

Zahawi sacked by Sunak after 'serious breach' of Ministerial Code

N [adhim Zahawi](#) has been sacked as Conservative Party chairman after a row over his tax affairs.

On Sunday an ethics inquiry found the former Tory chairman was "in serious breach of the ministerial code".

It follows a difficult week for embattled Mr Zahawi who was revealed to have penalty as part of an estimated £4.8 million settlement dispute with HMRC.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak asked Sir Laurie Magnus, his independent adviser on minister interests, to investigate whether Mr Zahawi had acted properly.

In his report Sir Laurie said Mr Zahawi had shown "insufficient regard for the principles of the general principles of the ministerial code and the requirements in particular under the seven Principles of Public Life, to be honest, open and an exemplary leader through his own behaviour".

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“I also fully appreciate the pressures faced by ministers as they address the complex issues of government and the difficulties they encounter in balancing the demands of their personal lives and their ministerial responsibilities,” he said

“These factors, however, cannot mitigate my overall judgement that Mr Zahawi’s conduct as a minister has fallen below the high standards that, as prime minister, you rightly expect from those who serve in your government.”

In a letter to Mr Zahawi, Mr Sunak said that, following the investigation, which completed its work after only a few days, “it is clear that there has been a serious breach of the Ministerial Code”.

“As a result, I have informed you of my decision to remove you from your position in His Majesty’s Government.”

Mr Sunak and his Government had faced questions for several days about the row, with growing pressure on Mr Zahawi to stand aside.

In the letter, Mr Sunak told the Tory MP: “When I became Prime Minister last year, I pledged that the Government I lead would have integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level.”

He paid tribute to Mr Zahawi’s contribution to the Government, including his role as vaccines minister during the pandemic.

“As you leave, you should be extremely proud of your wide-ranging achievements in Government over the last five years.

“In particular, your successful oversight of the Covid-19

vaccine procurement and deployment programme which ensured the United Kingdom was at the forefront of the global response to the coronavirus pandemic.”

In a letter to the Prime Minister following his sacking, Mr Zahawi did not explicitly mention the findings of the ethics inquiry into his tax affairs.

But he told Mr Sunak that he is concerned “about the conduct from some of the fourth estate in recent weeks”, in a reference to the media.

He said: “It has been, after being blessed with my loving family, the privilege of my life to serve in successive governments and make what I believe to have been a tangible difference to the country I love.”

In comments that appear to indicate that the former chancellor holds out little prospect of returning to office in the years to come, he said: “You can be assured of my support from the backbenches in the coming years. Your five priorities are the right priorities, and I will do whatever I can to help you deliver them.”

Sir Laurie’s four-page report, dated January 29 and setting out in detail the circumstances of Mr Zahawi’s tax affairs and communications with HMRC.

The row surrounding Mr Zahawi had centred on a tax bill over the sale of shares in YouGov – the polling firm he founded – worth an estimated £27 million and which were held by Balshore Investments, a company registered offshore in Gibraltar and linked to Mr Zahawi’s family.

According to the BBC the dispute was resolved between July and September last year, when Mr Zahawi was chancellor and in charge of the tax system.

Mr Zahawi had said that HMRC concluded there had been a

“careless and not deliberate” error in the way the founders’ shares, which he had allocated to his father, had been treated.

He also insisted he was “confident” he had “acted properly throughout”.

Mr Zahawi has faced calls to stand down as an MP but has told the Prime Minister he will continue to support him “from the backbenches in the coming years”.