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Summary

5 The inquiry concerned an allegation that the arrangements for a meeting held on 29 November 2017 had not been in keeping with the rules of the House and had, therefore, put the Member who had made the room booking in breach of paragraph 15 of the Code of Conduct.

I found that there had been a breach of the rule requiring all invitations, circulars and notices connected the event to be issued in the name of the Member. The decision not to follow some of the advice (as opposed to the rules) on managing meetings exacerbated the impact of that breach.

10 I did not find a breach of paragraph 16 of the Code of Conduct.

The breach of the Code of Conduct was at the least serious end of the spectrum. The Member apologised and identified action to avoid a recurrence of the breach of the rules.

15 I concluded the inquiry using the rectification procedure available to me through Standing Order No 150.

Mr Tommy Sheppard MP: Resolution letter

Letter from the Commissioner to Mr David Collier, 21 March 2018

My predecessor, Kathryn Hudson, wrote to you on 11 December to say that she was beginning an inquiry into whether the arrangements for a meeting held on
5 29 November 2017 had led to a breach of paragraph 15 of the Code of Conduct by Mr Tommy Sheppard MP. Mrs Hudson drew to your attention certain exclusions from the Commissioner's remit, one of which she considered relevant to the complaint described in your letter of 4 December 2017. She said that the
10 Commissioner may not generally investigate complaints about the expression of an MP's views and opinions, and that this was relevant because "*broadly speaking, decisions on whom to invite to, and exclude from, a meeting are manifestations of the views and opinions of the individual(s) making such decisions.*" Mrs Hudson said that, if it became relevant, should would consider whether Mr Sheppard had breached paragraph 16 of the Code.

15 Mrs Hudson's term of office expired on 31 December 2017 and I took up post as Commissioner on 1 January 2018. I have now completed the work on the inquiry and am writing to inform you of the outcome. My decisions and the reasons for them are explained in my letter of 2 February to Mr Sheppard (item 11 in the enclosed evidence pack.)

20 As you can see, I found that two emails sent by Europol Forum were not issued in Mr Sheppard's name and did not make clear Mr Sheppard's role as the host of the event. That was a breach of the rules for the use of House of Commons' facilities and so put Mr Sheppard in breach of paragraph 15 of the Code of Conduct. Additionally, Mr Sheppard told me that that Europol Forum decided who would be "un-invited"
25 from the event when the meeting was moved to a smaller room by the House authorities. This contributed to an impression that the event was owned by Europol Forum rather than by Mr Sheppard.

The meeting was initially advertised as "public". Although not against the rules of the House, this was contrary to the advice given to Members. Advertising the
30 meeting as public and not making clear from the outset that invitations might be withdrawn once issued gave a misleading impression of an entitlement to attend once registered for the meeting. That misleading impression had the potential to damage to the reputation of the House of Commons as a whole. However, having considered the matter very carefully, I was not satisfied that significant damage, if any, has been
35 caused to the reputation and integrity of the House through Mr Sheppard's actions.

I know that you were concerned that those who had their invitations to the meeting withdrawn had been selected through the application of a discriminatory criterion. I have seen the lists of those whose invitations were confirmed and of those whose invitations were withdrawn. It is not appropriate nor necessary to reproduce those
40 lists here and to disclose personal data about third parties. I have seen no evidence

to suggest that the individuals whose invitations were rescinded were selected because they were Jewish or because they had "Jewish-sounding" names.

5 I am not surprised that you found it odd that, having had your own invitation withdrawn, you were later able to obtain a ticket under a different name. In answering the allegation, Mr Sheppard has said that by then it was clear that not all those invited would attend and that your request was agreed because you were believed to be a representative of an organisation involved in the event. The process of reducing the number of invitees could have been handled better and more thought should have been given to releasing tickets to those who had been 10 "un-invited" when it became clear that that not all those whose invitation had been confirmed would attend. However, the weaknesses in the process did not provide evidence of discrimination, or of any other action which would have put Mr Sheppard in breach of paragraph 16 of the Code of Conduct.

15 In summary, I have found Mr Sheppard acted in breach of paragraph 15 of the Code of Conduct because not all the "*invitations, notices and circulars*" to do with the meeting were "*issued in the name of the Member making the room booking*". The decision not to follow some of the advice (as opposed to the rules) on managing meetings exacerbated the impact of that breach. Nonetheless, the breach of the Code was at the least serious end of the spectrum. Mr Sheppard has accepted my finding 20 and apologised for his breach of the paragraph 15 of the Code of Conduct. He had already identified ways in which he might avoid a recurrence of the problems I identified and has accepted my recommendation for additional action he might take.

25 I consider all of that to be an appropriate outcome and I have, therefore, concluded this matter under the rectification procedure available to me through Standing Order No 150. This brings the matter to a close.

21 March 2018

Written evidence

1. Letter from Mr David Collier to the Commissioner, 4 December 2017

5 I registered to attend a meeting in Committee Room 9 of the House of Commons at 17.30 on 29 November. On 27 November, early a.m., I received an email that informed me my place had been cancelled due to a room change (cancellation email attachment 1). I understand the new room allocated was Committee Room 6, which holds about 25 people less (room schedule email attachment 2).¹

10 The meeting had been a pro-Palestinian meeting that drew familiar anti-Israel activists. I had intended to go as part of my research. I am investigating anti-Zionism and antisemitism, run a blog from [redacted] and hold a press card from the National Union of Journalists.

15 It soon became apparent that many of the people I knew had also been cancelled. Some who intended to ask questions, others out of interest. Some are regular attendees at meetings, others had never been to meetings before. Many of these people had Jewish sounding names.

I had considered a 'hit-list', perhaps to ward off potential troublemakers, except I am freelance journalist who only ever observes in quiet, and some of those de-registered have never been to any events before. This cannot be used as an excuse to blanket cancel everyone who is Jewish.

20 There was clearly a disproportionate cancellation on the side of Jewish attendees. I searched Facebook, using an anti-Israel profile I use for research, and there were no mentions of any cancellations at all.

