

Ms Nadine Dorries MP: Resolution Letter

Letter to Mr Sunny Hundal from the Commissioner, 16 September 2008

I have now concluded my consideration of the complaint you sent me on 28 May against Mrs Nadine Dorries MP in respect of the contents of her Parliamentary website and in particular her weblog.

In essence, your complaint is that Mrs Dorries has included party political or campaigning material on her weblog which has been funded from Parliamentary allowances, contrary to the rules of the House.

I have carefully considered your complaint, consulting both Mrs Dorries and the House of Commons authorities.

The position is that no Parliamentary resources have been used to fund Mrs Dorries' weblog. Questions about whether its content is consistent with the rules in relation to Parliamentary funding do not therefore arise. The rules of the House, however, do require Members to make a clear distinction between websites which are financed from public funds and any other domain. At the time of your complaint, Mrs Dorries' website did not meet that requirement. Nor was it appropriate that she should use the Portcullis emblem on the weblog given its contents. And the funding attribution on Mrs Dorries' Home Page should have been updated to reflect that the funding came from the Communications Allowance and not from the Incidental Expenses Provision. In these three more technical respects, Mrs Dorries had not complied with the rules of the House and to this extent (but not in respect of your main complaint about Parliamentary funding) I uphold your complaint.

I am, however, satisfied that Mrs Dorries has taken effective action to rectify the situation, for which she has apologised. She has introduced a warning on her Home Page to those deciding to visit her weblog from that page that the user is leaving a Parliamentary funded website and she has updated the funding attribution. She has also provided a separate domain name for the weblog and has removed the Portcullis logo from it. She has expressed her regret for the confusion caused.

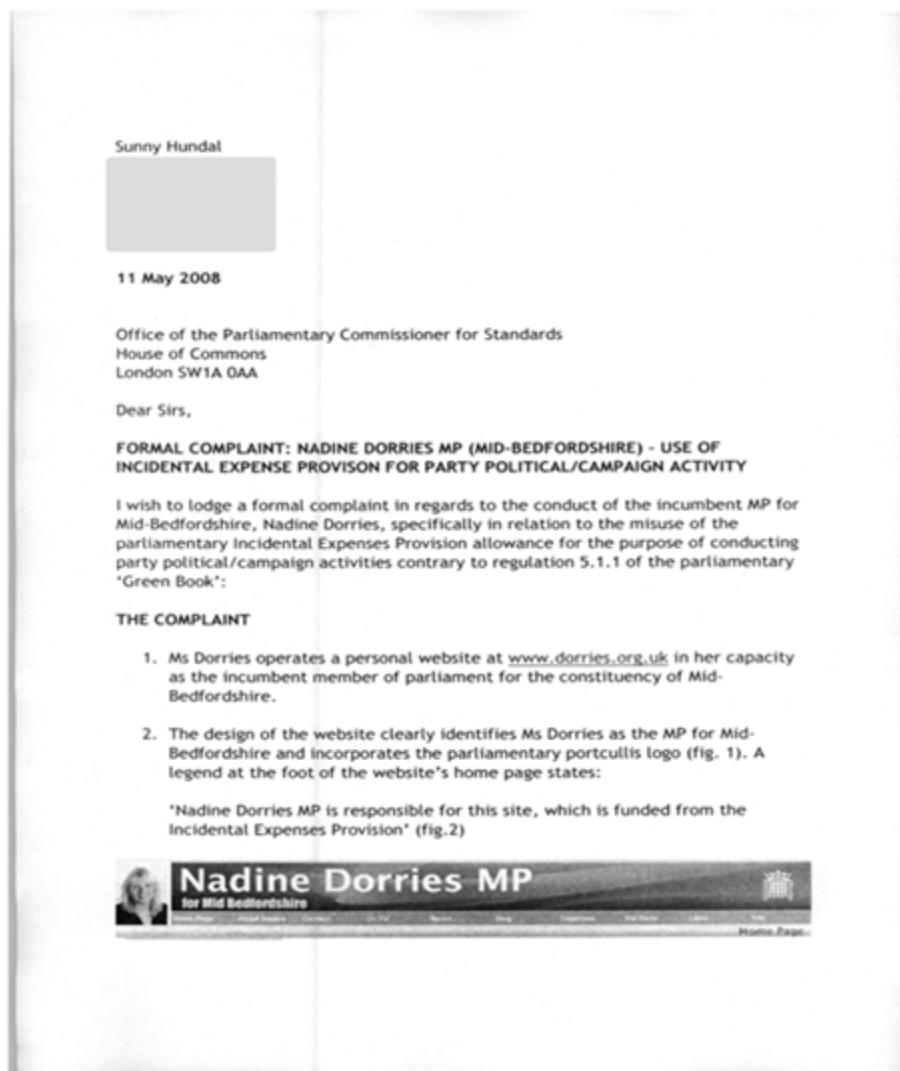
I consider that Mrs Dorries has made an appropriate response to these matters and that no further action on any point is required, and therefore consider your complaint now closed. I will be reporting the outcome to the Committee on Standards and Privileges. Thank you for raising this matter with me.

I am copying this letter to Mrs Nadine Dorries MP.

