

Patrick Mercer declares payment he accepted from undercover reporters

Patrick Mercer, the MP forced to resign from the Tory party over the lobbying scandal has officially declared a £2,000 payment he accepted from undercover journalists for work as a consultant.

Peter Dominiczak
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Mr Mercer, the MP for Newark, has now declared £2,000 given to him by reporters posing as lobbyists on the official Commons "Register of Members' Financial Interests".

He made the declaration after he had been informed by journalists that they were poised to publish a series of revelations about him.

Mr Mercer had failed to declare the £2,000 within the time allowed by parliamentary rules.

He is yet to declare another £2,000 payment, but still has time to add it to the register within the rules.

A Daily Telegraph and BBC Panorama investigation found that the MP for Newark, had tabled five questions to government ministers and put down a parliamentary motion after being paid a total of £4,000 as part of a contract he believed would earn him £24,000 a year.

The parliamentary questions were based on a draft given to him by an undercover reporter purporting to be a lobbyist for businesses with interests in Fiji.

Mr Mercer also established an all-party parliamentary group in support of the cause being promoted by the lobbyists, which he boasted he had persuaded around 20 other politicians to back publicly. He also agreed to provide the fictional client with a Parliamentary pass.

The first payment was made to Mr Mercer on 16 April. He registered a payment more than four weeks later on 28 May.

"I do not charge a great deal of money for these things," Mr Mercer said during a meeting to arrange his "consultancy" fee. "I would normally come out at £500 per half day. So £1,000 a day."

Following the disclosures, Mr Mercer resigned from the Conservative party.

Parliamentary rules ban MPs from undertaking "paid advocacy" on behalf of paying clients. It is also possible that the police will launch an investigation into Mr Mercer over potential offences of bribery and misconduct in a public office.

In March, Mr Mercer signed a contract with the lobbying company to work as a consultant and agreed to be paid £2,000 a month. On March 20, an undercover reporter provided Mr Mercer with the wording of the proposed parliamentary motion.

On March 26, Mr Mercer submitted an early day motion with almost identical wording. He did not declare his financial interest. Four other MPs have since signed the motion. There is no suggestion the other MPs knew Mr Mercer was being paid by the client or that they behaved improperly.

In April, the reporter told Mr Mercer he was "brilliantly earning your money, which ... will go through today". Mr Mercer responded by giving a thumbs up sign.

He said it was proving easy to recruit MPs. He said: "I mean who doesn't want a trip to Fiji?" The undercover reporter also asked the MP if he could submit a question to ministers on behalf of the client. After examining the draft, Mr Mercer suggested putting in a "handful".

He had five questions tabled and did not previously declare his financial interest.

Mr Mercer is being investigated by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

The MP referred himself for investigation.