25 To test the theory, I submitted a dummy application for a ticket - one hour after I had received the 'overbooking' email, and using a non-Jewish sounding name. Astonishingly, this application was accepted, and a confirmation was received (confirmation email attachment 3). When I followed up with a similar request from my own account - this email request was ignored.

30 I urge you to consider this matter. I should not be barred from events at the HOC because of discrimination of any sort, and with a clearly disproportionate amount of Jewish people de-registered who have never been to an event before, the discrimination that seems to have been at play here is based on racial rather than political issues.

¹ Attachments not reproduced

What makes this worse, is that that several of those who had originally been allocated tickets did turn up and were refused entry - even though there were (reportedly) almost a dozen empty seats inside.

5 If deselection fell disproportionately/exclusively on those with Jewish-sounding names, this was done in the name of the MP who oversaw the event (Tommy Sheppard MP) and would clearly represent "damage to the reputation and integrity of the House of Commons."

4 December 2017

Enclosure 1: Email from Europol Forum

10 Dear Subscriber

We regret that due to a change in venue which accommodates a smaller number than the original one, we are no longer able to offer you a place at the event.

Please knowledge (sic) that only those who receive a confirmation email from us will be allowed entry.

15 Please accept our apologies and hope to see you in our future events.

Enclosure 3: Email from Europol Forum

Subject line: Registration confirmed - #PalestineDay: How to end 70 years of injustice?

Dear all

20 Thank you for registering for our next seminar entitled: "the UN Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People: How to end 70 years of injustice?" We look forward to we [sic] at The Palace of Westminster - UK Parliament, Committee Room 6.

25 The seminar starts at 5.30pm until 7.30pm. Please come early to The Palace of Westminster to allow at least 20 minutes to pass through security and get to your seat in [text missing].

Tickets and confirmed registrations will be checked at the entrance. Please do not live-stream the seminar as this is a parliamentary procedure.

If you have any queries, please contact by email at events@europolforum.org.uk.

We look forward to seeing you tomorrow.

2. Letter from Mr Tommy Sheppard MP to another Member, copied to the Commissioner, 7 December 2017

Thank you for your letter.² I hosted the seminar you mention on behalf of Europal, an organisation I know and have worked with in the past, at the House of Commons
5 on Wednesday 29 November. My office initially booked Committee Room 9 for the event which was intended to mark the United Nations day of solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The invitations to attend were issued by Europal and, as with most events of this kind, they would have encouraged their supporters and members to attend. I know
10 they also offered tickets to the public through Eventbrite, as they have a policy of allowing their events to be open to the public without restriction. I understand that tickets were issued on a first come, first served basis. The event was soon fully subscribed at 90.

On 22 November we were informed by the House authorities that they would have
15 to move the booking to Committee Room 6 with a smaller capacity of 65 - this was because they needed Room 9 for a meeting of the 5th Delegated Legislation Committee and, as you know, Committee meetings take precedence over other bookings. With 90 tickets allocated numbers had to be reduced and some tickets had to be withdrawn. I know that this will have disappointed some people who were not
20 able to attend. I understand that Europal wrote to them to apologise for this, explaining why and saying that they hoped they would come to future events.

You ask whether those who had their invitations rescinded were selected on the basis of having a "Jewish-sounding" name. I have checked with Europal and they completely refute this allegation and are alarmed that anyone would suggest it. For
25 avoidance of doubt let me clear that I would seek to bar anyone attending a public meeting because they were Jewish or had a "Jewish-sounding" name, and I would never knowingly associate with any person or organisation which did.

I will ask the organisation if they still have a list of those who did attend the meeting but I do not know whether that information has been kept. I hope this clarifies the
30 mater but I'd be happy to discuss further.

7 December 2017

3. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Tommy Sheppard MP, 11 December 2017

Thank you for sending me a copy of your letter of 7 December to [name redacted]
35 MP. The information you have provided is helpful. Mr Blackman had copied his letter of 4 December to me but he had not asked specifically that I begin an inquiry. However, I have also received a complaint about the arrangements for the meeting

² Copy of this letter not reproduced

from Mr David Collier. I enclose a copy of Mr Collier's letter for your information. It is in connection with his letter that I am writing to you today.

Inquiry

5 In light of the information Mr Collier has provided, I have decided to begin an inquiry. The scope of the inquiry will be, in essence, to establish whether you acted in breach of paragraph 15 of the House of Commons' Code of Conduct for Members, as a result of the arrangements made for the meeting held in Committee Room 6 on 29 November 2017.

The relevant rules and guidance

10 Paragraph 15 of the Code of Conduct (copy of Code enclosed) says that:

15 *"Members are personally responsible and accountable for ensuring that their use of any expenses, allowances, facilities and services provided from the public purse is in accordance with the rules laid down on these matters. Members shall ensure that their use of public resources is always in support of their parliamentary duties. It should not confer any undue personal or financial benefit on themselves or anyone else, or confer undue advantage on a political organisation.*

20 A leaflet summarising the rules and more general guidance on the use of *Committee, conference, meeting and interview rooms*³ is available on the parliamentary intranet. A hard copy of that leaflet is enclosed. In the section headed "General Rules", under the sub-heading "Invitations and publicity" (pages 13 & 14), it says

"All invitations, notices and circulars to do with the meeting must be issued in the name of the Member making the room booking and not that of any third party involved.

25 *Members are not to advertise meetings as "public" because it can lead to overcrowding if more people turn up than can be accommodated in the room. This is a security risk and contravenes fire regulations. A set number of invitations should be issued, in line with the room's capacity.*

30 *Any significant media interest in a meeting must be notified in writing to the Serjeant at Arms Access Team...."*

Under the sub-heading Member's Code of Conduct, the leaflet says:

³ <https://intranet.parliament.uk/Documents/access-buildings/offices-rooms/hoc-meeting-room-guide-feb2017.pdf>

5 *“The Commissioner for Parliamentary Standards advises that when booking a meeting room for a function, Members should ensure that any relevant interests should be declared at the point of booking with the Events Team [details redacted], if the booking is on behalf of an outside organisation or individual other than the Member’s political party.*

Members who has such an interest must also indicate this on the invitations to their event.”