16 September 2008

Ms Nadine Dorries MP: Written Evidence

1. Letter to the Commissioner from Mr Sunny Hundal, 11 May 2008



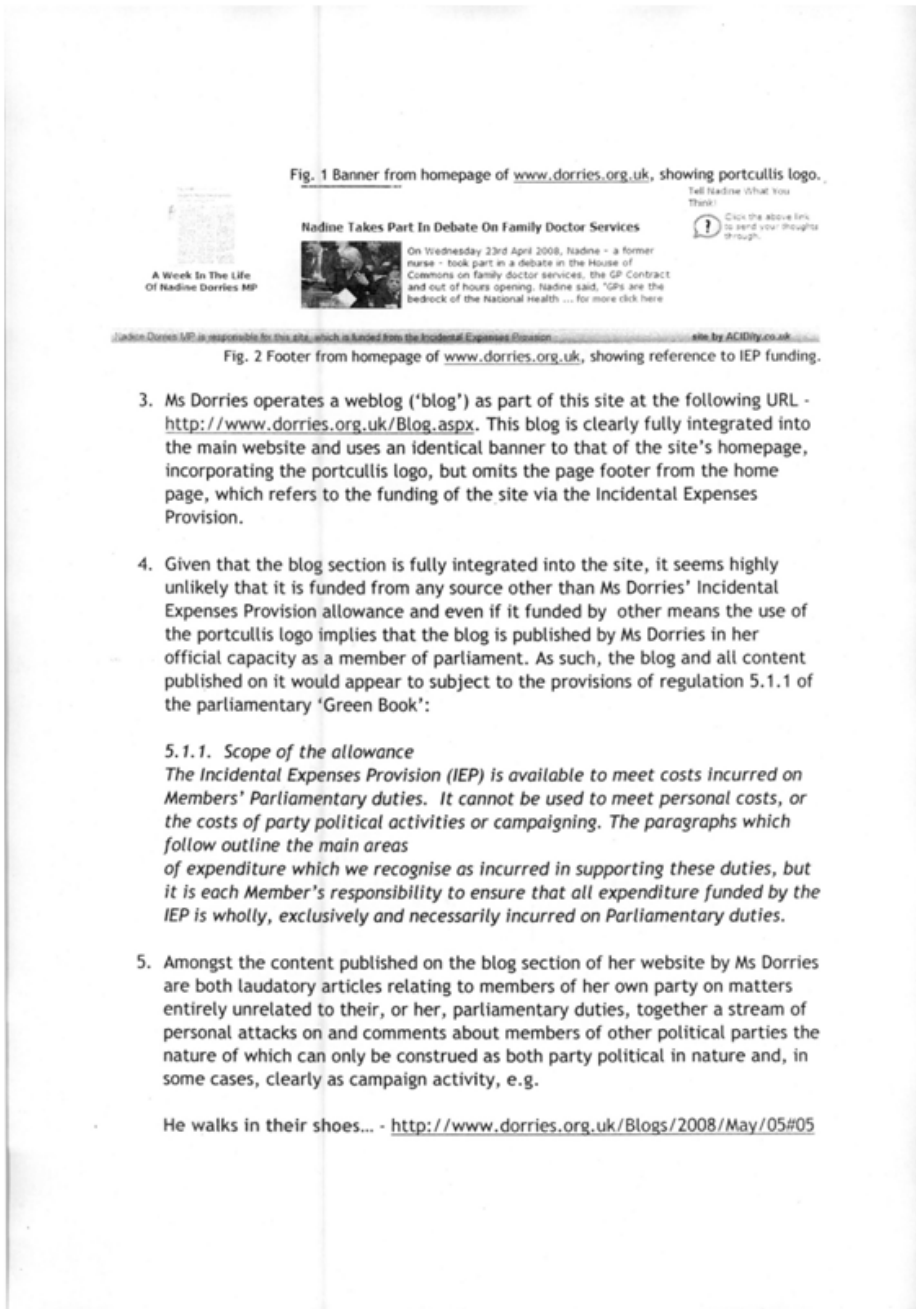


Fig. 1 Banner from homepage of www.dorries.org.uk, showing portcullis logo.

Fig. 2 Footer from homepage of www.dorries.org.uk, showing reference to IEP funding.

3. Ms Dorries operates a weblog ('blog') as part of this site at the following URL - <http://www.dorries.org.uk/Blog.aspx>. This blog is clearly fully integrated into the main website and uses an identical banner to that of the site's homepage, incorporating the portcullis logo, but omits the page footer from the home page, which refers to the funding of the site via the Incidental Expenses Provision.
4. Given that the blog section is fully integrated into the site, it seems highly unlikely that it is funded from any source other than Ms Dorries' Incidental Expenses Provision allowance and even if it funded by other means the use of the portcullis logo implies that the blog is published by Ms Dorries in her official capacity as a member of parliament. As such, the blog and all content published on it would appear to subject to the provisions of regulation 5.1.1 of the parliamentary 'Green Book':

5.1.1. Scope of the allowance
The Incidental Expenses Provision (IEP) is available to meet costs incurred on Members' Parliamentary duties. It cannot be used to meet personal costs, or the costs of party political activities or campaigning. The paragraphs which follow outline the main areas of expenditure which we recognise as incurred in supporting these duties, but it is each Member's responsibility to ensure that all expenditure funded by the IEP is wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred on Parliamentary duties.
5. Amongst the content published on the blog section of her website by Ms Dorries are both laudatory articles relating to members of her own party on matters entirely unrelated to their, or her, parliamentary duties, together a stream of personal attacks on and comments about members of other political parties the nature of which can only be construed as both party political in nature and, in some cases, clearly as campaign activity, e.g.

