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Sir Mark Philip Sedwill
Cabinet Secretary
By email

Dear Sir Mark,

I am writing to you in your capacity both as Head of the Civil Service and Cabinet Secretary, following the press conference given yesterday by special adviser Dominic Cummings.

This appears to be a clear breach of the Special Advisers: Code of Conduct which states at paragraph 14:

"Special advisers must not take public part in political controversy, through any form of statement whether in speeches or letters to the press, or in books, social media, articles or leaflets. They must observe discretion and express comment with moderation, avoiding personal attacks, and would not normally speak in public for their Minister or the Department."

Please can you tell me who authorised yesterday's press conference, and on what grounds it was permitted, given the code is so clear that special advisers must not take part in political controversy through any form of statement?

During the press conference Mr Cummings also said that he had written articles stating: "For years, I have warned of pandemics".

This appears to refer to a personal blog written by Mr Cummings last year. However it has now emerged from Mr Cummings' own sitemap that the original post published in March 2019 was edited last month to add a section on the risk to the Coronavirus pandemic.

If this edit was carried out by Mr Cummings it would also surely constitute a breach of the special advisers code as it would be clearly politically controversial to amend an article in this way while he was a special adviser.

In view of the fact that there must be a clear division between party political events and the expenditure of public money I would also ask for a justification of the press conference being held on public property, namely the Downing Street garden and for clarity that there was no cost to the taxpayer. And I would seek reassurance that no civil servants were involved in supporting the event.

As Cabinet Secretary, we depend on you to defend the independence of the civil service and to ensure that the role of special advisers is subject to appropriate boundaries. It is my clear view that the public controversy surrounding the role of Dominic Cummings breaks both the letter and the spirit of the relationship between elected politicians and staff who work on behalf of the public within the government machine.

Please would you investigate and treat this as a formal complaint against Mr Cummings.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jonathan Bartley". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

Jonathan Bartley
Co-leader
Green Party of England and Wales