10 Although the inquiry will be focused on paragraph 15 of the Code of Conduct, I should also draw to your attention now paragraph 16 of the Code, as this may also be relevant. This says:

“Members shall never undertake any action which would cause significant damage to the reputation of the House of Commons as a whole, or of its Members generally.”

15 Next steps

20 I would welcome your comments on the allegation that you have acted in breach of the rules concerning the use of rooms on the parliamentary estate, by arranging a meeting using House of Commons’ facilities, which was advertised as “open to the public”, for which tickets were made available by a third party through an on-line booking service, and in breach of the rule which requires that all invitations, notices and circulars to do with the meeting are published in the name of the Member making the room booking.

In addition to your response to the over-arching allegation, it would be helpful to have the following information:

- 25 • the background which led to the booking of the room for the meeting on 29 November 2017
- when, where and by whom the meeting was publicised
- your involvement, if any, in the publicity for this event, including whether or not you or your office approved the text used
- 30 • your relationship with Europal and the status of that organisation
- details of the information given to Europal about the status of the meeting (I note that the email confirming registration for the event described it as “a parliamentary procedure”

- whether you, or your staff, sought the advice of the House authorities before or when booking the Committee room
- 5 • whether any consideration was given to the need or otherwise to notify the Serjeant at Arms Access team, and if so the outcome of that consideration
- whether you consider the meeting on 29 November was in accordance with the rules and, if so, the basis for that belief
- 10 • copies of the text of all invitations to any similar events you have hosted in rooms on the parliamentary estate since May 2015, together with details of how the tickets have been made available for each of those events.

I note that you are already seeking from “the organisation” a list of those who attended the meeting on 29 November. Please provide a copy of that list when received, and please also obtain and send to me a list of all those who had invitations to that meeting withdrawn, with a clear statement of the basis on which those individuals were selected.

Important Information

I enclose a copy of the *Commissioner’s Information Note*,⁴ which sets out the procedure for inquiries. I am writing to Mr Collier to let him know that I have decided to begin an inquiry into this matter. I will explain to him that I am focusing on paragraph 15 of the Code, rather than on the precise terms of his complaint.

I will shortly update my parliamentary web pages to show the fact that I am conducting an inquiry into an allegation into an alleged breach of paragraph 15 of the Code of Conduct. My office will not comment further on any aspect of the inquiry to third parties. (They will, however, confirm that I have begun an inquiry if asked before this information is posted on my webpages and they will answer factual questions about the processes I follow and the standards system more generally.)

As you will be aware, my inquiries are conducted in private. This letter and any subsequent correspondence between you and the Commissioner in connection with this inquiry is protected by parliamentary privilege until such time as a final report is published. (Any such report will include all the relevant evidence, including the correspondence.) I would, therefore, ask that you respect that confidentiality. (I have made a similar request of Mr Collier.)

As a matter of courtesy, I should say now that I may make enquiries of the relevant House authorities in due course. If I do so, I will share that correspondence with

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

you. 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.

5 Action

As you are aware, my term of office ends at the end of this month. I would appreciate your help and co-operation, and welcome your comments on the allegation, together with any evidence you feel may assist my investigation, as soon as possible and no later than 31 December 2017. My successor, Kathryn Stone will no doubt contact you once she has had an opportunity to consider your responses to the questions above.

11 December 2017

4. Letter from Mr Tommy Sheppard MP to the Commissioner, 20 December 2017

15 Thank you for your letter of 11 December informing me of a complaint made by a Mr David Collier regarding a meeting I hosted at the House of Commons on 4 December. I shall reply in detail to the points you raise but I would first make a couple of preliminary points.

20 Mr Collier suggests that he is a neutral researcher and journalist. A cursory look at his blog would indicate he is nothing of the kind. I believe his reports of events are selective, distorted and extremely partisan and he is clearly trying to sully my name and reputation. A recent post on his blog bears the title "*Tommy Sheppard's anti-Jewish Marxist circus comes to Westminster*". I believe and regret that he is using the complaints procedure to this end.

25 About Europol Forum

I first developed a relationship with Europol Forum when I accepted an invitation to participate in a parliamentary delegation to Jordan which they were organising in January 2016. The purpose of the delegation was to develop a closer understanding of the role Jordan plays in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly with regard to their custodianship of the Al Aqsa Mosque, and to understand their position with regard to the ongoing peace process in the region. I was impressed at the organisation's professionalism and the fact that they were able to facilitate a range of meetings with senior government ministers and officials including King Abdullah II.

35 I have asked the organisation to provide some information on their recent activities and I have attached this as appendix seven.⁵ More information is available on their

⁵ Not reproduced here as not relevant to my inquiry

website at europalforum.org and they say they would be more than happy to answer any queries you may have.

About the meeting on 29 November:

5 I was approached in September by Europol Forum to ask if I would host a meeting in the House of Commons to mark the UN Day of Solidarity with Palestine which takes place each year on 29 November. This year had something of a special significance as it was 70 years since the passing of UN Resolution 181 which first set out the objective of what has come to be known as the Two State Solution, and it is also the centenary of the Balfour declaration which has been the cause of heightened
10 discussion on these issues over the last 12 months.

I agreed to host the event and asked Europol Forum to undertake the administration for the event under the direction of my office. I explain the detail of this below.

As well as myself as chair, the speakers on the panel were to be [details redacted].

15 You ask me to confirm that the meeting was arranged in accordance with the rules and you cite paragraph 15 of the Code of Conduct as applicable. Paragraph 15 breaks into three parts and I will take them in reverse order. Firstly, the meeting did not "*confer any undue personal or financial benefit*" on me or "*confer undue advantage on a political organisation*". (Europol Forum is a non-party/cross-party organisation and works across the political spectrum). Secondly, the meeting was "in support of
20 my parliamentary duties" as an elected Member of Parliament with an interest in foreign affairs. Indeed, it was specifically in furtherance of the Resolution of Parliament in late 2014 to recognise the Palestinian state.