He walks in their shoes... - <http://www.dorries.org.uk/Blogs/2008/May/05#05>

David [Cameron] needs to connect with the greater majority of the general public. The connection between him and them is vital; it's happening now and needs to go deeper.

Low income families are hurting. In a week when the 10p tax band was removed school dinners went up to £2 per child. The streets are no longer safe, house prices are in decline, you can't get a mortgage or educate your children well. In today's Britain, its tough trying to heat your home, fill your car or feed your family.

David needs to show that he will make this country a different and better place than it is under Labour. He cares about the low paid with genuine passion.

He's a family man, a dad who loves his kids. He finds it easy to empathise with those parents who can't give their children the things in life they want to - like a decent education or quick access to the healthcare they need. He finds it easy to put himself into someone elses position and understand how they feel.

To win the next General Election he needs to learn how to convey that genuine passion and empathy right in through the front door of every struggling family home in Britain.

And then people will vote for him, they will know he really feels for them, because he can walk in their shoes.

...

Phillpa Stroud - <http://www.dorries.org.uk/Blogs/2008/May/05#05>

I have just come back from visiting the Kings Arms project in Bedford. The project looks after the homeless and provides a depth of continued support over a number of years. It was one of the best run projects I have ever visited....

...Anyway, whilst having a cup of coffee with the amazing buzzing with energy [redacted], the project director who is also daughter of [redacted], I asked who had started the project originally.

I was surprised, but shouldn't have been when the answer came back, "this amazing woman Philippa Stroud who lived here about fifteen years ago."

Philippa apparently had a real concern for people sleeping rough, and got it into her head that something more positive should be done; and against the odds, setting out on her own, she did it.

The project is now huge, and has helped many hundreds of people to battle alcoholism and drugs, and assisted them to make the transition from the street to community.

Philippa Stroud is the Conservative candidate for Sutton & Cheam, a truly amazing woman and will be a Conservative MP after the next general election. I can't wait. She is also Director of the Centre for Social Justice.

...

Bedfellows in the Last Chance Saloon -
<http://www.dorries.org.uk/Blogs/2008/Mar/31#31>

*Last week [redacted] of the **ET** ran a story regarding the new language being used by the Labour party. The language consisted of words such as alternative voting, compulsory voting and PR.*

The story was largely uncommented on. What we are about to witness are the first steps of Labour's desperate efforts to keep the Conservatives out of power, and to cling onto government.

This will necessitate a working relationship between Nick Clegg and Gordon Brown. It won't need any further cosyng up between Lib Dem and Labour MPs. The biggest defender of government policy when Conservatives oppose comes from the Lib Dem benches; however, not with any thanks or appreciation from the Labour party back benchers, who hold Lib Dem MPs largely in contempt.

A resurgent Conservative party is a worry to the Lib Dems, as there are many Conservatives in close second place to their own MPs, they are looking at losing over half of their parliamentary seats.

The Labour party is staring at recession, falling polls, a Conservative London Mayor and defeat.

Bedfellows they will yet be.

6. Of particular concern are a series of five articles published between 11 March 2008 and 2 April 2008 in relation to her support for the 'Alive and Kicking'

campaign, articles which specifically target female Labour MPs in marginal constituencies and which are unequivocally both party political in tone and campaigning in their intent:

Alive and Kicking - <http://www.dorries.org.uk/Blogs/2008/Mar/11#11>

We know as a result of polling, that 72% of the public want to see a reduction in the upper limit from 24 weeks to 20 and that Labour MPs are largely against this move.

I would not like to be a Labour MP who votes against a twenty week amendment, and be sat on a majority of less than 5000 because Alive and Kicking are going to make sure the electorate know exactly which way every MP votes.

In addition to this, I wouldn't be at all surprised if the National press piggy back on to the Alive and Kicking idea and start running their own name and shame campaigns.

I will be launching my own 20 week web site very shortly, more news here soon.

To date, Ms Dorries has not launched the '20 week' website she refers to at the end of this article, however in a series of four articles under the general title of 'Beyond the Limit' she made the following comments about Labour MPs Laura Moffat, Barbara Follett, Jacqui Smith and

Laura Moffatt. Labour MP, Crawley. Majority 37.

As a result of a number of polls, we know that the majority of the public, as many as 72 per cent, wish to see the upper limit at which abortion takes place, reduced from 24 to 20 weeks.

Many MPs, however, choose to use Parliament as a place to pander to their own preference, or ideology, rather than to represent the will of the people.

Each day, I am going to highlight MPs who may need to think very seriously when voting on the issue of reducing the upper limit to 20 weeks, because if they don't, they may see their majorities wiped out at the next election.

Laura Moffat voted AGAINST counselling before the termination of pregnancy in 2007; and abstained during a vote to reduce the upper limit to 21 weeks.

I have no problem with abstention on an ethical conscience issue, if an MP truly does not want to compromise their own principles, and ensure that they do not misrepresent the majority of their constituents' views.

Barbara Follett MP. Labour. Stevenage. Majority: 3139.

Barbara Follett is the founder of Emily's list, which provides financial help and assistance to women wishing to become Labour MPs. In order to receive funding they have to support Labour party values, and be pro-abortion.

This means that any potential candidate of faith, ie, Jewish, Christian, Sikh, Muslim or Hindu would not qualify, which makes the list discriminatory .

