



House of Commons
Digital, Culture, Media and
Sport Committee

Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP

**Fourth Special Report of Session
2022–23**

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The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee

The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

[Julian Knight MP](#) (*Conservative, Solihull*) (Chair)

[Kevin Brennan MP](#) (*Labour, Cardiff West*)

[Steve Brine MP](#) (*Conservative, Winchester*)

[Clive Efford MP](#) (*Labour, Eltham*)

[Julie Elliott MP](#) (*Labour, Sunderland Central*)

[Rt Hon Damian Green MP](#) (*Conservative, Ashford*)

[Dr Rupa Huq MP](#) (*Independent, Ealing Central and Acton*)

[Simon Jupp MP](#) (*Conservative, East Devon*)

[John Nicolson MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, Ochil and South Perthshire*)

[Jane Stevenson MP](#) (*Conservative, Wolverhampton North East*)

[Giles Watling MP](#) (*Conservative, Clacton*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No. 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

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Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Rosie Akeroyd (Committee Specialist), Andy Boyd (Committee Operations Manager), Joe Briggs (Committee Specialist), Dr Conor Durham (Committee Specialist), Ollie Florence (Senior Media and Communications Officer), Dr Stephen McGinness (Clerk), Seb Newman (Second Clerk), Billy Roberts (Media & Communications Officer) and Shekera Rowe (Committee Operations Assistant).

Contacts

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You can follow the Committee on Twitter using [@CommonsDCMS](https://twitter.com/CommonsDCMS).

Report

Summary

1. This Special Report informs the House of the failure of the former Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Nadine Dorries MP to reconsider the authority of her sources or provide corroboration for evidence she gave to the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee on 19 May 2022. Her comments concerned a documentary series broadcast on Channel 4 in 2010, *Tower Block of Commons*.

Background

2. In 2010, the then Secretary of State Nadine Dorries and four other MPs participated in the four-part documentary series *Tower Block of Commons*, in which the Members spent time living in deprived housing estates across Britain. Ms Dorries lived in the South Acton estate in west London, with each programme documenting how she and other Members engaged with residents. The series was produced by Love Productions and broadcast on Channel 4 in February 2010.

Claims made by Ms Dorries

3. When she appeared before the Committee on 15 May 2022 as part of the Committee's regular scrutiny sessions with the Department, Ms Dorries claimed that some of the residents featured in the programme were actors. She told the Committee that:

The parents of some of the boys in that programme contacted me and came here to have lunch to tell me that the boys were in acting school. They were not really living in a flat—they were not real. They were actually actors... If you remember, there was a pharmacist I went to see who prepared food; she was also a paid actor as well.¹

4. In response, Channel 4 asked Love Productions to investigate Ms Dorries' claims. The production company interviewed many of those involved in the making of the series, including contributors and crew, and reviewed 85 hours of raw footage.² Channel 4 reported that these contributors included "ordinary members of the public and with whom the Secretary of State had significant interaction".³ The investigation was overseen by external lawyers.

5. Committee chair Julian Knight MP also wrote to Ms Dorries on 1 July 2022, asking her to provide corroboration and to correct the record if needed. He wrote that:

The Committee needs to ensure that those who give evidence before it do so with the intent of providing the truth as far as they know it. The Ministerial Code counts in Committee in exactly the same manner as it might in the Chamber and the Code is quite clear that should a Minister provide information that is not correct, they should, at the earliest opportunity,

1 Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (19 May 2022) [oral evidence Q67](#)

2 Channel 4 (15 July 2022), [Channel 4's statement on Tower Block of Commons | Channel 4](#)

3 Channel 4 (15 July 2022), [Channel 4's statement on Tower Block of Commons | Channel 4](#)

correct the record... The Committee, therefore, would like you to provide us with some corroboration of the events in question and if, on reflection, you may have misremembered that you write to us to correct the record.⁴

6. On 15 July, Channel 4 announced the result of Love Productions' investigation, as well as its own review of the production company's findings and its own internal document review. It issued a brief statement:

Neither Love Productions' investigation nor Channel 4's internal inquiries revealed any evidence to support the allegations made about the programme.⁵

Channel 4 provided further detail to this Committee that is published on our website and is included in the Annex of correspondence in this Report.

