



OFFICE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS APPOINTMENTS

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September 2020

1. You approached the Committee about taking up an appointment as an External Advisor to MJM Marine Ltd.

The Committee's role and remit

2. As you will be aware, it is the Committee's role to advise on the conditions that should apply to appointments or employment under the Government's Business Appointments Rules for Former Ministers (the Rules), which apply to former Ministers for two years after they leave office. The Rules seek to counter suspicion that:
 - a. the decisions and statements of a serving Minister might be influenced by the hope or expectation of future employment with a particular firm or organisation; or
 - b. an employer could make improper use of official information to which a former Minister has had access; or
 - c. there may be cause for concern about the appointment in some other particular respect.
3. When the Committee considers applications, it must have in mind that Government has judged that it is in the public interest that former Ministers with experience in Government should be able to move into business or into other areas of public life, and to be able to start a new career or resume a former one. It is equally important that when a former Minister takes up a particular appointment or employment, there should be no cause for any suspicion of impropriety.
4. It is not the Committee's role to pass judgment on whether an appointment is appropriate or suitable in any other regard.

The Application

5. You informed the Committee you were seeking to join MJM Marine Ltd (MJM) as an External Advisor. MJM is a company based in Belfast which specialises in refurbishment and interior fitting for the marine, commercial and private sectors and cruise ship industry. Its clients include banks, hotels and universities. It covers a variety of different refurbishment services across these sectors with design, manufacturing and research and development

arms as well as associated property and renewables businesses.

6. You stated your role would be to provide advice on the development and expansion of the business. You stated this role would not involve any contact with your former Department or the Government more widely. You confirmed you had no contact with MJM whilst in office. You said you had no access to sensitive commercial or policy information relevant to MJM and that you had not been involved in any policy or contractual decisions that would have affected them whilst you were in office.

7. The NIO confirmed you had no contact with the company whilst in office, no involvement in policy decisions or development affecting MJM, and awarded no grants or contracts to the company. It confirmed there was nothing on record to suggest you had access to sensitive information that would provide a benefit to MJM. The NIO (Northern Ireland Office) further stated that MJM does not have any contractual relationship with the (NIO) or the Government however it has a stakeholder relationship as a large business in the area, and have therefore been present at Government round table events. Overall the Department registered no concerns about the appointment.

The Committee's consideration

8. The Committee considered that, as you did not meet with MJM whilst in office, or approve any funding or policy decisions that affected the company, the risk this appointment was offered as a result of decisions made for actions taken in office is low.

9. The Committee considered the risks associated with your access to sensitive information from your time in office. The NIO confirmed that you did not have access to sensitive policy or commercial information from your time in office. Therefore, your access to sensitive information is unlikely to construe an unfair advantage. The Committee would however draw your attention to the conditions below which would prevent you from using any privileged information you may have had access to.

10. As a former Minister, there are inherent risks with the contacts you have gained in office. However you have stated that you will not have contact with the Government and this role will be advisory. Given that MJM does maintain a stakeholder relationship with the NIO the Committee would draw your attention to the lobbying and bids and contracts bans below which makes it clear that it would be improper to make use of your contacts (directly or indirectly) to the unfair advantage of your employer, or advise on a bid or contract relating to the UK Government, or Northern Ireland Executive.

11. Under the Government's Business Appointment Rules, the Committee advises this appointment be made subject to the following conditions:

- that you should not draw on (disclose or use for the benefit of yourself or the organisations to which this advice refers) any privileged information available to you from your time in Ministerial office;
- for two years from your last day in Ministerial office, you should not become personally involved in lobbying the UK Government, including the Northern Ireland Executive, on behalf of MJM Group (including parent companies, subsidiaries, partners and clients). Nor should you make use, directly or indirectly, of your government and/or Ministerial contacts to influence policy, secure funding/business or otherwise unfairly benefit MJM Group (including parent companies, subsidiaries, partners and clients); and

- for two years from your last day in office you should not advise MJM Group (or its parent companies, subsidiaries, partners and clients) on the terms of, or with regard to the subject matter of, a bid or contract with, or relating directly to the work of the UK Government or Northern Ireland Executive.

12. The Committee also notes that in addition to the conditions imposed on this appointment, there are separate rules in place with regard to your role as a member of the House of Commons.

13. 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 Ministerial Code/Civil Service Code or otherwise.

14. 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.*"

15. I should be grateful if you would inform us as soon as you take up this appointment, or if it is announced that you will do so. We shall otherwise not be able to deal with any enquiries since we do not release information about appointments that have not been taken up or announced. This could lead to a false assumption being made about whether you had complied with the Ministerial Code. Similarly, I should be grateful if you would inform us if you propose to extend or otherwise change your role with the organisation as depending on the circumstances, it might be necessary for you to seek fresh advice.

16. Once this appointment has been publicly announced or taken up, we will publish this letter on the Committee's website, and where appropriate, refer to it in the relevant annual report.

The Rt Hon The Lord Pickles

The Rt Hon Julian Smith MP