Barbara Follett MP has voted against reducing the upper limit and against a bill introduced to provide counselling and support.

72% of her constituents want the upper limit reduced to 20 weeks.

Will she represent their views at the next vote, or her own?

Jacqui Smith (Labour). Redditch. Majority: 2716.

Jacqui Smith has abstained during many abortion votes, however, she has taken funding from Emily's list on the basis that she supports pro-abortion values.

As I've said before, abstention is fine if she feels that by voting for her pro-abortion beliefs she would be mis-representing her constituents. One to watch.

Margaret Moran (Labour) Luton South. Majority: 5650.

Margaret Moran MP has abstained during many abortion votes, however, she has taken funding from Emily's list on the basis that she supports pro-abortion values.

As I've said before, abstention is fine if she feels that by voting for her pro-abortion beliefs she would be mis-representing her constituents. One to watch.

URLs for these articles:

<http://www.dorries.org.uk/Blogs/2008/Mar/25#25>

<http://www.dorries.org.uk/Blogs/2008/Mar/26#26>

<http://www.dorries.org.uk/Blogs/2008/Mar/27#27>

<http://www.dorries.org.uk/Blogs/2008/Apr/02#02>

7. Not only do these articles clearly breach regulation 5.1.1 of the Green Book on both party political and campaigning grounds - Ms Dorries has declined thus far to comment on any members of her own party who are likely to vote against a reduction in the upper time limit for abortions, let alone identify any who represent marginal seats - she also make assertions that are entirely unsustainable, specifically:

The figure given for public support for a cut in the upper time limit for abortion is based on the results of national opinion poll and one cannot, therefore, assume that this is necessarily representative of the view of a particular MPs constituents.

The assertion that 'Emily's List' is discriminatory and automatically excludes candidates with strong religious beliefs is simply untrue and fails to adequately reflect the diversity of opinion on abortion to be found within the cited religions - Judaism, for example, holds that human life begins with the taking of the first breath in keeping with the story of the creation of Adam (Genesis 2:7 KJV - 'And the LORD God formed man [of] the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.') - see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_and_abortion for a reflection of the diversity of opinion on abortion to be found in different faiths.

8. In view of Ms Dorries's comments (cited above) it is open to question whether her conduct is consistent with the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Member's of Parliament, specifically the following principle:

Members shall at all times conduct themselves in a manner which will tend to maintain and strengthen the public's trust and confidence in the integrity of Parliament and never undertake any action which would bring the House of Commons, or its Members generally, into disrepute.

Noting that Ms Dorries has, on a previous occasion, be found to have made impermissible use of parliamentary resources for the purpose of political campaigning - see 12th Report of the Select Committee on Parliamentary Standards and Privileges 2005/6:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmstnprv/1368/136802.htm>

And with due regard to the comments of the Parliamentary Commission for Standards in relation to the use of the Communications Allowance (Memorandum from the Parliamentary Standards Commission, 3rd report of the Select Committee on Parliamentary Standards and Privileges 2007/8:

“4. The Content of Publications

31. The guidance on the CA approved by the Members Estimate Committee contains what appears to be pretty full guidance on the sort of material which can and cannot be included in publications funded from the allowance. This makes clear that the content of such publications must not include party political or campaigning material, including material which seeks to compare a Member's party favourably with another, promote one party at the expense of another or undermine the reputation of political opponents... (*Green Book, para 6.2.1*)

32(b). In relation to material which is laudatory of a particular Government or party's achievements but is not clearly anchored in a Member's own Parliamentary activity on behalf of their constituents. Phrases such as:

"The Conservative council are already at work setting out priorities to help local residents, workers and visitors"

"This reaffirms Labour's commitment to investing in the NHS and responding to local health needs"

in my view stray across the boundary into the promotion of a particular political party and are therefore not permissible. So also is the selective use of statistics to a similar effect.”

I do not consider it reasonable to think that Ms Dorries is unaware of the regulations contained in the Green Book as this relates to the use of IEP or other parliamentary allowances for party political and/or campaigning purposes and must ask, therefore, that you institute a formal investigation into her conduct, as outlined above.

Regards

Sunny Hundal

2. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 6 June 2008

I would welcome your comments on a complaint I have received from Mr Sunny Hundal about the contents of your Parliamentary website, in particular your weblog.

I attach a copy of Mr Hundal's letter of 28 May which sets out his complaint. I attach also a summary of what I understand to be his complaints about some particular entries in your weblog and on your home page. (I am copying the summary to him in case he wishes to modify it, in which case I will let you have an amended version.)

In essence, the complaint is that you have included party political or campaigning material on your website which has been funded from your Parliamentary allowances, contrary to the rules of the House.

The Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament provides in paragraph 14 as follows:

"Members shall at all times ensure that their use of expenses, allowances, facilities and services provided from the public purse is strictly in accordance with the rules laid down on these matters, and that they observe any limits placed by the House on the use of such expenses, allowances, facilities and services."

