House of Commons

Committee on Standards

Oral evidence session with Mr Andrew Bridgen, former Member of the House, HC 832

Tuesday 1 April 2025

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Alberto Costa (Chair); Paula Barker; Gill Furniss; Sir Francis Habgood; Professor Michael Maguire; Mehmuda Mian; Dr Rose Marie Parr; Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst; Victoria Smith; Gareth Snell; Dr David Stirling; Michael Wheeler; Carys Williams.

Questions 1-20

Witness

I: Mr Andrew Bridgen, former Member of the House.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]

Examination of witness

Witnesses: Mr Andrew Bridgen.

Chair: First, may I thank you, Mr Bridgen, a former Member of the House, for coming to give oral evidence this morning? This hearing is at your request. In a moment, I will ask you to make an opening statement. Before I do that, I will ask Dr Shastri-Hurst if he wishes to declare an interest in relation to this hearing.

Dr Shastri-Hurst: Thank you, Chair. Prior to being elected to Parliament in July of last year, I served for a period of time as a chair of the disciplinary sub-committee for the Conservative party. In that role, I was involved in a case involving Mr Bridgen, which pertained to tweets posted on his behalf that led to his expulsion from the Conservative party. I do not believe that that conflicts me in relation to this matter, which relates to an entirely different set of factual circumstances.

Q1 **Chair:** Thank you for your declaration, Dr Shastri-Hurst. Does any other member of the Committee have an interest to declare? No? Then we shall move on.

Mr Bridgen has a right to legal advice during this hearing, and his adviser, Mr Christopher Newman, is sitting alongside him. To be clear, Mr Bridgen may take advice and address the Committee. In line with paragraph 66 of the procedural protocol governing our processes, Mr Bridgen's adviser has the right to advise him, but may not address the Committee directly.

Before I ask Mr Bridgen to make his opening statement, let me also make clear what the Committee's role is today. The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards has provided us with his opinion that Mr Bridgen breached the code of conduct by late declaration of a loan. The decision whether Mr Bridgen did or did not breach the code rests with this Committee. The matter before us is whether the loan in question should have been registered or should not have been registered. Any question the Committee may have after Mr Bridgen has been invited to make his opening statement will therefore focus primarily on that point. Mr Bridgen, I invite you to make your opening statement.

Mr Bridgen: Thank you, Chairman. Why are we all here this morning, ladies and gentlemen? I have not been an MP for 10 months. We are here to try and dig the Parliamentary Standards Commissioner out of a hole he has dug for himself.

I was sent a letter some weeks before the general election indicating that, in line with normal procedures, since there was an ongoing investigation by the Parliamentary Standards Commissioner, were I not to be returned, he would write to the complainant and say that he was unable to complete his investigation.

Two weeks after the election, when I was not returned, I had a letter from the Parliamentary Standards Commissioner saying that he had decided that he was going to carry on pursuing me on this matter—a matter that he has whipped to death over 10 months. He had come to the conclusion that he wanted me to dig him out of his little hole—"Just write me a letter saying you're very sorry for any breach, and I'll put it down as an inadvertent breach of the rules."

Well, Chairman, that is not good enough. I believe there has been a pattern of harassment against myself, not just by this Committee, but across the whole House in a plethora of ways, from the moment I spoke out—the only one of 650 MPs in this House—to raise concerns about the safety and efficacy of the mRNA vaccines. From the moment I stood up, spoke on my own and stopped this House from authorising those vaccines for babies under five years of age in this country, my life has been made hell.

My history with this Committee is a bit curate's egg. In 12 years, I had one interaction with it. In 2017, I was asked to apologise, on two occasions in the House, for not informing the House that I was selling my house to HS2—when I could point out that, in five other debates, I had done. That complaint was brought by [redacted]. It was his office that brought that complaint against me, on a technicality. I apologised to the House.

I just want to put the record straight on that. I am the only MP who had to sell his house to HS2. They gave me half a million pounds less than they owed me, and £360,000 less than I had paid for it five years before. Then, the Government decided to take the price that I had paid off the Land Registry, because it was so embarrassing to them. My political opponents then put stories out in my constituency saying that I had made a fortune selling my house to my mates.

To add insult to injury, four years after I had sold the house at a pittance to HS2—to the Government—they decided not to pay the gas bills, let them mount up for three years and stuck them on my credit rating. There were £7,500-worth of unpaid gas bills seven years after I had sold the house to them for half a million less than they owed me. But they made a mistake: instead of putting it on Mr A J Bridgen, they put it on my eldest son, who was 15 at the time—Alexander James Bridgen, who had moved to America. That is the sort of thing that has been going on.

