



OFFICE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS APPOINTMENTS

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BUSINESS APPOINTMENT APPLICATION: George Freeman MP, former Minister of State for Science, Research and Innovation. Paid appointment with Eastern Powerhouse.

1. You approached the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments (the Committee) under the government's Business Appointments Rules for Former Ministers (the Rules) seeking advice on taking up a paid role as the Chair of Science and Technology Advisory Board for Eastern Powerhouse.
2. The purpose of the Rules is to protect the integrity of the government. The Committee has considered the risks associated with the actions and decisions made during your time in office, alongside the information and influence you may offer Eastern Powerhouse, as a former minister. The material information taken into consideration by the Committee is set out in the annex.
3. The Committee's advice is not an endorsement of the appointment - it imposes a number of conditions to mitigate the potential risks to the government associated with the appointment under the Rules.
4. The Ministerial Code sets out that ministers must abide by the Committee's advice. It is an applicant's personal responsibility to manage the propriety of any appointment. Former ministers of the Crown, and Members of Parliament, are expected to uphold the highest standards of propriety and act in accordance with the 7 Principles of Public Life.

The Committee's consideration of the risks presented

5. Although you have been a public champion of Eastern Powerhouse and other regional clusters, this has been in your role as a constituency MP. You did not make any decisions relevant to Eastern Powerhouse whilst you were in office.

Therefore, the Committee¹ considered that the risk this role could reasonably be seen as a reward for your decisions in office is low.

6. As Minister of State for Science, Research and Innovation at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT), you will have had access to privileged information on scientific, technological and industrial policies and priorities of the UK government. DSIT was not aware of any specific information you have had access to that would offer an unfair advantage and it has been four months since you last had access to information as a minister.
7. There are risks associated with your influence and network of contacts gained whilst in ministerial office. In particular, this is an organisation that is interested in government policy and decisions relating to the East of England, for example major infrastructure projects or support and/or funding for particular industries and/or areas. You noted you have made it clear to Eastern Powerhouse that you will not lobby government on its behalf, and this will not form part of your role. Further, your role is focussed on partnerships with the private sector. There is a risk if you were to draw specifically on contacts in the private sector that you only gained as a result of your role as Minister of State for Science, Research and Innovation. The Committee also recognised you have a background in a similar area outside of your time in government and will likely have a network from this experience that you can draw upon.

The Committee's advice

8. The Committee considered conditions below are sufficient to mitigate the risks related to this role. These seek to prevent you from making use of privileged information, contacts and influence gained from your recent time in ministerial office to the unfair advantage of Eastern Powerhouse and its members.
9. In accordance with the government's Business Appointment Rules, the Committee advises this appointment with **Eastern Powerhouse** be subject to the following conditions:
 - you should not draw on (disclose or use for the benefit of yourself or the persons or organisations to which this advice refers) any privileged information available to you from your time in ministerial office;

¹ This application for advice was considered by Andrew Cumpsty; Isabel Doverty; The Rt Hon Baroness Jones of Whitchurch; The Rt Hon Lord Eric Pickles; Michael Prescott; and Mike Weir. Hedley Finn OBE, Sarah de Gay and Dawid Konotey-Ahulu CBE DL were unavailable.

- for two years from your last day in ministerial office, you should not become personally involved in lobbying the UK government or any of its arm's length bodies on behalf of Eastern Powerhouse (including parent companies, subsidiaries, partners and clients); nor should you make use, directly or indirectly, of your contacts in the government and/or ministerial office to influence policy, secure business/funding or otherwise unfairly advantage Eastern Powerhouse (including parent companies, subsidiaries, partners and clients);
- for two years from your last day in ministerial office, you should not provide advice to on behalf of Eastern Powerhouse (including parent companies, subsidiaries, partners and clients) on the terms of, or with regard to the subject matter of, a bid with, or contract relating directly to the work of the UK government or any of its arm's length bodies;
- for two years from your last day in ministerial office, you should not become personally involved in lobbying contacts you developed during your time in office in other governments and organisations for the purpose of securing membership to Eastern Powerhouse.