The current rules in relation to the funding and content of Members' websites are set out in a booklet published in April 2007 called "The Communications Allowance and the use of House Stationery". The introduction to the booklet sets out in paragraph 1.7 the responsibility of Members as follows:

***"Your responsibility.** It is your responsibility to ensure that all expenditure funded under the Communications Allowance and the provision of House stationery and prepaid envelopes is wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred on your Parliamentary duties. Parliamentary resources may not be used for communicating information about your political activities or those of the party to which you belong. You are responsible for ensuring that your use of this new allowance and of provided House stationery and pre paid envelopes is above reproach and you must ensure you follow the rules outlined in this booklet correctly."*

Paragraph 6.12.2 sets out the rules for websites as follows:

"The CA may be used to pay for setting up and maintaining a website or web presence only if its purpose is to inform constituents about your work as a Member and to provide contact details. It must not be used to fund party political activity or campaigning. If you include material which is not allowed under these rules, you must fund the whole cost from another source."

Paragraph 6.12.3 identifies material likely to be allowable on a website, provided it meets the criteria in 6.12.4:

- *"information about you*
- *information about Parliament, debates etc*
- *...*
- *services that allow you to promote your Parliamentary activities, but not your political activities, digitally. This might include the use of podcasts, weblogs and other related activities*
- *..."*

Paragraph 6.12.4 provides as follows:

"You must not use your CA funded publications or websites:

- *...*
- *to encourage people to join a particular political party*
- *...*
- *to promote or campaign on behalf of any person seeking election*
- *to criticise or campaign against anyone seeking election or otherwise seek to undermine the reputation of political opponents*
- *for the purpose of advancing perspectives or arguments with the intention of promoting the interests of any political party or organisation you support, or damaging the interest of any other such party or organisation*
- *..."*

Appendix Three sets out fuller rules and guidance on Members' websites funded from the Communications Allowance. Paragraph 7 provides as follows:

"You must not use your website:

- ...
- *to encourage people to join a particular political party*
- ...
- *to campaign on behalf of or against any person seeking election*
- *to advance perspectives or arguments with the intention of promoting the interests of any person, political party or organisation you support, or damaging the interests of any other such person, party or organization."*

Paragraph 14 provides as follows:

"The content of your website or online presence should not seek, directly or indirectly, to compare a Member's party favourably with another, promote one party at the expense of another or seek to undermine the reputations of political opponents. ..."

Paragraph 20 provides as follows:

"The use of party logos should be restricted to proportionate and discreet use. You may reproduce the House emblem (the crowned portcullis) on your website only if it satisfies the rules above."

Paragraph 24 provides as follows:

"There is a minimum requirement for you to display, prominently, on the homepage of your website, a statement that it is funded from Parliamentary allowances and that complaints about content should be made initially to the Director of Finance and Administration, House of Commons."

Before April 2007, the costs for a Member's website could be claimed for under the Incidental Expenses Provision as set out in the Green Book and in the relevant factsheet. Paragraph 5.13.4 of the Green Book published in July 2006 makes clear that expenditure on maintaining websites was allowable expenditure; but campaigning on behalf of a political party or cause was not allowable expenditure.

I would welcome your comments on this complaint in the light of this summary of the current rules. In particular it would be helpful to know:

1. whether you consider that your website, including your weblog, is in accordance with the rules for expenditure under the Communications Allowance, addressing particularly the examples identified by the complainant;
2. whether you consider that use of the House emblem on your website is appropriate in the light of its content and the rules;
3. what has been the nature of your claims for this website under the Incidental Expenses Provision and the Communications Allowance, and what this expenditure has covered;
4. if you have involved any member of your staff paid for from Parliamentary allowances in the preparation, drafting or maintenance of this website, how much time you estimate they have spent on this in each of the last two full financial years and the title or grades of staff employed on this work;
5. why the attribution on your home page has not been updated since the introduction of the Communications Allowance in April 2007 and why there is no reference to complaints about content being directed to the Department;
6. whether you have at any time sought the advice of the Department of Finance and Administration (now the Department of Resources) on the content of your website.

Any other comments or points you wish to make would, of course, be very welcome.

I enclose a Note which sets out the procedure which I follow in considering complaints. You will see that, now that I have accepted this complaint, it should be treated as a 'Personal and Confidential' inquiry until such time as I have concluded my work. I have now written to the complainant to let him know that I have accepted the complaint. If you would like a word about any of this at any time, please contact me here at the House of Commons or give me a telephone call.

I would be very grateful for your help on this matter.

6 June 2008

3. Ms Nadine Dorries' website and blog: Summary of complaint by Mr Sunny Hundal

<i>Number</i>	<i>Matter complained of</i>	<i>Alleged fault</i>	<i>Guidance breached (and paragraph number in Appendix 3 of booklet 'The Communications Allowance and the use of House stationery')</i>
1	Website	Carries a portcullis banner although the site breaches the rules on party political content	Paragraph 20....You may reproduce the House emblem (the crowned portcullis) on your website only if it satisfies the rules above.
2	Website: funding attribution	Website does not appear to carry the correct funding attribution	Paragraph 24. There is a minimum requirement for you to display, prominently, on the homepage for your website, a statement that it is funded from Parliamentary allowances and that complaints about content should be made initially to the Director of Finance and Administration, House of Commons.
Blog			
3. 3 May 2008	He walks in their shoes	Promotes interests of David Cameron.	<p>Paragraph 7. You must not must not use your website</p> <p>...</p> <p>to encourage people to join a particular political party</p> <p>...</p> <p>to campaign on behalf of or against any person seeking election</p> <p>...</p> <p>to advance perspectives or arguments with the intention of promoting the interests of any person, political party or organisation you support, or damaging the interests of any other such person, party or organisation.</p> <p>Paragraph 14. The content of your website or online presence should not seek, directly or indirectly, to compare a Member's party favourably with another, promote one party at the expense of another or seek to undermine the reputations of political</p>

