



**OFFICE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS APPOINTMENTS**

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By email

22 March 2023

Dear Mr Brine

Thank you for your letter dated 18 March in response to the recent allegation in the media that you contacted government ministers and officials on behalf of Remedium Partners. At the time, you were in paid employment with the company; subject to the government's Business Appointment Rules (the Rules); and a sitting Member of Parliament.

The contents of your letter are noted. As you are aware, it is our policy to report breaches of the Rules, or ACOBA's advice, to the government - as owner of the Rules. ACOBA is aware of the ongoing investigation into these matters in relation to your role as an MP by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, opened on 15 March 2023<sup>1</sup> and will await the outcome of that investigation.

The correspondence between you and ACOBA on these matters will be published, in line with the Committee's policy of transparency. This will also allow the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to continue his investigation without prejudice.

In the meantime, our previous correspondence on related matters (between 26 July and 8 August 2022) is enclosed. This will be published on ACOBA's website

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/standards-and-financial-interests/parliamentary-commissioner-for-standards/complaints-and-investigations/allegations-currently-under-investigation-by-the-commissioner/>

alongside our most recent exchange of correspondence on this matter below (between 10 and 22 March 2023).

Yours ever  
Suie

The Rt Hon Lord Pickles

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**Correspondence from Mr Steve Brine MP to the Rt Hon Lord Pickles to dated 18 March 2023**

Dear Lord Pickles,

Thank you very much for your letter dated 10 March 2023.

I am clear, and fully accept, that the government's Business Appointment Rules – upon which ACOBA offer advice - exist to protect the integrity of government, Parliament and MPs. I realise you have a difficult job (and have heard some of your media interviews in recent weeks) so am sorry to add to your workload and that of your team at this time.

You ask two very specific questions.

Your letter states; "You told ACOBA that you forwarded an email from Remedium Partners to the Secretary of State for Health & Social Care in March 2020, but you were not employed by Remedium Partners at the time and had no reasonable expectation whatsoever of employment or future remuneration with the company. You also stated you did not have any involvement in preparation for, nor did you attend, a meeting between Remedium Partners and the Minister for Immigration."

The assurances I provided to ACOBA in July and August 2022 remain accurate and correct. I was not employed by Remedium Partners at the time, more than six-months had passed since I was and there was no reasonable expectation whatsoever on my part (or it must be said the Remedium management team at the time) I would ever do so again.

Following an unexpected management take-over, in July 2020, I was asked to reprise my role as a Strategic Advisor and sought ACOBA advice which you kindly provided.

For the record, I was an external advisor to Remedium asked to provide challenge to the Board with an outsiders' view and give occasional commentary on events in the Westminster village. I was not a lobbyist (Remedium is a very successful

business with no need for such) and I was very clear with them from the outset that it is not something I could do, nor did they ever ask for such.

Finally, for ease, Remedium work around the UK healthcare staffing crisis placing permanent clinicians with Trusts, helping them save on costly agency locum spend.

I hope this clarifies the timeline on engagement with the company early in this Parliament, the relationship we had and the work they do. I trust this will be helpful and useful background, given these exchanges are published and read out of context.

I have always been transparent and honest regarding my outside interests since leaving Government (in March 2019) because I understand the importance of this to the House and our profession.

These have been properly declared in the House of Commons' Register of Members' Financial Interests and as shown - **even in a brief WhatsApp message published in the media last week where I quoted, in terms, my personal connection to this company** - when I contacted the Minister for the Cabinet Office and the Chancellor for the Duchy of Lancaster to offer assistance in February 2021.

At the time any of these messages were sent, we were of course in a national crisis and Government Ministers / the NHS were regularly warning about serious shortages in acute care staff and issuing pleas for help. Former staff were even being asked to come out of retirement in the country's hour of need.

Specifically, on 26 January 2021, it was reported the chief executive of the NHS had told MPs; "The area we are most concerned about is cancer surgery." In particular, he said, there is "huge pressure on anaesthetists at the moment", being diverted to care for Covid patients in intensive care units. [1]

Remedium Partners' Managing Director called me to say they had fifty anaesthetists who could be brought into the UK immediately. They wanted to help given the comments of the head of the NHS and I know their intention, had it been followed up, was to do so pro-bono. **To be clear, there would have been no direct financial benefit to Remedium through offering this.** Accordingly, I sent the reported message on 2 February 2021 to Michael Gove MP which he must have forwarded to Matt Hancock MP.

This, for me, was about responding in the national interest at the worst of times. I could have ignored this but I was in a position to help by making a connection and I think it would have been negligent on my part to do anything else. **These were anything but normal times. I take the high duty MPs are under seriously and despite the challenges of the pandemic, I believe I met that obligation.**

But referring back, as we must, to ACOBA's advice of July 2019 (renewed in July 2020) about any alleged breach of the advice I accepted, I do want state the following.

My judgement at the time was the most important thing was to bring the offer to the

attention of Ministers. I genuinely did not believe that the intention of the specific restrictions placed upon me would prevent me taking the course I did.

And, for completeness, none of the fifty anaesthetists quoted in my original message to Mr Gove were eventually employed by the NHS.