25 And, thirdly, I firmly believe the meeting was "*in accordance of the rules laid down on these matters*", particularly the guidance document "Committee Rooms, Conference, Meeting and Interview Rooms: Use of rooms for private meetings and events" issued in February 2017. Several parts of this document are relevant.

30 Firstly, this document states that notices must be issued in the name of the Member booking the room. This was indeed done and I attach a notice of the meeting (appendix one) which makes it clear that I am hosting the meeting. Please note that this is the last version of the Eventbrite notice and states that the meeting is private - initially it stated that the meeting was public but the presentation of my name and involvement was the same. It is quite common across the House for meetings of this kind to be organised in conjunction with a third party organisation who then undertake some of the administration related to the event but this is done at the
35 request and under the direction of the MP.

The guidance says that "Members are asked not to advertise meetings as public" and then goes on to explain why. It does not say that Members cannot or must not advertise meetings as public. In discussion with the organisation they requested that the meeting be open to the public as this is their usual practice and they make

the point that since the purpose of the meeting is to educate and inform then if they only invite people known to them that objective is compromised. As it happened when it became necessary to move the meeting to a smaller room the status of the meeting was changed to private in order to reduce capacity - I explain this in detail below.

The guidance states that "*Members should ensure that any relevant interest should be declared at the point of booking... if the booking is on behalf of an outside organisation*". It does however say that this is in conjunction with the booking of "*functions*" and that a "*declaration is not necessary when booking a room simply for a meeting or presentation*". In any event I have no financial or other interest in Europal and therefore it was not necessary to declare an interest at the time of booking. I would point out that this part of the guidance makes it clear that it is quite normal to host events on behalf of a third party.

With regard to paragraph 16 of the Code of Conduct I can see no way in which my actions in organising this meeting would have caused any, never mind "*significant damage to the reputation of the House of Commons....*" The meeting was to promote a United Nations event, it included a range of distinguished speakers and it was in furtherance of objectives - support for the rights and statehood of the Palestinian people - which are the policy of both the UK Government and the House of Commons itself. Mr Collier claims that people were discriminated against in terms of having an invitation to attend this meeting rescinded on the basis that they were Jewish or had "*Jewish sounding names*". Were this true it might well cause reputational damage to our Parliament, but it categorically is not true as I explain in detail below in answer to your points on this matter.

Turning now from the Code of Conduct to the specific points you raise about the meeting, let me respond to those I have not already covered above.

Publicity

There was no publicity to speak of for the meeting - no print or paid for advertising - merely the online listing on Eventbrite and on Europal's own site. This was arranged by Europal under my instruction.

You ask for details of the information given to Europal about the status of the meeting. As mentioned previously, I discussed and agreed with them that the meeting would be open to members of the public - and as I explain below this status had to be changed when we were required to move to a smaller room. The reference to 'parliamentary procedure' in the email confirmation referred to requesting that attendees do not undertake any recordings in the Committee Room.

There was no significant media interest in the event and no other reason to inform the Serjeant at Arms in advance. On the evening when it was thought there might be a disturbance from people who turned up without an invitation the police in the corridor did attend but no incidents took place.

You ask for copies of the text of all invitations to any similar events which I have hosted since May 2015. I cannot provide this information by 31 December but I attach details of two similar events (appendix two)⁶ which may be used for comparison. Please let me know if you do require me to furnish you with details of
5 all other meetings and I will get my staff to work on this. I presume your objective here is to see if there is anything unusual about the way the meeting on 29 November was organised and I can assure you that there was not.

Let me now turn to the details of how the tickets for the event were issued as this seems to be the nub of the matter with Mr Collier alleging that he (and others) have
10 been discriminated against because he is Jewish.

As I said earlier, I decided in conjunction with Europal to allow members of the general public to apply for tickets for this event. We chose to use Eventbrite for this purpose which is probably the best known of the online ticketing agencies - particularly for non-commercial events. The advantages of Eventbrite are that it is
15 free to both the event organiser and attendees and that it is familiar and well-known. The great disadvantage is that because tickets are issued free, and the ticket-holder has made little commitment to the event other than filling in a brief online form, the non-attendance rate from those issued with tickets is high. I have experienced this myself on many other occasions not related to Parliament. As a consequence, it is
20 usual practice to set the allocation of tickets much higher than the capacity of the room in order to allow for non-attendance of 30-50%. So, the allocation was initially set at 150 for Committee Room 9 which had a capacity of 90.

On 22 November my office were informed by the House authorities by telephone that they would have to move the booking to Committee Room 6 because they
25 needed Room 9 for a meeting of the 5th Delegated Legislation Committee and, as you know, Committee meetings take precedence over other bookings. The correspondence relating to the original booking and the room change are attached at appendix three.⁷ We informed Europal and explained to them that they would need to restrict the tickets to cope with the reduced capacity.

At this point 139 people had registered for the event - far more than could be accommodated in the smaller Committee Room 6. I attach at appendix four the full list of these people.⁸ I should make it clear that I have not told any of these people I am supplying you with their names. I know that all your inquiries are confidential but I do think some of these people might be concerned if their names were
35 subsequently to get into the public domain as a result of any report that you may or may not issue and I would ask that these names are not appended to any such report.

Committee Room 6 holds 65 and as that capacity has to include speakers, staff and some special guests we knew that around 45 other people could be accommodated.

⁶ Not reproduced here as the details of those events are not relevant to the inquiry

⁷ Emails between Mr Sheppard's Office, the House Authorities and Europal - not reproduced as the detail of those emails are not relevant to the inquiry

⁸ Not reproduced here - personal data not relevant to the inquiry

Allowing for non-attendance a revised ceiling of invitations was set at 70 tickets, in the expectation that 40-45 would turn up. At this stage, the setting on Eventbrite was changed to private. Europol selected people to whom revised invitations would be sent and in doing so they gave priority to people they recognised as having participated in similar events in the past or who were known to them as having a contribution to make to the debate.