			opponents....
4. 28 March 2008	Philippa Stroud	Promotes interests of Conservative election candidate	Paragraphs 7 and 14
5. 31 March 2008	Bedfellows in the last chance saloon	Critical of Labour and LibDems	Paragraphs 7 and 14
6. 25 March 2008 to 2 April 2008	5 articles on Alive and Kicking	Critical of certain Labour MPs eg Laura Moffat (25 March 2008), Barbara Follett (26 March 2008), Jacqui Smith (27 March 2008), Margaret Moran (2 April 2008)	Paragraphs 7 and 14
7. 21 April 2008	We ain't got no	Critical of Labour education policy and achievements	Paragraphs 7 and 14
8. 6 April 2008	Men only	Critical of Nick Clegg	Paragraphs 7 and 14
9. 1 April 2008	Westminster Health forum Keynote Seminar	Critical of Nick Clegg	Paragraphs 7 and 14
10. 13 March 2008	Now you see them...	Critical of Nick Clegg and LibDems	Paragraphs 7 and 14

Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

June 2008

4. Extract from email to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 11 June 2008

With reference to your recent correspondence to myself regarding the above, may I first of all take this opportunity to express my surprise at receiving your letter, as a simple telephone call to myself at my office to have clarified the details of the complaint, would I believe have led to this case being dismissed at the first hurdle.

As you may be aware, the complainant – Mr Sunny Hundal – has published in full on his website (copy of link below) the complaint he has made to yourself. The complainant has also issued a public news release on this matter too, leading to a number of queries to me by journalists in the media. However, as you will be aware, Members of Parliament are advised not to comment to the media during the course of any investigations, a situation which puts me in a difficult situation, in the light of the complainant's decision to place into the public domain the details of his complaint. What advice would you offer as to how I should respond to these media enquiries [blog address]

With regards to the blog site to which you refer in your correspondence, I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that this is a completely separate website to my main website. My blog site is funded by me personally and

in no way through the use of public funds. Copies of the appropriate documentation proving this point can easily be made available if you so request it.

Please be assured that I will be responding in full to your correspondence in due course and will co-operate fully with your investigation into this matter.

I hope to hear from you soon with regards to my query above.

11 June 2008

5. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 12 June 2008

Thank you for your e-mail of 11 June about this complaint.

I would not presume to offer you advice about handling the media, but I would confirm what you say: once I have accepted an inquiry (as I have in this case) then those who are assisting me with the inquiry, including the Member involved, are expected to keep the exchange of information as 'in confidence' between us. That means that my communications to you, and yours to me, are not to be given wider dissemination. Nor should you supply the media with the information which you are giving to me relating to the complaint.

I look forward to receiving your response, and am very grateful for your co-operation in this matter. My letter of 6 June drew attention to a number of sections in the April 2007 booklet "The Communications Allowance and the Use of House Stationery". You may wish to read the whole of Appendix Three from which I drew some extracts. In particular, in the light of what you say, I would draw your attention to paragraph 5 which reads as follows:

"Scope of Websites funded from the CA

The CA may be used to pay for setting up and/or maintaining a website only if its purpose is to inform or communicate with constituents about your work as a Member and/or to provide contact details. It must not be used to fund party political activity or campaigning. You may not use the Communications Allowance to pay for individual web pages or parts of websites, where other parts of the site are paid for from other sources."

And to paragraph 8:

"Links to other websites

In order to maintain a clear distinction between your website, which is financed from public funds, and any other domain, you must make a clear distinction between your site and any site to which links are provided. You may do this by taking users through a page that confirms they are leaving your website, or by requiring them to acknowledge it through a pop-up form."

I do so to assist you in preparing your reply and not to suggest that I have come to any conclusion on the matter. To do that, I need your response, and it is likely I shall then seek comments from the Department of Resources.

Thank you for your help with this and I look forward to receiving your reply.

12 June 2008

6. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 30 June 2008

With reference to our previous correspondence regarding the complaint made by Mr Sunny Hundal about the contents of my Parliamentary website and his apparent misunderstanding of its relationship with regards to the content of the separate website, which is my web blog.

I believe it is important for the purposes of this response to make clear the distinction between my parliamentary website and my blog site—both of which are entirely different web sites, which are funded from separate and different sources. Whilst my parliamentary website is funded via parliamentary expenses, my blog web site is funded by me in a personal capacity, at no cost to the taxpayer; please find enclosed documentation of invoices with regards to this matter.

