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Rt Hon Lord Pickles
Advisory Committee on Business
Appointments
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

20 April 2023

By email: acoba@acoba.gov.uk

Dear Lord Pickles,

Thank you for your letter of 27 January to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, relating to Nadine Dorries' employment at TalkTV. I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The Cabinet Office agrees with the Committee's assessment that Ms Dorries has not adhered to the Business Appointment Rules by failing to seek the Committee's advice in advance of her engagement as a TalkTV programme presenter. Ms Dorries should have sought ACoBA's advice before entering into that engagement, and announcing her role in public. It is vital that all individuals who have held Ministerial positions abide by the requirement, which is set out in the Ministerial Code, to seek advice about any appointments or employment they wish to take up within two years of leaving office.

I note the Committee's assessment 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. Due to the highly visible nature of the role, and Ms Dorries' lack of involvement in any commercial activities for TalkTV's business, I agree with the Committee's advice that further action would be disproportionate in this case. I have also taken into account the importance of journalism and of free speech; the business appointments process is not intended to restrict unnecessarily how former Ministers may continue to contribute to public debate. The very public nature of this role, and the required declaration of any paid activity in the House of Commons' Register of Members' Financial Interests has also informed my decision, as there is clearly no suggestion that the activity in question is covert or hidden.

As you are aware, the Cabinet Office is working with your Committee to improve the operation and efficacy of the Business Appointment Rules. Reflecting the comments in your correspondence, this will include assessing whether or not the updated Rules should specifically exclude journalism and media appearances due to the typically limited risk of these types of appointments, as well as an assessment of the range of sanctions available, and also how business appointment conditions should be proportionate to risk.

I would like to thank the Committee for your ongoing work on these matters.

Warm regards

Lucy Neville-Rolfe

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