These people then received a confirmation giving details of the room change. The list of these people is attached together with the names of speakers, staff and some special guests is attached at appendix five.⁹ The remaining people were written to explain that their invitation had been rescinded and explaining why. An apology was issued and they were told that they would be welcome at future Europol events. A list of these people which totals 73 names is attached at appendix six.¹⁰ Indeed, I understand that some of the people who were disappointed in the 29th meeting have subsequently been given tickets for the next Europol event on a similar subject on 23 January 2018.

An event like this will inevitably attract people who might define themselves as Palestinian activists or as pro-Israel activists. Some will be Jews, some Christian or Muslim, and many of no faith. There were Jewish and non-Jewish people at the meeting and I fully expect there would be Jewish and non-Jewish people who had their invitations rescinded.

There is absolutely no substance to the allegation that people were selected to attend on the basis of them being Jewish or having "Jewish sounding names". Indeed, I find the whole idea of "Jewish sounding names" to be ridiculous as someone's name gives no indication of a person's views or affiliations in this matter, there being many people with ostensibly Jewish names who are critics of Israel and supporters of Palestinian rights.

I consider this to be a malicious allegation designed to cause reputational damage to myself and to the wider cause of Palestinian human and political rights which I advocate. I have to say that the staff who had to make the choice about restricting the numbers and thereby disappointing a number of people who wanted to attend are hurt and offended by the suggestion that they would discriminate against people because they are Jewish.

On the evening itself, a handful of people turned up wanting to gain admission to the meeting even though they had been written to and told that this would no longer be possible. Two or three people pressed their case quite energetically and my stewards informed the reception desk that they were concerned. At this point police already in the Committee corridor attended and no incidents occurred with those protesting deciding to leave and the meeting taking place inside.

⁹ Not reproduced here - personal data not relevant to the inquiry

¹⁰ Not reproduced here - personal data not relevant to the inquiry

Undoubtedly the need to move rooms at fairly short notice has caused a situation in which a number of people have been disappointed by not being able to attend a meeting they had initially been told they could attend. With hindsight, had I known all along that the meeting would have been in a smaller Committee Room I would not have allowed tickets to be offered to the general public in the first place and would have made it an invitation only seminar.

I think it fair to say also that this experience has made me think again about using Eventbrite or similar online ticketing agencies for events of this kind. The Eventbrite website, rather than processing applications, actually issues confirmation of registration to the user and creates the untestable impression that someone has been given a ticket to the event. I feel if I am to organise events of this nature in the future, I will simply write to people inviting them to apply to me directly and I'm sure this would make things easier for the House authorities and all concerned.

I hope that I have answered all of the questions in your letter but please do let me know if you require any further information. I am also at your disposal to discuss the matter further at any time.

Wishing you compliments of the season and all good fortune in your future endeavours.

20 December 2017

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30

This event has ended.

PRIVATE SEMINAR
THE UN DAY OF SOLIDARITY WITH PALESTINIAN PEOPLE 2017
HOW TO END 70 YEARS OF INJUSTICE?
 by EuroPal Forum
 #PALESTINEDAY

NOV 29

PRIVATE SEMINAR on #PalestineDay: How to end 70 years of injustice?

by EuroPal Forum

Free

Sold Out

DETAILS

DESCRIPTION

Every year since 1977 the United Nations has observed the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November. EuroPal Forum invites you to a seminar on "the UN Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People: How to end 70 years of injustice?"

Hosted and Chaired by:

Tommy Sheppard SNP MP

Speakers include:

- Professor Manuel Hassassian, Palestinian Ambassador to the UK
- Hugh Lanning, Palestine Solidarity Campaign chairman
- Baroness Jenny Tonge
- Dr Ghada Karmi - Palestinian author and academic
- Zaher Birawi - EuroPal Forum chairman

Wednesday 29th November 2017 from 5.30pm at the Palace of Westminster

- This is a private seminar, to confirm your registration, please send us an email: events@europalforum.org.uk

DATE AND TIME

Wed 29 November 2017
17:30 - 19:30 GMT
Add to Calendar

LOCATION

Committee Room 6
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA
View Map

5. Letter from the Commissioner to the Director of Accommodation and Logistics Services, 28 December 2017

I would like to ask for your advice on a complaint I have received about Mr Tommy Sheppard MP, into which I have begun a formal inquiry. The complaint from Mr David Collier concerns a meeting Mr Sheppard hosted in one of the Committee Rooms.

The allegation I am investigating is that, as a result of the arrangements for that meeting, Mr Sheppard acted in breach of paragraph 15 of the Code of Conduct for Members. As you can see, I have referred Mr Sheppard to the leaflet available on the intranet which summarises the rules and general guidance on the use of *Committee, conference and meetings and interview rooms*.¹¹

I enclose the relevant correspondence for information. I would be grateful for the following information.

- Whether Mr Sheppard or anyone else involved in arranging the meeting on 29 November 2017 sought advice from your team about the arrangements for and/or the wording of the invitations to this meeting.
 - If not, what advice would you have given if your views had been sought?

In particular, it would be helpful to know:

- whether you consider the purpose of the meeting was one allowed for within the rules
- the advice you would offer Members
 - considering advertising a meeting as “public”
 - advertising meetings on Eventbrite or other on-line ticketing providers for meetings held on the parliamentary estate

I would be happy to receive any other comments you consider relevant in the context of the correspondence I enclose. In the meantime, I have written to Mr Sheppard, sharing a copy of this letter with him, and asking for further information about the allegation that at least one individual was able to obtain a ticket after the tickets of some attendees were rescinded. I do not think this information is relevant to the matters on which I am seeking your advice but please let me know if you would find it helpful to have Mr Sheppard’s answer on that point before you reply.

¹¹ <https://intranet.parliament.uk/Documents/access-buildings/offices-rooms/hoc-meeting-room-guide-feb2017.pdf>

Assuming that it is not necessary to wait, please respond to the new Commissioner, Kathryn Stone, by 15 January 2018.

