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HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR CAMBERWELL AND PECKHAM
SHADOW SECRETARY OF STATE FOR CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT
SHADOW DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

John Whittingdale MP
Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee
7 Millbank
House of Commons
London SW1P 3JA

3 May 2012

Dear John,

As you will know, there has been a great deal of concern in the House, and more widely, about the way the Department for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport handled the News Corporation bid for BSkyB.

Specifically, there is concern about the contact between Adam Smith and News Corporation and the process whereby a political appointee came to be playing a role in a quasi-judicial decision.

In the House on 30 April 2012, Gerry Sutcliffe MP asked the Prime Minister when Members would have the opportunity to put questions to the Permanent Secretary. The Prime Minister replied:

in this House, our Select Committee, excellently chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale), is able to call, whenever it likes, whatever civil servants it likes and to ask those questions.

Hansard, 30 April 2012, column 1252

There are a number of questions for the Permanent Secretary which remain unanswered:

- in view of the fact that it was a quasi-judicial decision, how he came to the view that it was appropriate for a Special Adviser, a political appointee, to be a contact point between the Department and News Corporation
- given the email from Frederic Michel to James Murdoch sent at 11.32am on 15 November 2010 and released by the Leveson Inquiry on 24 April 2012, which says Jeremy Hunt was given 'very strong legal advice' not to meet News Corporation that day and that 'the Permanent Secretary has now also been involved', what was that involvement
- given these evident concerns, whether he thought it was appropriate for the Secretary of State to take on the responsibility for what was a quasi-judicial decision, and if not, whether he raised his concerns with anyone
- whether he gave prior approval to Adam Smith being a contact point with News Corporation, or whether he found out that Adam Smith was in fact in contact with News Corporation and subsequently approved it
- what were the 'clear requirements' that were given to guide Adam Smith's work in this respect and when were they given
- what were the arrangements, if any, to supervise compliance with these 'clear requirements'.

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