



David Bell

Permanent Secretary

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Sir Gus O'Donnell GCB
Secretary to the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service
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Dear Gus

ALLEGED PHONE HACKING

Further to our telephone conversation on 20 July, you asked me for information regarding the alleged hacking of a senior official's telephone. I am writing to set out further details about this matter.

In July 2010, a senior official raised concerns with me about media harassment. The official was concerned about journalists and photographers following him at home. He complained that he was receiving a large number of phone calls from journalists, some of which were in the middle of the night. He also mentioned receiving calls where no-one actually spoke to him.

In the light of these concerns, I asked my Departmental Security Officer to speak to the official concerned. The Departmental Security Officer discussed these matters with the official, who added that as well as media harassment by telephone and outside his home, he suspected his mobile phone had been tampered with, for the purpose of intercepting calls. The Departmental Security Officer advised that this was a matter that should be dealt with by the Police and by the mobile phone provider. He offered to contact the Police and the official's mobile phone provider to help resolve these problems and detect any possible offenders. The official said that he would prefer to deal with these matters personally.

In a subsequent follow-up conversation, the official confirmed that neither the Police nor the mobile telephone company were able to identify any malpractice. He also confirmed that the calls had stopped, and that he no longer had concerns about phone tampering. I therefore concluded that no further action was appropriate, and that it was not necessary to inform either you or the Secretary of State for Education. As a result, the first that the Secretary of State knew about this matter was on the evening of 20 July 2011.

Following the comments made by Nick Raynsford MP in the House of Commons on 20 July 2011, my Departmental Security Officer spoke again to the official concerned yesterday evening. The official confirmed that he met with Mr Raynsford at Portcullis House about a week ago, on an unrelated matter and that as an aside to that conversation, he had a very short exchange with Mr Raynsford about the above issues. The official said though that his comments were very brief and that he would be astonished if the remarks made by Mr Raynsford in the House of Commons could have referred to this conversation.

The official also confirmed that he had never spoken to you about the allegation that his telephone(s) had been interfered with in any way. He recalls that the only conversation he had with you around the time that these events happened was to discuss his appearance in front of the Education Select Committee taking place in late July 2010.

The official also confirmed that at no time did he ever suggest, or even consider, that the telephone calls he received without anyone speaking on the line came from political special advisers at No. 10 Downing Street. The official did though surmise that there was some political motivation behind the calls.

I hope that this information is helpful to you.

Best wishes.

Yours ever
David

SIR DAVID BELL KCB