Thank you for your assistance.

28 December 2017

5 **6. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Tommy Sheppard MP, 28 December 2017**

Thank you for your letter of 20 December 2017. The information you have provided is helpful.

10 I said at the outset that I might seek advice from the House authorities. In accordance with my usual practice when inquiring into allegations of misuse of House-provided resources, I have today written to the Director of Accommodation and Logistics Services, [name redacted], to seek her advice. I enclose a copy of that letter (minus enclosures, as you have seen them already) for information.

15 You will have an opportunity to comment on the Director's advice before any final decision is made on the allegation. As you can see, I have asked the Director to give her advice by 15 January 2018. In the meantime, in light of the information provided in your letter, it would be helpful if you would provide the new Commissioner, Kathryn Stone, with your observations on Mr Collier's evidence that, having had his ticket cancelled, his application for another ticket made in a different name was
20 successful.

28 December 2017

7. Letter from Mr Tommy Sheppard MP to the Commissioner, 12 January 2018

Might I start with welcoming you to your new position - I hope that you have a successful and rewarding tenure. May I also wish you a Happy New Year.

25 I am writing in response to Kathryn Hudson's letter of 28 December 2017 regarding the complaint against me by Mr David Collier. She asks me to comment on Mr Collier's "evidence" that having had his initial Eventbrite ticket cancelled, his email application for a ticket under another name was then successful. Please note that I
30 would have dealt with this matter in my original submission but Ms Hudson did not ask me about it in her letter of 11 December and indeed said she would tell Mr Collier that she would be "focusing on paragraph 15 of the Code rather than on the precise terms of his complaint".

35 As I explained previously a number of people were written to apologising that we would not now be able to offer them a ticket for the event for the reasons outlined in my letter of 20 December.

On the morning of 27 November - two days before the event - an email was received by Europol Forum requesting a ticket from a Mr Mark Edgeway. This was not immediately responded to. The following day Mr Edgeway sent a follow-up email clearly demonstrating that he was very keen on attending the event. We now know
5 from Mr Collier's website (screenshot attached)¹² that it was Mr Collier himself who had applied in the name of Mark Edgeway, although no-one could have known that at the time and the incoming request was taken at face value.

By then, the day before the event, it was clear that not everyone whose invitation had been confirmed would be able to attend and so it should have been possible to
10 accommodate one or two more people within the available capacity. As Mr Edgeway had identified himself as a representative of a local branch of the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign which was a partner organisation for the event (the chair of PSC, Hugh Lanning, was one of the speakers) it was decided to offer him a ticket.

The name Mark Edgeway was on the registration list, a copy of which you have, and
15 had David [Collier] attended and used the name he registered for entry we would have let him in as we trust that people are honest when they provide information and we would not have made further checks. Clearly, Mr Collier had no intention of turning up anyway and was simply trying to engineer a situation which would support his narrative of being discriminated against.

I must also repeat my concern about the accusation that there was discrimination
20 involved in selecting who would get a ticket for this event on the basis of applicants having "Jewish sounding names". This is nonsense. I have no idea whether most people would regard David Collier as a more or less "Jewish-sounding name" than Mark Edgeway - I doubt there's any discernible difference. And more to the point it
25 is spurious and wrong to draw any correlation between someone's name and their political position.

I hope this helps but I am happy to meet or provide further information if this will assist.

12 January 2018

30 **8. Letter from the Director of Accommodation and Logistics Services to the Commissioner, 23 January 2018**

Thank you for the letter dated 28 December 2017, from your predecessor, concerning a complaint from Mr David Collier regarding Tommy Sheppard MP's use
35 of stationery. I am sorry for the delay in my reply, but I was ill and away from the office last week.

I have made inquiries with colleagues in the Events Team and they have no record of advice being sought for the event held on 28 November 2017. If I had been asked

¹² Screenshot not reproduced here as not relevant to the alleged breach of the rules

to provide advice I would have referred to for guidance: The Committee Rooms, Conference, Meeting and Interview Rooms: use of rooms for private meetings and events document dated October 2016 which is available on the Parliamentary website [intranet] and a link is available [here].

5 The guidance states that:

Invitations and Publicity

All invitations, notices and circulars to do with the meeting must be issued in the name of the Member making the room booking and not that of any third party involved; and

10 *Members are asked not to advertise meetings as 'public' because it can lead to overcrowding if more people turn up that can be accommodated in the room. This is a security risk and contravenes fire regulations. A set number of invitations should be issued, in line with the room's capacity;*

15 Given that guidance I would have advised against advertising tickets using Eventbrite in the manner illustrated in (Appendix one) the correspondence would not have been in the spirit of the rules.

20 It is not immediately obvious that the event is a parliamentary meeting hosted by Mr Sheppard (appendix one). Mr Sheppard is mentioned as the chair and the host later in the text; but the banner advertising illustrate a private seminar on Palestine Day "by Europol Forum" and that is more obviously on display which could lead to confusion.

On the question of whether the purpose of the meeting was allowed within the rules; the rules state that meetings are permissible on the estate if they relate to:

25 *Matters in which the UK is, or may become involved on a political, economic or military level and relationships between the UK and any other country or countries;*

I would have advised that the meeting itself was within the current guidance.

23 January 2018

30 **9. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Tommy Sheppard MP, 24 January 2018**

I have now received [the Director's] reply to Kathryn Hudson's letter of 28 December 2017 and I enclose a copy for your information. You will see that [the Director] expresses some reservations about the advertising of the event on Eventbrite and, in particular, that it was not immediately obvious that the event was

a parliamentary meeting hosted by you. She specifically points to text which might lead to confusion.

5 If you have any comments you wish to make on [the Director's] advice before I reach a decision on the allegation, please let me have them as soon as possible, and no later than 8 February 2018.

24 January 2018

10. Letter from Mr Tommy Sheppard MP to the Commissioner, 2 February 2018

10 Thank you for your letter of 24 January and your invitation to comment on the observations made by [the Director] in relation to Mr Collier's complaint against me.