When I was last in front of this Committee two and half years ago—Chairman, you were a member of that Committee at that time—it was over the Mere Plantations lobbying issue. I had recorded in the register of interests a free trip to Ghana to see some trees, due to a dispute between my constituents and the Inland Revenue, who said that there were no trees and that it was a complete tax scam. My constituents were not getting any tax relief on their investments. They had planted tens of thousands of trees. I met the Ghanaian forestry commission. I caused the business attaché at our high commission in Accra to be dismissed for not going up and checking out the trees at the largest British-owned plantation in west Africa. For not putting that in eight emails—when I had met Ministers and told them verbally, and it was on the register—I was suspended from the House for two days. For not putting that in eight emails, reminding them of what I had already told them—and it was in the register—I was suspended by the House for two days.

It turns out that three weeks after the then Parliamentary Standards Commissioner had passed my file to this Committee, at the end of 2022, an informant of mine in the Labour party told me, "You won't believe what has gone on. Kathryn Stone has been lobbying the Labour party for honours." Clearly, that would have been a breach of her independence. I wrote her a very nice letter saying that it may well be a malicious smear, but three weeks after she had passed the papers to this Committee, when she was nothing to do with my case any longer—she actually wrote to me and said, "I have finished my involvement in the case; it has gone to the Committee"—I asked her in writing, "Can you confirm or deny that you have been lobbying the Labour party for honours?" She wrote back that she was intimidated by my question.

Now, Alberto, if I were to write to you, as Chairman of this Committee, saying, "Alberto, can you confirm or deny that you have been stealing hot sausage rolls from Greggs the bakers in Westminster tube station?", unless you had been stealing the sausage rolls, I doubt you would feel intimidated.[redacted]. I was suspended for three days by this Committee for asking that question.

[redacted]

[redacted]

Then Daniel Greenberg comes in and, within no time at all, I have another standards investigation regarding late filing of registrations of travel costs that had been paid. That sounds terrible, yes. The reason why I had to go to third-party funding is that I was speaking all over Europe. As far as I am aware, MPs are allowed to go to another Parliament and speak—with invites—paid for by this House. I was invited to speak in the Norwegian, Swedish Parliament, the Finnish Parliament, the Latvian Parliament, the European Parliament and the Irish Parliament.

The House authorities—IPSA—said they did not think that me speaking about vaccine harms and excess deaths was an essential part of my job, so they were not going to fund it. They did not even fund me going to the European Union. I suggest that colleagues look on YouTube; I actually got a standing ovation in the European Parliament. That trip was funded by the European Parliament. The only trip IPSA did fund in the end—they said they would not, but they did in the end—was the one where I spoke in the Dáil.

The problem with all that is that I registered with the registrar that I had had a trip paid for, but it did not matter how many times I emailed the European Union saying, "Can you please send me the costings so that I can register it within 28 days"—they did not answer. That was the reason for the late filing. A load of them were not even late. Greenberg admitted that a load of the claims were absolutely spurious—the filings were not late—and dropped a whole lot out. He has now put in this report, "He's been doing all this."

As a result of that, I had a meeting to discuss all this with the current registrar in my office in front of a witness—[redacted], a full member of my staff now—and he said he completely understood why I was unable to register it, no matter how many times I emailed the EU and said, "I am going to be in trouble if you don't give me the exact costings within 28 days." In fact, we came to an idea that we need to have a different system. As a result of my experience, the system was changed to make it more accommodating to colleagues. They will be able to make an interim declaration of the cost and then a final declaration when they get the final costs some months later. Yes, I apologise for the technical breach of the rules, but it was unavoidable—there was nothing I could do about it. But that will not be how Greenberg will write it up today.

At the same time that the registrar was in my office, we had a discussion again about the loan from Jeremy Hosking, and he again said, "It's not within the rules. It's not within the rules"—multiple times. Bear in mind that that loan had gone on legal costs, all paid to my lawyers—they were not paid to me. They did not even go through me; they went straight to my lawyers. Those had gone on for eight years. It was an eight-year legal case, which is probably still ongoing now. The registrar had changed, but the advice from the registrar had never changed. The advice had always been that it was outside the rules.

Bear in mind Daniel Greenberg has already written to me saying, "Andrew, all you have to do is just write me a 'you're very sorry' letter. You're not a Member any more now. We'll just call it a day." Chairman, given what has been perpetrated against me—this is a fraction of the harassment I have suffered over the last three years, of which this Committee is just one part, from successive Commissioners for Standards, who are not as independent as it would appear, and your former Chair—there is no appetite for Greenberg to open an investigation into his predecessor's conduct or the former Chair of this Committee.