7. On 19 July, Ms Dorries replied to the Committee's letter of 1 July, stating that:

I set out my experiences on taking part in the programme in my comments during the Select Committee and stand by those remarks. I do not wish to add anything further at this time.⁶

8. On 23 September 2022, Committee chair Julian Knight wrote again to Ms Dorries, giving her a second opportunity to correct the record, writing that:

When you told us about the *Tower Block of Commons* using actors instead of real people the shock among the Committee must have been evident to you, it indicated a deception perpetrated on the viewing public. The subsequent reaction of the television companies involved and the people in the programme shows that they also took the claim seriously. The weight of evidence provided to us, including sight of the internal Channel 4 report, now suggests that your recollection of the show is flawed.⁷

Mr Knight told Ms Dorries that the Committee was now having to decide whether her claims were "now not an inadvertent mistake but a deliberate attempt to mislead the Committee". He gave Ms Dorries another opportunity to reconsider "your claims about the programme and acknowledge that your recollection may have been wrong or to provide evidence that you are correct". Ms Dorries responded on 11 October by email. She noted that she would "lay out again, for the sake of clarity what took place".

Following the screening of TBoC, one of the young men from the 'homeless young men' section of the programme called my office manager and asked if he could visit parliament. My office manager thinks it may actually have been his mother who called to ask and I vaguely remember speaking to her on the phone. However, not enough to recall the conversation, only the request.

4 Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (1 July 2022), [Correspondence with Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP](#)

5 Channel 4 (15 July 2022), [Channel 4's statement on Tower Block of Commons | Channel 4](#). Channel 4 declined the Committee's request to publish a summary of Love Production's investigation but provided further details of how the investigation was conducted. The letter, dated 17 October 2022, is attached in the Annex to this Report.

6 Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (19 July 2022), [Correspondence with Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP](#)

7 Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee (23 September 2022), [Correspondence with Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP](#)

He came, did the tour and my office manager and I had lunch with him afterwards in Portcullis House.

He told us during lunch that he had not in fact been homeless at all, was an actor, that other boys in the section were too and that he lived at home in North London with his mother. She had also been in the programme and prepared food in a small section towards the end and worked in a pharmacy in North London.

Given that the young man whose name I cannot remember - this was twelve years ago - was well dressed, articulate and well educated, I had no doubt at all that what he was telling me was factual and truthful.

Our conclusion

9. We are disappointed with Ms Dorries reluctance to engage with the Committee on this matter. Ms Dorries at first refused to reconsider her claims and her subsequent clarifications introduce more confusion than they resolve.

- In the Committee she talks about meeting boys in a flat (which matches Channel 4's investigation) who later turned out to be actors. Her clarification talks about a homeless young men section.
- In the Committee she said that she saw a pharmacist who prepared food and who was also an actor. In her clarification, that pharmacist was the mother of one of the boys.
- In the Committee she said that the parents of one of the boys contacted her and came to have lunch to tell her the boys were in acting school. In her clarification, the mother, who was also the pharmacist, arranged for her son to come to the House for a tour and lunch and it was he who told her about being an actor.

We do not find either the original claims, or the clarifications to be credible and have seen no corroboration of her claims that Channel 4 and Love Productions used actors in a reality television show. In contrast, the detailed investigation carried out by Channel 4 gives us confidence that her claims are groundless. We are concerned Ms Dorries appears to have taken an opportunity, under the protection of privilege, to traduce the reputation of Channel 4.

Had Ms Dorries remained Secretary of State, driving a policy of selling the channel, we may have sought a referral to the Privileges Committee but, as her claims have not inhibited the work of the Committee and she no longer has a position of power over the future of Channel 4, we are, instead, publishing this Report to enable the House, and its Members, to draw their own conclusions.

