

Tim Loughton vs the Department for Education

James Forsyth 17 January 2013

[The Spectator blogs](#) website

In a week where the inner workings of Whitehall have rarely been out of the news, Tim Loughton's evidence to the Education Select Committee has made a particular splash. As Isabel reported yesterday, Loughton criticised the way the department was run and claimed that the children and families agenda 'was a declining priority' in his time there and had been 'greatly downgraded since the reshuffle.'

Inside the Department of Education, there's real irritation at Loughton's comments. One senior Department for Education source launched the following broadside:

'Tim Loughton opposed transparency on child protection and sided with those all over the country who want to maintain a culture of secrecy. He thought publishing full Serious Case Reviews was a big mistake and opposed a proper investigation of the Edlington case. He had no interest in the details of what had gone wrong or redaction of the SCR. He strongly opposed Gove, special advisers, and officials in their insistence on trying to get to the bottom of the Edlington case, which he thought was a paranoid waste of time for no political gain because there was little publicity. His approach to child protection as a political issue was disgraceful.'

'Loughton spent his time pandering to pressure groups so they would praise him on Twitter. Loughton wouldn't focus on child sex abuse unless it was all over TV and the DfE now has to pick up the pieces.'

'Loughton was a lazy incompetent narcissist obsessed only with self-promotion. Journalists should consider his actual behaviour when he calls for inquiries and attacks us for not taking issues seriously that he refused to handle professionally.'

Even by the standards of Whitehall, this is a brutal critique. But it appears to reflect the frustration felt in Great Smith Street at what some of those in the department see as posturing by Loughton has since he lost his job.

When the Spectator put this to Tim Loughton, he defended himself robustly:

On the Edlington case:

'I was the one most committed to the publication of full serious case reviews and proper transparency in terms of what went wrong in tragedies like the Edlington case. Having spent a lot of time visiting Doncaster children's services and telling senior people in the case that publication was going to happen, I was frustrated that it took so long for the department to publish the final report which could have been done and dusted over a year before it was published.'

On 'lazy, incompetent narcissist':

'I was always the first one in and the last one out. I notched up more time travelling and visiting local authorities and vulnerable families than anyone else.'

On 'obsessed with self-promotion':

'If raising the profile of child exploitation which has been neglected for so long is self-promotion then I plead guilty. I'm really pleased that working with a whole variety of agencies

we have got a detailed action plan which put the whole issue of child exploitation on the nation's radar. I am really proud of that and I had hoped my boss was too.'

Tim Loughton vs the Department for Education, round 2 **Isabel Hardman 22 January 2013**

The battle between Tim Loughton and the Education department rumbles on, with new foot soldiers joining the fray. The latest shot fired in the war comes from Labour's Stephen Twigg, who has demanded an investigation into the quotes we ran on Coffee House last week from a senior DfE source which described the former minister as a 'lazy incompetent narcissist obsessed only with self-promotion'.

Twigg has written to the department's Permanent Secretary Chris Wormald, saying the following:

'You will be aware that both special advisers and civil servants are bound by a code of conduct, which precludes them from making personal attacks.'

In the letter, which you can read in full [here](#), Twigg asks Wormald to investigate whether a breach of the respective codes for SpAds and civil servants has taken place.

The chances are that Michael Gove will get a chance to have his own say on Loughton: the Education Secretary appears before a select committee tomorrow. He will also doubtless want to refute the former children's minister's original claims which sparked the row that the children and families agenda was a 'declining priority' in his department. But for today, he's launching his own attack on Twigg's vocational education policy.