If you want to uphold the standards of this House, the view from outside, which I can have now after 14 years in this place, is that it is not regarded by the public how we would like it to be. I hope that today, in this hearing, we will have a chance to improve that somewhat. I am quite happy to answer your questions.

Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Bridgen. I repeat that, as I noted at the opening of our sitting, the Committee's role today is to decide whether or not the code of conduct has been breached. I said that questions would be focused on that point, and I trust that, moving forward, answers will also address that point. I call on any members of this Committee to indicate if they wish to ask any questions.

Q2 **Dr Parr:** Thank you, Mr Bridgen. I am Rose Marie Parr, a lay member of the Standards Committee. I would like to explore with you your relationship with Mr Hosking and how the question of that interest-free loan, with no repayment date, arose. Could you give us some information on that background please?

Mr Bridgen: I was introduced to Jeremy Hosking. I was in a situation where I had come to this House as a multi-multi-millionaire. I was a former young executive of the year UK. I ran my own business—I had founded. I was pushed out of it by my brother and some other family members, who then sought to steal from the family business and basically never have a dividend again.

I was earning about £1 million a year before I became an MP, so it was a bit of a pay cut. That income completely dried up once I was here and my brother was running it. My brother was opening up other businesses in his and his wife's name and feeding off my company. I spoke to Jeremy—I was introduced to him—and he said, "I have had exactly the same situation, where two partners in business did exactly the same diversion of funds. I feel very sorry for you. I am a very, very wealthy man, and I am willing to help. We'll get retribution—get justice."

It did not actually quite turn out like that, unfortunately, in the long run, but that is how I came to meet him. It was after the Brexit vote, and I found out that we had in common that he was quite a Brexiteer, and I had led Leave for the East Midlands in the referendum. So we had that in common. But, apart from that, that was it.

Chair: Are there any other questions? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Bridgen: Sorry, did I not say? It was [redacted] MP who introduced me to him. I thought I said that.

Q3 **Mehmuda Mian:** Good morning, Mr Bridgen. I am Mehmuda Mian, another lay member of this Committee. Following on from your answers to my colleague, could you clarify whether Mr Hosking was a friend or became a friend, or was he purely a political contact?

Mr Bridgen: Was he a friend? I guess anyone who lends you that sort of money so that you can try and get your fortune back—I was grateful to him. We did not meet often enough to be that close about anything. I probably met him once or twice a year, and in some of the meetings we were discussing purely legal matters of, say, an appeal, a report or a second opinion, and that would be either on the phone or a Zoom call. In person, I met him probably, in eight years, five or six times. Before [redacted] introduced me to him, I did not know him at all—I had never even heard of his name.

Q4 **Mehmuda Mian:** So were all your contacts with him in relation to the money that he had lent you, or were there other matters that you—

Mr Bridgen: Obviously, for six months I had joined the Reclaim party, which is funded by him through Laurence Fox. We did have a couple of social events. I did go to his house once—one of his many houses—up near the Scottish Borders, when I was up that way. Obviously, because he was funding the legal team, when they wanted advice on whether to go for this barrister or that barrister, or that appeal, it had to go back to him, because he was funding it, wasn't he? It was his decision ultimately which way the funding went for the case.

Chair: Does anybody else have a question? Paula.

Q5 **Paula Barker:** Morning, Mr Bridgen. Thank you for your written evidence and for being here today to present your oral evidence. In the guide to the rules for Members, we are asked to consider the possible motives of any donor. Could you tell us a little bit about what your thoughts were around Mr Hosking's potential motives for lending you the money that he did?

Mr Bridgen: He said that he had a great deal of sympathy for my situation, it having been a situation he had been in himself with, I think, the Marathon hedge fund—I think it was something like £32 billion-worth of hedge fund. He had been involved in a legal dispute with his partners, which I believe he said he had lost.

I think it is fair to say that, towards the end of our relationship, I detected that his motives had changed somewhat, and I was unhappy about it. He was seeking to influence me, and I was not going to allow myself to be influenced. Indeed, he was putting huge pressure on me to drop the legal case against Matt Hancock—something which I was not going to do. He was also putting enormous pressure on me not to stand at the 2024 general election. Again, I have got evidence of this. Quite honestly, the relationship ended at the point where he tried to exert any control over me.

