

To: Jeffrey Epstein[jeevacation@gmail.com]
From: David Stern
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Subject: FT: Mandelson to head WPP-backed consultancy

Mandelson to head WPP-backed consultancy

By Ben Fenton and Elizabeth Rigby in London
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Lord Mandelson is to head a consulting firm with financial backing from Sir Martin Sorrell's WPP group, according to people with knowledge of his plans.

Britain's former business secretary has been little seen since his party's defeat in the May general election, but people familiar with his plans said on Monday he would now emerge to use his contacts and experience to advise businesses.

A friend of the peer said his activities would not involve lobbying - "it is classier than that". Instead, Global Counsel LLP would be a consultancy that offered "high-level strategic advice" to European companies.

Cabinet Office rules on how ex-ministers can use the knowledge and address book they build up in office will determine exactly how the company works, the friend said.

Lord Mandelson, who will be chairman of Global Counsel, and his assistant Ben Wegg-Prosser, who will be chief executive, have been working at the London offices of JWT, a WPP division, to sort out final details.

The new entity was registered at Companies House as a limited liability partnership on November 24. WPP Group (UK) Ltd and Mr Wegg-Prosser were the only partners named in the registration papers.

WPP and Sir Martin declined to comment on reports that first emerged on Sky News.

As a key member of the backroom and cabinet in both Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's New Labour administrations, as well as being a former European trade commissioner, Lord Mandelson has a contact book that is the envy of many political rivals and allies alike.

"What is his calling card? He has been at the heart of government and knows how the EC works and how regulation works," said a person who knows him well. The former business secretary, who is in India, was unavailable to comment. According to his friends, Global Counsel will start out as a two-man outfit but could add more people later.

Lord Mandelson has already registered his firm Willbury Ltd at Companies House to receive the proceeds of his memoir of New Labour - The Third Man - and money from speaking engagements.

One New Labour hand described the business secretary's operation as a "cheaper version of Tony Blair's outfit"