It is very important to me that I act as a person of good character and positive motivation, and I hope my actions at this time were reasonable, understandable within the advice you gave and proportionate.

Yours,



[1] BBC NEWS report - 26 January 2021

12:22 26 Jan 2021

### **NHS chief 'most concerned' about cancer patients**

When coronavirus infections are high and hospitals fill up, it has a major knock-on effect on patients who need care for other conditions, including cancer.

Head of NHS England, Sir Simon Stevens, has told MPs he is particularly worried about patients who need cancer surgery.

There have been some reports of cancellations of urgent surgeries, which doctors have decided need to be carried out within a month – although this is not common.

Sir Stevens says: "The area we are most concerned about is cancer surgery. Chemotherapy and radiotherapy, I think, are continuing and for the most part in an uninterrupted fashion."

The health service is doing "everything possible" to keep these services going, he says.

But this is a challenge when three-quarters of intensive care beds are being used by Covid patients, and a quarter of all hospital beds, he says.

While more space and beds can be found, particularly in the private sector, Sir Stevens says the availability of staff is one of the biggest blocks.

In particular there is "huge pressure on anaesthetists at the moment", being diverted to care for Covid patients in intensive care units, Sir Simon says.

And the surgeons and anaesthetics working in the private sector are "generally the same people who are working for NHS".

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**Correspondence from the Rt Hon Lord Pickles to Mr Steve Brine MP dated 10 March 2023**



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By email

10 March 2023

Dear Mr Brine

I am writing in my capacity as Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (ACOBA), with reference to recent media articles<sup>2</sup> about your ongoing contact with the government and the NHS on behalf of Remedium Partners in February 2021 and the months preceding.

The media reports allege, and your WhatsApp messages suggest, you lobbied the chief executive of the NHS and ministers on behalf of Remedium Partners. Specifically that in February 2021 you were in contact with Michael Gove, the Minister for the Cabinet Office and the Chancellor for the Duchy of Lancaster, to discuss Remedium Partners and its work; and that you were in contact with other ministers and leaders within the NHS for '*months*'. The WhatsApp message quoted in the media references your personal connection to the company.

The House of Commons' Register of Members' Financial Interests<sup>3</sup> states that you were working with Remedium Partners as a Strategic Adviser at the time (from 1 July 2020 until 31 December 2021).

The government's Business Appointment Rules (the Rules) exist to protect the integrity of government. The Rules seek to consider and mitigate various risks associated with movement out of government service. A major consideration is the

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/03/09/steve-brine-covid-lobbying-claim-referred-watchdog/>

<sup>3</sup><https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmregmem/220503/220503.pdf>

risk a former minister could offer an advantage or unfair access to an organisation through privileged access to contacts and influence gained from government service. To help mitigate this particular risk, there is a ban on former ministers lobbying the government for two years on leaving office as set out in the Ministerial Code at paragraph 7.25<sup>4</sup>.

You requested advice from ACOBA in May 2019 though you later informed ACOBA this work '*never really got going before – and then there was a General Election etc – so [you] dropped it*' but that as of July 2020 you would be returning to Remedium Partners '*...in exactly the same terms as before*'. ACOBA advised its previous restrictions still stood<sup>5</sup>. These restrictions made it clear that you must not make use of your contacts in government to make representations on behalf of your employer, Remedium Partners.

The ongoing contact with government officials and ministers as described, appears to be a clear breach of both the Rules and the advice you accepted<sup>6</sup>.

Further, your actions appear to be incompatible with assurances you provided to ACOBA in relation to a previous allegation (in July 2022) of lobbying the government on behalf of Remedium Partners<sup>7</sup>. You told ACOBA that you forwarded an email from Remedium Partners to the Secretary of State for Health & Social Care in March 2020, but you were not employed by Remedium Partners at the time and had no reasonable expectation whatsoever of employment or future remuneration with the company. You also stated you did not have any involvement in preparation for, nor did you attend, a meeting between Remedium Partners and the Minister for Immigration.

The Committee seeks an explanation for:

- your apparent failure to follow its advice and the Rules; and
- the veracity of the assurances you offered in July and August 2022 that you had not lobbied the government whilst in receipt of payment for work with Remedium Partners.

In line with our policy of transparency, we will be publishing our correspondence in due course. I would be grateful for a reply to this letter by Friday 18 March. Your

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<sup>4</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1126632/Ministerial\\_Code.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1126632/Ministerial_Code.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>The Business Appointment Rules apply to all former ministers for 2 years on leaving office. As you left your role as Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Public Health and Primary Care in March 2019, you were subject to the Rules and relevant advice at the time of the WhatsApp exchange reported.

<sup>6</sup>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1049501/Remedium\\_Partners\\_letter.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1049501/Remedium_Partners_letter.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/covid-19-lobbying-of-matt-hancock-didnt-break-rules-says-former-minister-steve-brine-nw80bzhp5>

correspondence or any failure to respond will be included in our publication. Correspondence will also be copied to the Cabinet Office, as the owner of the Rules.

*Yours ever*  
*Elie*

The Rt Hon Lord Pickles