Q6 **Paula Barker:** In your register, there have been previous declarations that Mr Hosking had given you loans.

Mr Bridgen: Yes.

Q7 **Paula Barker:** Could you just explain why, in this particular instance, you did not declare on time?

Mr Bridgen: Well, I did not need to declare it; I never needed to declare it. It is not within the scope of the rules.

Paula Barker: That is what I am trying to tease out.

Mr Bridgen: It is not that I did not declare it on time; it was never in the scope of the rules.

Q8 **Paula Barker:** Just for me to be clearer perhaps: in your words, why do you believe that this particular instance was different to those that you declared?

Mr Bridgen: Because this was a purely private matter. Hosking was lending me the money to fund a legal case between myself and my brother about a business that I had formed in 1988, preceding my parliamentary career—it was nothing to do with it. I checked that out with the registrar, and he said it would appear to be outside the rules. That is not even this registrar; this is at least the previous registrar—a previous incarnation of the registrar. The current registrar has said the same to me twice and put it in writing to the current Parliamentary Standards

Commissioner. But Mr Greenberg has filleted the quote—he has been economical with the truth—and said, "Because you already have registered, you should register it." But that was an addendum to his comment that the scope of the rules is that the loan for the legal costs is outside them. It was eight years ago that that started. I have checked and checked and checked, and it has always been outside the rules.

But what is not outside the rules is that, because of the financial hardship placed on me by my brother cutting me off from all my private wealth, effectively, I was struggling. So Jeremy Hosking lent me money to pay for renting a house in my constituency. Clearly, that is to do with my parliamentary duties, so I registered it. He lent me a 16-year-old Land Rover to drive around the constituency in, and I registered it, because that was to do with my parliamentary duties.

Eventually, I did register the loan, but that was because I was under pressure from Hosking himself, near the end of our relationship. He said, "Given the quantum now, you need to register this." Quite honestly, that was so that I ended up in front of this Committee. That was why he did it—to damage me, he believed. I was not too bothered, because, as far as I am aware, there is no punishment for over-declaring.

It is all right to say, "Well, it's Hosking, so it's got to be declared or not declared." But if you own shares in a company—as I do, in many companies, but I just do not appear to have any control over them—you register the shares. If you have an income from that company in a salary or wage, you would declare that—that would be declarable—but dividends from the same company are not declarable under the rules, or certainly were not. So there are those anomalies within the rules; things can be declarable and not declarable from the same entity.

Paula Barker: Thank you. That is really helpful.

Q9 **Chair:** If there are no more questions from Members, I will ask you a question, Mr Bridgen. If, by your own admission, you would not say that he was a friend—you did not meet often enough to be close enough; that is what you have just said to the Committee—and he was not giving you money because of your role as an MP, do you think he would have supported you in your legal action against your brother were you not an MP?

Mr Bridgen: Well, we cannot venture into hypotheticals, Alberto. You always say that before the elections. Life is not a dress rehearsal. I may never have met him if I had not been an MP. If [redacted] had not introduced me, I would not know who he was.

Q10 **Chair:** What would benefit the Committee is understanding the nexus between Mr Hosking and yourself. At the core of this is the source of the donation. Why would Mr Hosking give such large sums of money to help your legal case—

Mr Bridgen: It did not start like that, Alberto. It was not large sums of money, and he would have got it back when I had won. I had a cast-iron case. If you look at the notes that I gave—and this is extensively—

Chair: Let me ask the question again, if I may, because I would like a clear answer to this—

Mr Bridgen: There is not a clear answer, is there?

Q11 **Chair:** Well, this goes to the heart of it. We can only adjudge based on evidence produced, and you have repeatedly said in your evidence that he was a mate, but you have now told us, "I would not say he was a friend. We didn't meet often enough"—

Mr Bridgen: Of course, anyone who lent you that sort of money, you would be grateful for, but as it turned out, Alberto, and as the evidence I have given to the commissioner will show, he was not really a mate at all.

Q12 **Chair:** But you said he was. In your own evidence to this Committee, you have said he was a mate.

Mr Bridgen: He was at the beginning—I think he was, yes. I was very grateful to him. But I had never met him before this transaction happened and he lent me the money.

Chair: I understand, so why would—

Mr Bridgen: How could he be a mate before I had met him?

Q13 **Chair:** Why would anyone who is not a mate and who is not seeking to give money to influence you as an MP give money?

Mr Bridgen: I do not know. I cannot put myself in his mind and give you that answer.