However, as requested I would like to take this opportunity to answer each of your individual questions as follows:

1. **Rules for expenditure under the Communications Allowance**—I consider that my main parliamentary website is in accordance with the rules for expenditure under the Communications Allowance for the reasons outlined above. To reiterate, whilst my parliamentary website is funded via the Communications Allowance, my blog website is an entirely separate entity and is funded by myself in a personal capacity. For this reason I believe the content of my blog website does not contravene any parliamentary rules, as it is not funded via any parliamentary expenses.
2. However, I accept that the distinction between these two separate websites could be clearer from the point of view of a user to both these sites, hence the reason I have instructed the designer of my websites to put appropriate mechanisms in place—such as a completely different domain name and the opening of a new window when accessing the blog website—to make this distinction clearer for visitors to both of these individual sites.
3. **Use Of the House Emblem**—I consider that it is appropriate to include the use of the House emblem on my main parliamentary website, but accept that for the avoidance of doubt it would be preferable to avoid its use on my blog site and have advised my web designer to act accordingly.
4. **Claims for parliamentary website**—My main parliamentary website—please refer to copies of attached invoices[not included in the written evidence] —which was previously funded by the Incidental Expenses Provision, and latterly via the Communications Allowance, covers expenditure related to the hosting; design; maintenance; support (including out of hours and weekends); domain name registration; statistical information and search engine registration for my main parliamentary website.
7. **Staff Involvement In Parliamentary Website**—Whilst members of my parliamentary staff have some duties and responsibilities with regards to the content of my main parliamentary website, my separate blog site is updated with new content by me only. I would estimate that approximately 1 hour per week has been spent by my parliamentary researcher, in adding new content to my main parliamentary website.
8. **Correct Attribution On Home Page**—It is with great regret that the home page of my main parliamentary website has not been updated with the revised attribution details since the introduction of the Communications Allowance in April 2007—however, in response I have instructed my website designer to make the appropriate changes on this matter and apologise for any inadvertent error on my part, with regards to this point.
9. **Advice Of The Department Of Resources**—I am not aware of any occasions when I or my parliamentary staff have sought the advice of the Department of Finance and Administration/Department of Resources with regards to the content of my website, as I have always been confident that I have adhered to the rules in accordance with the rules for expenditure under the Communications Allowance, for the purposes of funding my main parliamentary website.

I very much hope the content of this letter addresses the queries you referred to in your original correspondence—however if there may be any further points on which you feel you may need further clarification, then please do not hesitate to get in contact with me.

30 June 2008

7. Letter to the Acting Director of Operations, Department of Resources from the Commissioner, 2 July 2008

I would welcome your comments and advice on a complaint I have received against Mrs Nadine Dorries about the contents of her Parliamentary website, in particular her weblog.

I attach[relevant correspondence] .

You will see from this that Mrs Dorries funds her weblog from her own resources. She has also said how she proposes to make a clearer distinction between her Parliamentary website and her weblog.

I would be grateful if you could help me in identifying where Mrs Dorries may have breached the rules of the House in her presentation of her Parliamentary website and her personal weblog, and how far her proposed remedial action is sufficient in rectifying the position. If you consider that further action was required it would be helpful to know what that should be. Any other comments you wish to make would, of course, be very welcome.

The Committee on Standards and Privileges are currently taking a close interest in response times, so if it were possible to let me have a response within the next two or three weeks, that would be particularly helpful.

2 July 2008

8. Letter to the Commissioner from the Acting Director of Operations, Department of Resources, 7 July 2008

Thank you for your letter of 2 July concerning a complaint about Mrs Dorries' Parliamentary website. You asked for my views on whether Mrs Dorries has breached the rules of the House and if actions she has taken properly address any breaches.

Before answering your specific questions, it may be helpful if I outline the process by which this Department has scrutinised claims for website costs since the introduction of the Communications Allowance in April 2007.

You will be aware that staff in my Department are required to review the home page of any website when a claim is submitted for payment. Para 23, page 29 of the booklet *The Communications Allowance and the use of House stationery* says "...the Members Estimate Committee has decided that you must enclose a hard copy of the home page of your website with any claim."

In practice, not all Members submit hard copies of their website homepage with claims, so my staff review homepages on-line and print off a copy for our records only if there are indications that the site may have content which falls outside of the rules of the House. If this is the case we look further into the site to confirm whether the content contravenes the rules.

The Department accepts that websites are different in scope and content from parliamentary newsletters and will be accessed by people who make a conscious decision to look at the site. Historically, websites have not attracted any great scrutiny, and because the content evolves and changes rapidly we have adopted a pragmatic approach to our review process. If the homepage indicates inappropriate content we look at the site in more detail and advise the Member that the site needs to be amended; we would pay the initial claim but refuse to pay further claims if the site remained non-compliant.

In general this approach has worked well: Members have usually made the necessary amendments or opted to fund their websites from their own money.

Mrs Dorries made a claim for her website, which was received by this department on 4 June 2008. Having reviewed the homepage we felt that the blog, which appeared to us to be part of the site, breached the rules of the allowance and we wrote to her on 13 June to ask her to relocate the blog on another domain, whilst advising her that she could maintain a link to the blog on her website. The claim was paid, in accordance with our previous practice. I enclose a copy of the letter sent to Mrs Dorries; to date we have received no response to this.

Mrs Dorries says that she pays for the blog from her own funds; but as she acknowledges, this was not clear from the website. We have looked again at her site and whilst the 'blog' option on the menu near the top of the home page now provides a warning that you are leaving the site when it is selected, there are two further access points on the page that allow you to enter the blog and these do not display such a warning. It is our opinion that one link to her blog should be sufficient and this should incorporate a notice that makes it clear that it is not funded from parliamentary allowances.

The portcullis should not be used on a non-compliant website (booklet, page 28, para 20). I note from our second review that this has now been removed from the blog.

Although the funding declaration should have referred to the Communications Allowance rather than the IEP (which would have been applicable before April 2007), I do not consider this a serious error, as the important point was that it made clear that public funds were being used; and I note that this has now been put right.

