



OFFICE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS APPOINTMENTS

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BUSINESS APPOINTMENT APPLICATION: MS CATHERINE BROWN

The Committee has been asked to consider an application from Ms Catherine Brown, former Chief Executive of the Food Standards Agency (the FSA), to take up an appointment as the Chair of the Peas Please Advisory Board, at The Food Foundation.

Ms Brown was Chief Executive from October 2012 to March 2017. Between March and October she worked on internal projects for the Agency. Her last day in the Civil service was 13 October 2017.

Appointment details

Ms Brown wishes to take up an unpaid and part-time appointment as the Chair of the Advisory Board at Peas Please, a campaign set up by The Food Foundation.

Peas Please tackles the challenges facing the UK's food system in the interests of the UK public. It aims to secure commitments from both industry and Government to improve the availability, acceptability, affordability, and quality of vegetables, in order to better the consumption of vegetables among the UK public, particularly of children and those on a low income.

The Food Foundation is an independent think tank which provides analysis of the problems caused by the food system and the role of policy and practice in addressing these; develops and articulates food policies that support and guide the UK public; and informs and generates demand for new public and private sector policy and practice.

Ms Brown said her role would be to chair the Advisory Board, which includes academics; policy makers from around the UK; and food producers. It is tasked to help the Food Foundation maximise the impact of its Peas Please campaign. She said she would not hold one to one meetings with government officials; nor does she expect to have contact with Ministers. However, Peas Please is likely to hold three or four half day meetings a year at which government officials would be invited, alongside other key stakeholders (from industry and academia). Ms Brown noted that Peas Please has no intention to seek changes in government policy, which is already in favour of supporting UK agriculture and encouraging people to access the ingredients of a healthy diet.

Ms Brown confirmed she had no official or contractual dealings with the organisation whilst in office; and noted that nutrition policy was not within the remit of the FSA. The only previous contact Ms Brown had, was volunteering at the Peas Please conference in Cardiff, after she left the FSA.

Ms Brown noted she has a long history of involvement in the third sector before and during her time in the Civil service; and was previously employed by BUPA in a positive health management role, and in the food industry (Unilever).

Ms Sandys, Founder and Trustee of the Food Foundation, was appointed Deputy Chair at the FSA in September 2017, following an open competition in the February. The FSA confirmed Ms Brown had no involvement in the appointment process for Deputy Chair; that the appointment process was led by the Department for Health; at the time of the appointment, Ms Brown was undertaking project work on behalf of the Chairman; and Jason Feeney was in post as the FSA Chief Executive.

The FSA confirmed it has no relationship with this organisation; that it is not aware of Ms Brown having any previous official dealings with it; that she holds no relevant sensitive information; and that she had no access to any policy or departmental information, which could provide her prospective employer with an unfair advantage. No concerns were raised about this appointment.

The Committee's consideration

The FSA confirmed it has no relationship with the organisation and that Ms Brown had no official dealings with it whilst she was in office. The Committee noted there is an indirect link with Ms Sandys, Founder and Trustee of the Food Foundation, as she was appointed Deputy Chair of the FSA. However, the FSA confirmed Ms Brown had no involvement in this appointment. Further, this is an unpaid role. The Committee considered it could not reasonably be perceived Ms Brown was offered this role as a reward for her time in office.

The Committee noted that the aim of Peas Please is improvement in public health and is therefore aligned to government policy. As such, it considered it would not be improper for Ms Brown to have contact with government officials, in the way she describes, in her role as Chair. The Committee considered that given the nature of Peas Please, the risk of unfair advantage was not a particular concern, though it did note the FSA and Ms Brown's confirmation she had no access to any relevant commercially sensitive, policy or departmental information.

The Prime Minister accepted the Committee's advice that, in accordance with the Government's Business Appointment Rules, this appointment be subject to the following conditions:

- that she should not draw on (disclose or use for the benefit of herself or the organisations to which this advice refers) any privileged information available to her from her time in Crown service; and
- for two years from her last day in Crown service, she should not become personally involved in lobbying the UK Government on behalf of Peas Please or the Food Foundation, or its partners. This does not preclude routine contact on matters aligned with Government policy relating to this role with Peas Please. However, it would prevent Ms Brown from making use, directly or indirectly, of her contacts in Government to influence policy or secure funding on behalf of Peas Please or the Food Foundation, or its partners.

By 'privileged information' we mean official information to which a Minister or Crown servant has had access as a consequence of his or her office or employment and which has not been made

publicly available. Applicants are also reminded that they may be subject to other duties of confidentiality, whether under the Official Secrets Act, the Civil Service Code or otherwise.

The Business Appointment Rules explain that the restriction on lobbying means that the former Crown servant/Minister "should not engage in communication with Government (Ministers, civil servants, including special advisers, and other relevant officials/public office holders) – wherever it takes place - with a view to influencing a Government decision, policy or contract award/grant in relation to their own interests or the interests of the organisation by which they are employed, or to whom they are contracted or with which they hold office.

I should be grateful if you would ensure that we are informed as soon as Ms Brown takes up this position, or if it is announced that she will do so (I enclose a form for this purpose). We shall otherwise not be able to deal with any enquiries, since we do not release information about appointments which have not been taken up or announced, and this could lead to a false assumption being made about whether he had complied with the Rules.

I should also be grateful if you would ask that Ms Brown informs us if she proposes to extend or otherwise change the nature of her role as, depending on the circumstances, it may be necessary for her to make a fresh application.

Once this appointment has been publicly announced or taken up, we will publish this letter on the Committee's website and include the main details of the application, together with the Advisory Committee's advice, in the regularly updated consolidated list on our website and in the next annual report.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Parkington
Committee Secretariat