Q14 **Chair:** Would you lend money to someone who is not a mate and who is not an MP, and who you have no connection with? Would you lend them large sums of money? You are a businessman by background. Would you do that?

Mr Bridgen: Large sums of money are relative to your financial position at the time. Yes, I have given money to people I do not know in crowdfunders and funded various things—yes, of course I have. I cannot put myself inside—and you cannot ask me to put myself inside—the mind of Jeremy Hosking. He is probably a man worth, I suspect, something in the region of well over £1 billion. I would struggle to comprehend what life is like for that man.

Q15 **Chair:** I understand, but unfortunately—or fortunately, rather—the code of conduct makes it clear that it is for the MP himself or herself to determine why someone—

Mr Bridgen: What can I do more than ask the registrar of the register of interests? It has been going on that long that I have asked more than one. I asked my association chairman. Another point on that, Chair, is that for

Greenberg to say that the complaint came from a member of the public is so far from the truth as to be laughable.

Q16 **Chair:** Order. I want to go back to the question I am asking, so let me be very clear and unambiguous. The obligation on ascertaining whether or not a donor is seeking to influence is what the MP, himself or herself, should consider. It is the obligation of the MP to consider—*[Interruption.]* Let me finish. It is the obligation of the MP to consider whether or not the source of the donation is seeking to influence the MP.

Mr Bridgen: He certainly was not.

Q17 **Chair:** Allow me to finish the question. Did you consider whether or not Mr Hosking was giving you a donation—a loan—because of your role as an MP? Did you consider that, as is your obligation under the code?

Mr Bridgen: I cannot put myself inside Mr Hosking's head.

Chair: I am not asking you to. I am asking you to—

Mr Bridgen: Did I consider? Yes, I did consider. But you may have noticed that I am not someone who can be bent to the will of others, much to the chagrin of the Conservative Whips and four or five Prime Ministers. Some people just do the right thing, Alberto, like Mr Newman sitting next to me, who is here this morning pro bono to help me. Some people just do the right thing. I did not give up a £1 million-a-year salary to become an MP for £65,000 a year because I did not want to do the right thing for North West Leicestershire—yes?

Chair: Are there any other questions from the Committee?

Q18 **Michael Wheeler:** Good morning. I am Michael Wheeler. I am one of the MPs on the Committee. This is a broad point and I am not trying to put you into anyone else's mind. Do you think that it is possible, in the absence of any pre-existing relationship or friendship, for there to be purely private and personal matters between an MP and a political donor?

Mr Bridgen: Well, it was not a political donation. I did not even know he was a political donor at the time that he lent me the money. I needed money to move that case forward, else it was going to fall, and he did the right thing. He could see another human being who was being defrauded. He said it was a situation that he felt a lot of empathy for, because he had been in it—obviously on a bigger scale—and he did not hesitate. He certainly did not try to put any influence on me, and it would not work. I mean, I am not that sort of person.

Q19 **Michael Wheeler:** I understand that, but as you yourself have said, there is no harm in over-declaring, so considering the absence of an existing relationship, your position as an MP and his position as someone who had made political donations—

Mr Bridgen: [redacted]

Q20 **Chair:** Any other questions from members of the Committee? No? Mr Bridgen, given that there are no further questions from the Committee, I would invite you, if you wish, to make a closing statement.

Mr Bridgen: Ladies and gentlemen of the Committee, it is a pleasure to appear in front of you. I chose to do it. I could have just written my false letter of apology, which would imply guilt. I think we have seen the dangers of pleading guilty to issues on which you have only acted in good faith, and I maintain that I have only acted in good faith through all of this.

I really ask the Committee to come to a better decision with regard to me than they did two and a half years ago when, effectively, this Committee covered up breaches of the Nolan principles by the then parliamentary commissioner and by its own Chairman. Unfortunately, I will not be able to let matters lie on either of those issues. I ask the Committee to deal with this as fairly as possible today.

I think I need to re-emphasise the point that although Hosking was a good person trying to do the right thing—that was my belief. The moment he did try to exert any pressure on me, which was after the declaration, I ended the relationship and he never was able to influence me at all.

Chair: Thank you, Mr Bridgen. The Committee will now sit in private to consider its findings on the complaint against you. I would now ask you and your adviser to withdraw. We are likely to report our conclusions later this month or in May. Thank you very much for coming.

Mr Bridgen: Will there be a transcript of today available?

Chair: Yes, there will be.

Mr Bridgen: Will I get a copy of it?

Chair: Yes, you will.

Mr Bridgen: Thank you very much, and thank you very much, Committee.

Chair: Thank you.