financial records)

APPGs in receipt of over £12,500 from outside Parliament, in money or in kind, are required to complete an income and expenditure statement, which should then be approved at its AGM or another General Meeting. This statement should also be published on its website within 28 days of its approval. Failure to publish an income and expenditure statement on the Group's website led to a breach of paragraph 28
20 of the rules.

Recommendations from the Registrar

As you can see from the enclosure, the Registrar has recommended action to put the APPG on a firmer administrative footing for the future. In summary these are;

- 25 • Contacting the Assistant Registrar to update the entry for the APPG, which I believe you have done.
- Ensure the former secretariat returns to you (under secure conditions) all personal data held on behalf of the group, which may include minutes, correspondence, mailing and membership lists (past and present),
30 information from surveys, cookies etc. The former secretariat should also be required to delete any copies.
- [Your letter of 1 October informed me that the Groups bank account had been closed]. If the group does not have its own bank account the Chair will need

to establish one in order to hold the money it has, and then arrange handover of the funds.

- 5 • If the secretariat has been involved in managing the group's assets, it is advised to ask for a list of assets and liabilities dated from the time of the secretariat's departure.
- Any past publications or financial data should be returned to the Chair, along with the minutes and membership lists, which are official records.
- 10 • If the secretariat administered the Group's social media accounts, it should hand over full details and passcodes to the Chair. The secretariat should also remove from its own website any mention of its role with the APPG.
- Arrange an online workshop on how to support an APPG for your staff member, [name redacted].

Conclusion

15 My investigation has identified breaches of four paragraphs of the rules for APPGs. Although these breaches are at the less serious end of the spectrum, they should not have happened. As chair of the APPG for American Football you are responsible for ensuring the group complies with the rules.⁶ However, I appreciate the fact that in March this year you contacted the Assistant Registrar as soon as you became aware there had been an error in the group's registration.

20 Standing Order No 150 makes provision for me to conclude an inquiry without making a referral to the Committee on Standards in certain circumstances, and I am satisfied that that would be an appropriate outcome on this occasion.

25 In order for me to implement the rectification procedure, it would be necessary for you to accept that the group was in breach of the *Guide to the Rules on APPGs* and to apologise on the group's behalf. You would also need to state clearly whether you have implemented the steps recommended by the Registrar and to describe any further action which you will take to ensure the APPG adheres to the rules in future.

30 If you agree to this proposal, I would publish the enclosed written evidence pack on my webpages, here: <https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/complaints-and-investigations/allegations-the-commissioner-has-rectified/> and I would report the outcome to the Committee on Standards in due course.

⁶ <https://www.parliament.uk/globalassets/documents/pcfs/all-party-groups/guide-to-the-rules-on-appgs.pdf>

I would be grateful if you would let me know by **23 November 2020**, whether you are content to proceed as outlined above. It would be helpful if you would, at the same time, say whether you are satisfied with the factual accuracy of the enclosed material. Please also let me know if you wish me to consider any further redactions.

- 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.

16 November 2020

14. Letter from Mr Peter Bone MP to the Commissioner, 19 November 2020

10 Thank you for your letter of the 16th November 2020 and for agreeing to resolve this matter through the rectification procedure.

On behalf of the APPG for American Football, I accept that the group was in breach of the guide to the rules of APPGs. I unreservedly apologise to you on behalf of the group.

15 I can confirm that the group has implemented the steps recommended by the Registrar. In particular

1. We have contacted the Assistant Registrar with the revised entry of the APPG. This was acknowledged on the 5th October 2020.
2. The former secretariat has returned all personal data on behalf of the group. Which was done on the 28th September 2020. The former secretariat has confirmed they have deleted any copies.
3. The APPG's bank account was closed on the 28th September 2020 and the balance at that time was nil. The group will establish a new bank account if it is necessary to do so⁷.
4. There are no assets or liabilities of the APPG at today's date.
- 25 5. All past publications and financial data has been returned to the APPG along with the minutes and membership list by the former secretariat on the 5th October 2020.
- 30 6. The social media account and website were closed on the 28th September 2020. The former secretariat confirms that they have removed from their website any mention of its role with the APPG.

⁷ £700.24 owed to the secretariat paid to them prior to the bank account being closed.

7. An online workshop on how to support an APPG has been applied to on the 17th November 2020.

It is my intention in the future that the APPG will liaise regularly with the relevant authorities to ensure that the APPG adheres to the rules.

- 5 May I also apologise for causing you and your office so much work in relation to this matter. I know this has been particularly difficult due to the Covid crisis.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

19 November 2020