

Leveson

1. Who you are and a brief summary of your career history.

I began my career working as a junior journalist at Scottish Television, in 1992, before becoming a 'Trainee' at ITN nine months later. While there I spent time at ITV News, 5 News and Channel 4 News, editing various programmes. My final role at ITN was Head of Output at ITV News. In 2006 I moved to the BBC, where I became Editor of the BBC News at Ten and BBC News at Six. I was the Editor of BBC News' election night programme in 2010, which ended up being extended for several days because of the negotiations to form a Coalition Government. My final role at the BBC was Controller of Global News, responsible for the World Service in English, BBC World News, and bbc.com/news. In February 2011 I accepted the role of Government Director of Communications.

2. Please provide the Inquiry with a full account of all matters relevant to the process of your appointment as Director of Communications for the Conservative Party, together with all relevant documentation. Without prejudice to the generality of this request, your account should in particular include details of:

a) The first approach you received, and the first steps you proactively took, in relation to this matter;

For the record, I am not the Director of Communications for the Conservative Party, my title is Government Director of Communications. I have attached a full copy of my contract for this position.

In January 2011 I received a text from Andy Coulson after he had announced that he was resigning from the post of Government Director of Communications, asking if I would be interested in being considered for the role. I contacted him to say I would be interested to hear more about it and what it would entail and waited to hear.

A few days later, I was contacted by and met with Ed Llewellyn, the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, at the PM's request. We discussed the role and my suitability for it on two separate occasions. I was then invited to an interview with George Osborne, and a separate one with David Cameron. I was offered the job, and - after a subsequent

meeting to discuss terms and conditions with Ed Llewellyn and Sue Gray, the Civil Service's Head of Propriety and Ethics - I accepted.

b) The details of the appointment process, including:

i) The extent to which you represented, or others represented on your behalf, that your previous and continuing connections with the BBC should be regarded as advantageous in the new post;

During this process I was told that my experience of working at a high level in mainstream news would be an advantage in the role – specifically a knowledge of how the news cycle tends to work, and the type of stories that are and are not of interest. My knowledge of the BBC was seen as an advantage, but no more than the fact that I spent the first thirteen years of my career at ITN, working at ITV News, Channel 4 News, and 5 News.

ii) The extent to which you were asked about, disclosed, and took any steps in relation to any potential for conflicts of interest relating to your new post;

I was asked if there were any conflicts of interest by Sue Gray, and I informed her that my wife is a writer and freelance presenter/journalist – with a company called Paya Ltd. I stepped down from my role as Secretary to that company before taking up the appointment.

iii) The extent to which you were subjected to any vetting or clearance processes, either at the time or subsequently; and

Before taking up the post I underwent national security vetting to Security Check (SC) level. This involved detailed checks of my background, credit history, Police records etc and allowed access to sensitive government information (up to occasional Top Secret material).

After taking on the job I went through the more intensive Developed Vetting (DV) process, the highest level of national security vetting, involving long interviews with me, family, friends and previous employers, as well as thorough background checks and a full review of my personal finances.

c) Your job description and the terms and conditions of your appointment.

I was not provided with a specific job description – however I was given a detailed contract (attached at the end of this submission). The code of conduct included in this document sets out the work Special Advisers can and cannot do.

3. The Inquiry understands that you were the successor to Andy Coulson. Upon taking up the appointment, what changes if any were made to the nature and remit of the role of Director of Communications? What initial assessment did you make of the way in which the role had previously been undertaken? Did you make any changes upon taking up the role, or thereafter?

There were no changes to the nature and remit of the role of Director of Communications when I was employed, or subsequently. It was clear from the start that the job fell into to three key parts:

- keeping across day-to-day events
- focusing on the long term strategy of the Government
- ensuring effective communication of Government policy in the short and long term.

It was clear from when I began that Andy Coulson had a reputation for being highly professional in the role – that reputation seemed more than justified.

I did however make some changes, such as to the meeting structure, including:

- an 815am Press Office conference involving myself, Olly Grender (the Lib Dem Deputy Director of Communications), Gabby Bertin (the Prime Minister's Political Press Secretary), Steve Field (the Prime Minister's Official Spokesman) and various other Special Advisers and No10 Press Officers. This meeting is designed to run through the key issues of the day and ensure we have the right lines to take, and people available to brief/do interviews. Following this meeting, I go to the Prime Minister's 830am morning meeting, where a standing agenda item is media issues. This is made up of my observations after reading the newspapers, listening to the radio and watching the television.