15 As I stated in my letter to your predecessor of 20 December my staff and I are cognisant of the guidance note on the booking of Committee Rooms to which [the Director] refers. We made the booking through the Events Team but other than the routine paperwork we did not seek any particular advice from them regarding this meeting. In fairness, certainly at the time of making the booking, we had no reason to suspect that this event was anything more than a run of the mill meeting, dozens of which are organised in Parliament every week.

[The Director] raises two specific points.

20 Firstly, that it should be made clear that the meeting was organised by myself and that invitations should be made in my name. As I said in my earlier letter I do believe that this was the case - it was quite clear I was the host of the meeting and I believe anyone attending would have been clear that they were there at my invitation. That I used a third party organisation (Europol Forum) to help with the administration of the event is not contrary to the guidance and is consistent with many other meetings
25 organised by many other Members in Parliament. Perhaps third party involvement should be prohibited but this is not the case at the moment.

30 Secondly, [the Director] points out that Members are asked not to advertise meetings as public. I understand this, and I did consider it, but I thought that on this occasion it was appropriate to open up some of the tickets to the public. I would point out again that the guidance uses the words "*asked not to*", it does not say "should not" or "must not". So, I think to conclude my actions are against the spirit of the rules is a harsh judgment. Again, perhaps the guidance should be changed to make it more definite in this regard and remove any ambiguity.

35 I have already said that I appreciate the inherent difficulties in using Eventbrite or similar platforms and this experience has led me to conclude that I will not do that again.

Finally, I would ask that you give some consideration to the wider context. I doubt Mr Collier cares much for whether the guidance document was followed in the administration of this meeting. His purpose in lodging this complaint is to evidence his accusation against me that I am anti-Semitic and have deliberately excluded people on the basis of them being Jewish. This is insulting, hurtful and a grave attack on my character and reputation. I would ask that you make it clear that there is no evidence to sustain this unfounded allegation.

2 February 2018

10 **11. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Tommy Sheppard MP, 19 February 2018**

Thank you for your letter of 2 February 2018. I am sorry it has taken a little longer than usual for me to reply.

I have considered very carefully the information collated over the course of this inquiry. I now have sufficient evidence to reach a conclusion.

15 Paragraph 15 of the Code - decision

The guidance leaflet on the use of Committee Rooms begins with the following rubric "*Rooms are available for Members and [certain other passholders] to book private meetings or functions related to their parliamentary duties or the work of parliament.*" On page 12 of that leaflet it says among other things, under the heading "Main booking conditions", "*The Member ... should make all reasonable efforts to check the credentials of any organisation or individual(s) invited onto the Estate.*"

In that context, I share [the Director's] reservations about whether some of the arrangements for the meeting on 29 November 2017 were fully in keeping with the spirit of the rules.

25 It was not clear at the outset to applicants that invitations might be withdrawn once issued and the meeting was, at least initially, advertised as "*public*". Those factors gave the impression of an entitlement to attend once registered for the meeting. The reference in the confirmation email to the meeting being a "*parliamentary procedure*" was inaccurate and may also have contributed to the impression of an entitlement to attend a public event on the parliamentary estate. An entitlement was not created. If it had, that could have been inconsistent with Members' responsibilities to ensure that all reasonable efforts are made to check the credentials of individuals invited onto the estate.

35 I share [the Director's] concern that, although you are named as the chair and host on the invitation, the prominence of the banner and the text which says "*Europal Forum invites you to a seminar on ...*" is potentially confusing. I have also seen at least two emails sent by Europal Forum (confirming registration for the event and the email of 27 November 2017 notifying the withdrawal of a place) referred to "our"

event (Europal's). They were not issued in your name and did not make clear your role as the host of the event.

5 In your letter of 20 December, you told Mrs Hudson that Europal Forum selected the individuals to whom "revised invitations" would be sent". The fact that these decisions were made by Europal Forum contribute to the overall impression that the event was "owned" by Europal Forum rather than by you/your office.

Taken together, I consider this amounts to a breach of the rules on the use of Committee Rooms and, therefore, to be in breach of paragraph 15 of the Code of Conduct.

10 Paragraph 16 of the Code - decision

15 As you know, when Kathryn Hudson began this inquiry she drew your attention to paragraph 16 of the Code, in case it proved relevant. In the light of my finding in respect of paragraph 15, paragraph 16 is relevant. The misleading impression of an entitlement to attend a meeting on the parliamentary estate had the potential to cause damage to the reputation and integrity of the House of Commons as a whole.

20 However, as you will be aware, the Committee on Standards has made clear that it would expect this rule to be breached only in extreme and extremely limited circumstances. Having considered the available evidence very carefully, I am not satisfied that significant damage, if any, has been caused to the reputation and integrity of the House through your actions and the misleading impression some individuals may have had of their right to attend the meeting on 29 November 2017.

25 With hindsight, the process of reducing numbers could have been handled better. For example, it might have been helpful to explain to the individuals who found themselves "uninvited" the basis on which they had been chosen. Or, given that you expected a significant number of ticket holders not to attend, it might have been helpful to explain the circumstances and ask who no longer planned to attend.

30 It is not entirely clear to me that giving priority to people whom Europal recognised as having participated in similar events was consistent with one of the stated aims of the event, that is, to "educate and inform". However, restricting invitations to a private meeting on the parliamentary estate to individuals known to the organisers is not in conflict with the rules.

35 I am not surprised that Mr Collier found it odd that, having had his invitation withdrawn, he was later able to obtain a ticket under a different name. I can see how that would give rise to some suspicions about the reasons for withdrawing some of the original invitations. You have told me that by the time the ticket for "Mark Edgeway" was confirmed, "it was clear that not everyone whose invitation had been confirmed would be able to attend". Again with hindsight, I hope we can agree that some thought should have been given to releasing tickets to those who had been

“uninvited” only two days before, rather than issuing an invitation to a late applicant.