In summary, when we first reviewed Mrs Dorries's website in June this year, we concluded that it was not fully compliant. Having reviewed it again on 4 July we still feel that there is some modification needed to the blog access. In addition, although not part of the complaint, the article "A Week In The Life of Nadine Dorries MP" (reproduced from the *House Magazine*) contains, in its last paragraph, an attack on the Prime Minister which we feel falls outside of the rules. In line with our previous practice provided that Mrs Dorries updates her site in line with advice and the rules of the Communications Allowance, we would continue to pay any future claims.

I hope that this covers the areas you raised, but should you need any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

7 July 2008

9. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Quality Assurance Administrator, Department of Resources, 13 June 2008

Thank you for your recent C2 claim form, on which was attached an invoice from[supplier], for domain hosting at Dorries.org. As this cost relates to your constituency website, we have allocated it against the Communications Allowance and not the IEP.

In accordance with the guidance to this allowance (outlined in the booklet *The Communications Allowance and the use of House stationery*), we have reviewed the contents of your website. May I draw your attention to Para 7, Page 27, which states that your website must not "*advance perspectives or arguments with the intention of promoting the interests of any person, political party or organisation you support, or damaging the interests of any other such person, party or organisation*".

We note that your blog, located at www.dorries.org.uk/Blogs.aspx, contains some material that falls outside of the guidance, specifically the entries titled '24, 42' and 'Be Our Guest'. We would therefore advise that this should be relocated to a domain not supported by the Parliamentary allowances. It would be acceptable to leave a redirection page or link at the current location to the blog.

Alternatively, you may wish to review the contents of your blog and modify it in light of these comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss this matter, or any other aspect of the Communications Allowance.

13 June 2008

10. Letter to Ms Nadine Dorries MP from the Commissioner, 16 July 2008

I attach a letter of 7 July from the Department of Resources with their comments on the complaint about your website and weblog, into which, as you know, I am making inquiries. I sent the Department of Resources a copy of your letter to me of 30 June.

As you will see, having reviewed the changes to your website which you made following this complaint, and following the Department's letter to you of 13 June, they have noted that there is now a warning to those using the menu on the top of the Home Page of your Parliamentary funded website to access your separate (privately funded) weblog site that they are being transferred to a new site. However, they also note that there is no similar warning when using the two other access points on the Home Page (which I think are referred to as blog spots). They suggest that you might remove these two blog spot references from your Home Page. They have noted too that you have removed the Portcullis from your weblog and have corrected the funding declaration on the Home Page of your Parliamentary website.

I believe from what I have seen that you have also changed the domain name for the weblog.

I am myself concerned, however, that the terms of your warning to those visiting your website or weblog does not signal a sufficiently clear distinction between your website funded from public funds and your personal weblog, as is required by the Rules (paragraph 8 to Appendix Three to the April 2007 rules and guidance). I am not sure most users would appreciate the significance of the warning. I would hope that you might consider amending the warning

to make it clear in terms that the user is leaving a Parliamentary funded website or (if from the weblog) about to enter one. The Department of Resources agrees with this proposal.

There is an additional point raised by the Department which was not included in the complaint but which relates to the article on “the week in the life of Nadine Dorries MP” reproduced from the House magazine, to which there is a link on the Home Page of your Parliamentary website. I would be grateful to know if you accept the Department of Resources’ view on that article and, if so, what action you would propose to take about it.

Subject to your response, I believe it may be possible for me to resolve this complaint by use of the rectification procedure. This procedure enables me to conclude the complaint and report the outcome informally to the Committee on Standards and Privileges, rather than submit a formal report for consideration by the Committee.

In order to follow the rectification procedure, I would need you to accept that you have breached the rules of the House in the three respects set out below, and to apologise for this. These breaches relate to the rules applying to the use of the Communications Allowance in that you failed to maintain a clear distinction between your Parliamentary website, which is financed from public funds, and your privately funded weblog; use of the Portcullis emblem on your weblog; and failure to update the funding attribution on the Home Page of your Parliamentary website. The rectification would be to ensure that there is a clear distinction between your website and your weblog (and you would need to take appropriate action with the blog spots and to amend the wording of the warning to meet that requirement), and removal of the Portcullis emblem from your weblog and updating of the funding (and complaints) attribution on the Home Page of your Parliamentary website, both of which you have already done.

It would also be helpful to know that you are taking appropriate action in respect of your Commons diary referred to in the Department of Resources’ letter.

I would be grateful to know whether you would be content for me to consider the rectification procedure in respect of this complaint on the lines set out in this letter.

16 July 2008

11. Letter to the Commissioner from Ms Nadine Dorries MP, 2 September 2008

With reference to our previous correspondence regarding the above complaint—in response to your most recent correspondence, please be advised that the following changes have been made to my website, as you advised:

- Removal of two ‘blog spots’ buttons from the home page.
- Removal of article, titled, ‘Week In The Life of Nadine Dorries MP’
- Additional clarification added to the text when accessing my blog site as follows: ‘This blog is not a parliamentary funded website.’

I very much hope these amendments will meet with your satisfaction and comply fully with the rules applying to the use of the Communications Allowance.

Once again, I would like to take this opportunity to apologise to the Committee on Standards and Privileges for any inadvertent mistakes I have made on this matter and emphasise how much I regret the confusion this has caused.

If you have any further points you would like to bring to my attention on this matter then please do not hesitate to get in contact with me.

2 September 2008