- A 530pm meeting (with a similar cast list to the 815am meeting), designed to review the day, work out any urgent issues, and look forward to the next day
- A weekly strategy meeting at 5pm on a Thursday to look at forthcoming major issues.

4. Please give the Inquiry an account of the approach you take to your work as Director of Communications. The Inquiry is interested to understand your perspective on what you consider to be your operational priorities and your methods of delivering on those priorities; your relationship with David Cameron and other senior members of the Conservative Party; and how you go about leading the organisation you are in charge of, including setting the tone for its organisational culture and business focus.

My approach to the role of Director of Communications is as follows:

It is important to both have a full understanding of:

- how all mainstream media, and some specialist media covers the Government.
- and a detailed understanding of Government policy and its strategy for delivering it.

Ensuring that I keep across both of these areas is vital for formulating the lines the Prime Minister and Ministers take as well as their long term media interventions.

It is also important that I am able to keep across the breaking news agenda, to judge when it is appropriate for our lines to change, to decide if we need to put up ministers for interview, and rebut inaccurate reports.

The danger is spending so much time on longer term strategy and messaging that you miss the importance of breaking news, or that you get so drawn towards breaking news that you miss the importance of setting out a long term strategy.

I interact with the Prime Minister on a very regular basis. As well as his twice daily team meetings, there are a range of other meetings, e-mails, texts and phone calls.

It is very unusual if there is a day when I do not have some contact with him (including weekends).

In terms of setting the tone for organisational culture and business focus, we aim to ensure we behave in a manner that is accurate, honest, fast, and courteous.

5. Please describe for the Inquiry the approach you personally take to engaging with newspaper proprietors, including:

(a) the extent to which that engagement is conducted formally or socially, including the extent of any hospitality you give, receive or participate in;

I have not had any engagement with newspaper proprietors since starting this job (I understand the word ‘proprietor’ to mean owners).

It is common for me to meet newspaper and broadcast editors, and these are declared on a quarterly basis (I have attached a list).

Meetings range from dinners and lunches, to coffees and drinks.

Occasionally I also phone an editor to discuss a particular story or upcoming issue. Similarly, they may occasionally call me to raise concerns.

On a day to day level it is common for me to speak to newspaper or broadcast political editors – usually by phone. These conversations are designed to brief them, or answer their questions on events and Government policy.

Every week I speak to a range of commentators.

Since taking up the job, I have also met with representatives of Google and Facebook.

(b) the nature, frequency and purpose of your engagement with Rupert Murdoch, James Murdoch, Rebekah Brooks and other representatives of News International;

I have never had a meeting of any kind with Rupert or James Murdoch. I did accept their invitation to their summer reception in June 2011.

On May 9th, 2011 I visited Wapping to have lunch and met Rebekah Brooks, Dominic Mohan and Will Lewis for the first time. I have had no further meetings with Rebekah Brooks or Will Lewis.

As my quarterly declarations show, I have had the following meetings with News International Editors:

- Sunday Times Editor, John Witherow
 - o Drink, April 2011
 - o Drink coming up – May 2012
- The Times Editor, James Harding
 - o Lunch, April 2011
 - o Interview with PM, October 2011
 - o Conference breakfast, October 2011
- The Sun Editor, Dominic Mohan
 - o Lunch, May 2011
 - o Dinner, May 2011
 - o Conference dinner, October 2011
 - o Drink coming up – May 2012
- News of the World Editor, Colin Myler
 - o Lunch, April 2011

I have had much more frequent contact with the Political Editors of each of these newspapers, usually in the form of a coffee, drink or phone call. I speak on a weekly basis with Martin Ivens, the Sunday Times Columnist, and I have had less frequent conversations with the columnists Rachel Sylvester and Danny Finklestein.

All of these engagements have been for the purpose of briefing journalists on Government business.

At the Conservative Party Conference last year I attended a breakfast meeting between the Prime Minister and James Harding, and a dinner with Dominic Mohan, Trevor Kavanagh and Tom Newton-Dunn.

I have also met Fred Michel, Public Affairs Executive at News International.

(c) How that compares with your engagement with the senior representatives of other newspaper groups

My contact with News International was not proportionately greater than with representatives of other newspaper groups, or indeed broadcasters. See quarterly declarations in appendix.

Craig Oliver.