Annex: Correspondence

1 July 2022 - Committee Chair Julian Knight MP to Nadine Dorries MP

Rt Hon Nadine Dorries

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

By email

1 July 2022

Dear Secretary of State

You appeared before this Committee on 19 May 2022. During the session, Dr Rupa Huq mentioned that you had appeared on the “Tower Block of Commons” programme and you said “I later discovered that they were actually actors”. You then said that “The parents of some of the boys in that programme contacted me and came here to have lunch to tell me that the boys were in acting school. They were not really living in a flat—they were not real. They were actually actors [...] If you remember, there was a pharmacist I went to see who prepared food; she was also a paid actor as well”.

I believe you will be aware of the press coverage of that statement and the denials from both Channel 4 and Love Productions that actors had been used on that programme. There was also an article in the press from the mother of the boys in question, also denying that they were actors.

It would appear that your statement to the Committee is contested and may indeed be incorrect. The Committee needs to ensure that those who give evidence before it do so with the intent of providing the truth as far as they know it. The Ministerial Code counts in Committee in exactly the same manner as it might in the Chamber and the Code is quite clear that should a Minister provide information that is not correct, they should, at the earliest opportunity, correct the record.

It is a matter of record that previous Ministers have resigned because they provided incorrect information to a Committee but this does not concern a matter of Government policy. The Committee, therefore, would like you to provide us with some corroboration of the events in question and if, on reflection, you may have misremembered that you write to us to correct the record. We would like you to do so by the 8 July so that the Committee might consider your response at its meeting the following Tuesday.

Yours sincerely

Julian Knight MP

Chair, DCMS Committee

19 July 2022 - Nadine Dorries MP to Julian Knight MP

Julian Knight MP

Chair, DCMS Committee

By email

19 July 2022

Dear Julian,

I am writing in response to your letter of 1 July regarding my appearance at the Select Committee on 19 May 2022 and the discussion on the “Tower Block of Commons” programme.

I set out my experiences on taking part in the programme in my comments during the Select Committee and stand by those remarks. I do not wish to add anything further at this time.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP

Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

23 September 2022 - Committee Chair Julian Knight MP to Nadine Dorries MP

Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP

By email

23 September 2022

Dear Nadine Dorries,

Tower Block of Commons

I refer you to our letter of 1 July 2022 and your response dated 19 July 2022.

When Ministers speak to my Committee the conversations are often broad ranging and Ministers, in conversation, have been known to make mistakes and give responses that later turn out to be wrong. We have former Ministers on the Committee who appreciate the impossibility of being perfectly correct at all times. We accept that and are always appreciative when Ministers later write to us to correct the record.

Our system of scrutiny depends heavily on Ministers being honest and, when they inevitably make mistakes, to, honourably, return to the Committee, as soon as possible, to correct mistakes.

When you told us about the Tower Block of Commons using actors instead of real people the shock among the Committee must have been evident to you, it indicated a deception perpetrated on the viewing public. The subsequent reaction of the television companies

involved and the people in the programme shows that they also took the claim seriously. The weight of evidence provided to us, including sight of the internal Channel 4 report, now suggests that your recollection of the show is flawed.

Your initial response to our letter, requesting that you provide corroboration and correct the record if needed, failed to acknowledge that your statements in front of the Committee may have been less than accurate. Instead, you chose to stand by your claims. We find ourselves having to decide whether your claims are now not an inadvertent mistake but a deliberate attempt to mislead the Committee. Given that this is not a matter of policy and simply an anecdote, that you may have used many times over the years, we would like to offer another opportunity to reconsider those your claims about the programme and acknowledge that your recollection may have been wrong or to provide evidence that you are correct.

We would like you to respond to the Committee by Friday 7 October. If you fail to respond, or stick to your version of events without corroboration, the Committee will have little option but to take this matter to the House for consideration by the Privileges Committee.

Yours sincerely

Julian Knight MP

Chair, DCMS Committee

11 October 2022 - Nadine Dorries MP to Julian Knight MP

By email

Dear Julian,

Thank you for your letter.

I am afraid that I can only repeat to you what happened. I cannot as you suggest, say that I say I made a mistake as that would be untrue.

I shall lay out again, for the sake of clarity what took place.

Following the screening of TBoC, one of the young men from the 'homeless young men' section of the programme called my office manager and asked if he could visit parliament. My office manager thinks it may actually have been his mother who called to ask and I vaguely remember speaking to her on the phone. However, not enough to recall the conversation, only the request.