5 Nonetheless, in so far as you are able give an assurance on behalf of a third party, you have given a clear and unequivocal statement that the individuals whose invitations were rescinded were not selected because they were Jewish or were perceived to have 'Jewish sounding names'. Having seen the lists of people who had tickets withdrawn and those who received an invitation to the smaller event, I have seen no discernible pattern. You say that an individual's name gives no indication of their views or affiliation in this matter and that is a valid point. Similarly, 10 assumptions about individual heritage based solely on names would be likely to be unreliable.

I have seen no evidence to substantiate the allegation that being Jewish or perceived to be Jewish was a criterion for the withdrawal of tickets. You have said that, if had been, it “*might well cause reputational damage to our Parliament*”. I hope that 15 Mr Collier will be reassured by that clear statement from you.

Taking all of this into account, I do not find a breach of paragraph 16 of the Code of Conduct for Members.

Other matters

Use of on-line platforms to manage tickets

20 As you have pointed out, it is not explicitly against the rules to use an on-line platform to advertise a meeting on the parliamentary estate. However, I do think there are inherent difficulties in doing so and remaining within the spirit and the letter of the rules on the use of parliamentary facilities. I am, therefore, pleased to read that you have resolved against doing so again in the future.

25 *Overbooking*

While this is outside the scope of the inquiry, I am concerned by the descriptions you have given about the routine over-booking of events to be held on the parliamentary estate. I would be grateful for an assurance that you will seek the advice of the relevant House authorities about the security implications of such 30 practices and modify arrangements for any other events which you host in line with any advice they give.

Amending the rules

I have noted your suggestions about clarifying and/or tightening some of the rules concerning the use of facilities on the parliamentary estate. As you may be aware, 35 the relevant rules are the province of the Administration Select Committee. If you

would like to raise the matter with the Committee, you might write to the Chair, Sir Paul Beresford MP or to the Clerk, Ms Sarah Heath, when this inquiry is concluded.

Next steps

5 Under Standing Order No 150 I may conclude an inquiry without making a referral to the Committee on Standards in certain circumstances, using the “rectification” procedure.

10 If you accept my decisions and agree that you have breached paragraph 15 of the Code of Conduct, the Committee would expect you to acknowledge your breach of the rules and to apologise for it. (An acknowledgement and apology in your response to this letter would be in keeping with their usual expectation.) I would issue a decision letter to the complainant; and publish a report of my work on my webpages. I would report briefly to the Committee that I have concluded the inquiry in this way.

15 Please respond to the questions above and let me know whether you accept my analysis and the proposal to conclude this matter by way of a rectification as soon as possible and no later than 6 March 2018.

20 If you agree, I would write to Mr Collier to inform him of the outcome. Before doing so, I would share with you a draft copy of my letter to him and of the evidence pack which would subsequently be published on my webpages, to give you the opportunity to comment on its factual accuracy.

In the meantime, this matter remains protected by parliamentary privilege and should continue to be kept in confidence.

19 February 2018

12. Letter from Mr Tommy Sheppard MP to the Commissioner, 5 March 2018

25 Thank you for your letter of 19 February informing me of the outcome of your investigation of the complaint against me made by Mr David Collier.

30 I note that you have concluded some aspects of the organisation of the meeting of 29 November were inconsistent with the procedures set out in the guidance booklet on the booking of Committee Rooms. I had thought that some of the information was advisory rather than mandatory but I accept your interpretation and will not contest it.

35 I note that you conclude that my not following the guidance amounts to a breach of the first part of paragraph 15 of the Code of Conduct which refers to “*rules laid down on these matters*”. I therefore apologise for not following the guidance to the letter and also apologise for breach of this provision of the Code. I hope you will accept that this was unintentional and I also hope you will acknowledge that the second

part of this paragraph is moot in that no personal or financial benefit was conferred on me or anyone else as a result of these actions.

5 I note that you have concluded that no breach of paragraph 16 of the Code of Conduct has taken place. I am pleased that you find there is no evidence to substantiate the charge of anti-Semitism which Mr Collier implies. I am also pleased that having looked at who was invited and who was not, you have found no evidence to suggest that whether people were Jewish or had Jewish sounding names had any bearing on the matter.

10 I hope that this letter will allow you to close the matter but I am at your service should you require anything further from me.

5 March 2018

13. Letter from the Commissioner to Mr Tommy Sheppard MP, 14 March 2018

15 Thank you for your letter of 5 March 2018. As promised, I enclose now a copy of the written evidence pack, which in due course will be published on the relevant page here on my webpages <http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/complaints-and-investigations/allegations-the-commissioner-has-rectified/>.

20 The text of the letter I propose to send to Mr Collier is the first item after the summary in the evidence pack. While the content of that letter is for me alone, I would be happy to consider any comments you have on its factual accuracy.

25 You will note that I have highlighted some of the text in the penultimate paragraph of the draft letter. I would be grateful if you would respond to the recommendation in my letter of 19 February about seeking advice from the relevant House authorities about the routine over-booking of events to be held on the parliamentary estate.

I would be pleased to have any comments you wish to make on the draft letter to Mr Collier as soon as possible and no later than 21 March 2018.

30 Our correspondence continues to be protected by parliamentary privilege. Until I send you and Mr Collier letters concluding this inquiry, this matter should remain confidential.

14 March 2018

14. Letter from Mr Tommy Sheppard MP to the Commissioner, 20 March 2018

Thank you for your letter of 14 March with enclosures.

[Redacted.]

With regard to the recommendation in your letter of 19 February suggesting I should seek advice from the House authorities regarding the overbooking of events, I had thought this point moot as I had already made it clear that I would not intend in the future to use Eventbrite (nor indeed similar platforms) where routinely
5 overbooking to deal with established patterns of non-attendance is required. However, let me also give you an assurance that were I to consider any administrative arrangements which might require overbooking then I would most certainly seek the advice you recommend.

I very much hope, as I'm sure you do, that this will allow the matter to be concluded.

10 *20 March 2018*