10. The advice and the conditions under the government's Business Appointment Rules relate to your previous role in government only; there are separate rules administered by other bodies such as the Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and the Registrar of Lords' Interests². You are reminded that as a Member of Parliament you have a separate ban on paid lobbying under the Parliamentary Code of Conduct. It is an applicant's personal responsibility to understand any other rules and regulations they may be subject to in parallel with this Committee's advice.

11. 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.

12. 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*

² All Peers and Members of Parliament are prevented from paid lobbying under the the House of Commons Code of Conduct and the Code of Conduct for Members of the House of Lords. Advice on your obligations under the Code can be sought from the Parliamentary Commissioners for Standards, in the case of MPs, or the Registrar of Lords' Interests, in the case of peers

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."

13. You must inform us as soon as you take up employment with this organisation(s), or if it is announced that you will do so. Please also inform us if you propose to extend or otherwise change the nature of your role as, depending on the circumstances, it may be necessary for you to make a fresh application.
14. Once the 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 Lord Pickles

Annex- material information

The role

1. You said Eastern Powerhouse is a project run by ResPublica³. Eastern Powerhouse's website says it is a business-led, membership body that represents the East of England. Its membership also includes local councils and educational establishments. Its goal is to drive economic growth, investment in skills, innovation, and transport to enhance productivity across the region. It collaborates with the private sector, universities, colleges, local authorities, and political parties.
2. ResPublica's website says that it is an independent non-partisan think tank. It *'...seeks to establish a new economic, social and cultural settlement for the United Kingdom'*. ResPublica will provide the executive and secretariat functions for the Eastern Powerhouse as well as its policy research and advocacy function. It is funded through membership fees - to support the research projects and reports, staff costs and overheads, including media and advocacy for any research.
3. You wish to take up a paid role as Chair of the Science and Technology Advisory Board. You said your responsibilities will include helping:
 - identify private sector members
 - develop a coherent business plan and investment proposition for a business-led economic development plan for the Eastern region

You said you have made it clear to Eastern Powerhouse that you will not

³ <https://www.respublica.org.uk/>

lobby government on its behalf.

4. You said you considered this as returning to a former career where you worked for 15 years prior to becoming an MP and then a minister. You said your previous work focussed on science and technology consulting, corporate finance advisory, and investing. You worked for the Cambridge Cluster⁴ from 1996 to 2010, founding and financing high growth technology companies and promoted industries in biology and life sciences.

Dealings in office

5. You did not meet with the Eastern Powerhouse in your role as a minister. You have met with the organisation in your capacity as an MP and told the Committee:
 - you have supported the work of the Eastern Powerhouse and you are an advocate for regional clusters across the country⁵.
 - you said that in the last two years, you have spoken as a guest of honour at the Eastern Powerhouse event on the Eastern region innovation economy.
 - you are quoted on Eastern Powerhouse's website, along with other ministers and MPs, discussing the importance of promoting business in the East of England⁶.
 - you said that you have attended occasional political/ think tank events run by ResPublica.
6. You said that you did not make any policy, regulatory or commercial decisions specific to the Eastern Powerhouse whilst in office.

Departmental assessment

7. DSIT said that you did not meet with the Eastern Powerhouse in your capacity as Minister of State for Research, Science and Innovation. It confirmed that you attended the Eastern Powerhouse launch in March 2022 in your role as MP for Mid Norfolk. DSIT confirmed that it does not have a departmental relationship with Eastern Powerhouse.
8. DSIT said that you did not make any policy, regulatory or commercial decisions relevant to Eastern Powerhouse whilst in office. It considered the risks regarding your access to information are limited - it was not aware of any information you have that would offer it an unfair advantage.

⁴ <https://www.cambridgenetwork.co.uk/the-network/cambridge-cluster>

⁵ <https://www.georgefreeman.co.uk/norfolks-innovation-economy>

⁶ <https://www.easternpowerhouse.uk/>

9. DSIT recommended standard conditions.