

10 December

Sir Gus O'Donnell  
Head of the Home Civil Service  
Cabinet Office  
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### REPORTING OF GIFTS FOR SPECIAL ADVISERS

I understand that whilst giving evidence under oath at the Tommy Sheridan perjury trial on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> December, the Prime Minister's Communications Director, Mr Andy Coulson, appeared to state that media organisation News International was paying his legal fees.

Paying legal fees amounts to a gift. Please confirm that the gift has been registered in line with the Cabinet Office's reporting guidelines. Please also tell me the date on which Mr Coulson registered this payment as a gift.

The Committee of Standards in Public Life in Annex B of its Seven Principles states: "Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties".

Given Mr Coulson's role, it seems inconceivable that this principle will not be breached with the payment of legal fees by News International.

In the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers, rewritten we are told by the Prime Minister himself, in June 2010, it also states: "[Special Advisers] should not receive benefits of any kind which others might reasonably see as compromising their judgement or integrity".

I would like your view on whether the payment represents a breach of the Civil Service Code or Principles of Standards in Public Life. I am sure many reasonable minded people would see the payment as compromising Mr Coulson.

I think it is also important that you clarify precisely what nature of financial support Mr Coulson has received, or expects to receive, from News International to help cover his legal fees.

Thank you in advance for your help with this matter. I look forward to your response as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Tom Watson  
Member of Parliament for West Bromwich East