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Rt Hon. Lord Pickles
Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACoBA) Chair
Office of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments
G/08 Ground Floor, 1 Horse Guards Road
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1 September 2023

Dear Lord Pickles,

Thank you for your letter of 27 June 2023 relating to the announcement concerning Boris Johnson, and the process ACoBA has followed.

The Cabinet Office accepts the Committee's assessment, and notes that the risks surrounding media appointments are limited and typically subject to the conditions that former Ministers are already required to abide by following their departure from office. I therefore also accept that it would be disproportionate to undertake further action in these circumstances, other than the public exchange of such correspondence (noting that there was a breach).

Regarding your broader reflections on the ACoBA Business Rules, the Government is grateful to you and the Committee for your input into the package of reforms we announced to Parliament in July, which will make the system both more flexible and enforceable. This includes developing a Deed of Undertaking for former Ministers to enforce the Rules in a manner similar to the revised contracts for civil servants, and a new streamlined process for lower risk roles. This will ensure resources can be concentrated on the applications that present the most risks to the integrity of the Government.

As part of these reforms, the Government is minded that media appearances, books or journalism should in due course be formally exempted from the business appointment rules (whilst still maintaining duty of confidentiality requirements). This recognises also the importance of the rights to free speech within the law. This 'minded to' approach is therefore guiding in the assessment of appropriate steps on this particular issue.

I would like to thank the Committee for your ongoing work on these matters, and my officials will continue to work with ACoBA to introduce these reforms.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon. Oliver Dowden CBE MP
Deputy Prime Minister