He came, did the tour and my office manager and I had lunch with him afterwards in Portcullis House.

He told us during lunch that he had not in fact been homeless at all, was an actor, that other boys in the section were too and that he lived at home in North London with his mother. She had also been in the programme and prepared food in a small section towards the end and worked in a pharmacy in North London.

Given that the young man whose name I cannot remember - this was twelve years ago - was well dressed, articulate and well educated, I had no doubt at all that what he was telling me was factual and truthful.

I am afraid I have nothing more to add.

The information I provided the committee was voluntary, anecdotal and in conversation with Rupa Huq MP. I believe that Rupa and I may even have had this conversation in the past. I was not asked to provide the information, nor is it related to Government policy which was the reason why I appeared before the committee, in my role as Secretary of State responsible for DCMS policy.

Yours Sincerely,

Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP

17 October 2022 - Chief executive of Channel 4, Alex Mahon, to Julian Knight MP

Dear Julian,

Tower Block of Commons—request for report to be published by DCMS Committee

As per the request from the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee to C4 last week, we understand that it is your Committee's intention to publish a report regarding comments made by the former Secretary of State before your Committee on 19 May 2022. These relate to the C4/Love Productions series Tower Block of Commons, which was broadcast in 2010.

Whilst giving evidence to your committee on 19 May 2022, The Rt Hon. Nadine Dorries MP claimed that after appearing in the series Tower Block of Commons she had learned that contributors who were presented as ordinary members of the public living in a deprived housing estate in London were in fact paid actors.

C4 and Love Productions took this matter extremely seriously. In order to investigate the claim, Love Productions, who made the programme for C4, conducted a thorough investigation overseen by their external lawyers. The investigation sought to interview all contributors with whom the former Secretary of State had had significant interaction with, in terms of meaningful conversations and/or actions in relation to the narrative of the programmes and the series, and all relevant production staff.

Relevant documentation was retrieved from the archive and 85 hours of rushes were reviewed. All the available evidence indicated that the contributors were ordinary members of the public; that they were not acting; that their contributions were genuine; and that they lived in the homes in which they were portrayed as living at the time when the series was filmed.

C4 reviewed Love Productions' findings and undertook its own internal document searches and review. On 15 July 2022, C4 issued a public statement confirming that neither Love Productions' investigation nor Channel 4's internal inquiries found any evidence to support the claims made by the former Secretary of State.

On 23 September 2022, at the request of the Committee, C4 shared a summary of Love Productions' investigation with the DCMS Committee Specialist, following agreement that it would be treated as confidential. The reason we sought for this information to be treated in confidence was because of an ongoing duty of care, on behalf of both Love Productions and Channel 4, towards those who participated in the programme in good faith, 12 years ago.

Having discussed the Committee's request for this confidential summary to now be made public with Love Productions, we believe that our ongoing duty to ensure that those who participated in the show do not suffer undue harm as a result of having done so remains, and for that reason, we cannot consent to it being published, nor do we believe that a meaningful redacted version of the summary can be produced for publication without compromising that duty of care.

We would, however, agree to the following information being included in the Committee's report:

1. Love Productions' investigation was conducted by a team of senior producers who were not affiliated to Love Productions at the time the series was in production or broadcast and was overseen by their external lawyers.
2. The investigation team identified and sought to interview all relevant production staff, and contributors with whom the former Secretary of State had significant interaction with, in terms of meaningful conversations and/or actions in relation to the narrative of the programmes and the series. This included the young men who featured in the series interacting with the former Secretary of State, and anyone who prepared food for the former Secretary of State.
3. All relevant documentation was retrieved from archives and reviewed. This exercise included all relevant payment records, release forms etc, and reviewing 85 hours of unedited footage. It was reviewed by a team of five people.
4. The investigation team found no evidence to support the claims made by the former Secretary of State. All available evidence found that contributors were ordinary members of the public, that they were not acting, that their contributions were genuine, and that they lived in the homes in which they were portrayed as living within the series.

I would be happy to discuss this matter with you in more detail should that be of use.

Yours sincerely,

Alex Mahon

Chief Executive, Channel 4