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Ivan Lewis MP
Shadow Secretary of State for
Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport
House of Commons
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22 July 2011

Dear Mr Lewis,

Thank you for your letter of 21 July about Mr. Coulson.

Taking each of your points in turn.

Neither the Deputy Prime Minister nor the Royal Household raised any concerns with me or officials either before or during Mr. Coulson's period of employment as a special adviser. I have to admit to being somewhat surprised to be asked about Buckingham Palace when they have already clearly said, "On no occasion did any officials from Buckingham Palace raise concerns to Downing Street and indeed it is outrageous to suggest this."

Neither were any concerns raised with me by the Prime Minister or any other special advisers about Mr. Coulson's conduct in previous employment.

On records for the Inquiry, Government has a long-established set of procedures for ensuring Inquiries have access to the paperwork they require, including emails.

Neither I nor my officials or No10 special advisers were informed that the Metropolitan Police intended to begin Operation Weeting in advance of the Police announcement.

On the issue of interaction with the police you will be aware that I have made clear that I feel that the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff acted entirely properly in his exchange with John Yates. You will be aware that in his evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee, John Yates said "The offer was properly and understandably rejected". This is due to the long-standing principle that government should not be drawn into matters of operational independence of the police. You will also be aware that this has been the case under all administrations regardless of the nature of the case, with the only exception being national security issues. I did not issue guidance about this.

I have not done a check around Whitehall about whether Neil Wallis or any of his companies have ever received any monies from the public purse but you will of course be aware that non-trivial Government transactions are now made public. I can also confirm that Neil Wallis was not employed or contracted by the Cabinet Office or Downing Street.

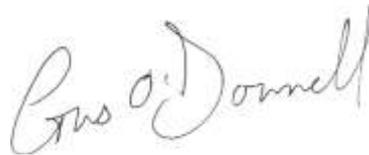


On vetting, you appear to have a misunderstanding about the purpose of security vetting which is about access to information not suitability for a job. As you know, Mr. Coulson was cleared to SC level which allowed him access to Secret papers. This is one level below DV and higher than the CT and baseline security checks, the two levels lower down. Developed Vetting (DV) is required only for individuals who require frequent access to the highest classification material. Only a very small number of individuals are DV cleared even within No10 and the Cabinet Office. Decisions on vetting are taken by the No10 Permanent Secretary who decided that he wanted to keep the number of staff in No10 with access to the most secret material as low as possible. DV is also a long and very resource intensive process and should therefore only be used where there is a clear business requirement for doing so. I am happy to confirm that I fully support the decision not to require DV at the outset.

However, clearances are kept under review and can be upgraded at any time. Following a well publicised counter terrorism incident at East Midlands airport it was decided that Mr. Coulson should undergo DV given the importance of communications in handling a terrorist incident. This process was started in November and can take up to 6 months to complete. Obviously it had not been completed by the time of Mr. Coulson's departure at the end of January. However, I can assure you that Mr. Coulson was very happy to participate fully in securing DV. The decision on timing of this process was taken purely on the basis of business requirements and his resignation had nothing to do with this process.

As requested in your letter, I am making mine public.

Yours sincerely,



Gus O'Donnell

