

4 April 2022

Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP  
Chair  
Procedure Committee  
House of Commons

Dear Ms Bradley

I write on behalf of the House of Commons Trade Union Side in the wake of media reports at the weekend concerning allegations of sexual misconduct against an MP. Those reports are a reminder, if any were needed, of the importance of the House finding risk-based and proportionate steps to ensure the safety of its own employees, MPs' staff and—indeed—other MPs during investigations of alleged sexual misconduct.

We believe that one such step is the exclusion from the parliamentary estate of any MP under investigation for sexual misconduct. In our view, the weekend's reports—which will have been read by constituents, parliamentary employees and MPs' staff—strengthen the case for Parliament promptly to examine the means by which such an exclusion might be introduced.

Elements of the weekend reporting of the allegations will have proved all too familiar to observers of these issues: concerns are raised by someone who works on the parliamentary estate about potential sexual misconduct by an MP; colleagues of the MP are made aware of those concerns but do little or nothing to alert the wider parliamentary community to any potential risk; an investigation into the allegations commences; the MP continues to attend Westminster, despite the allegations, and interacts with members of staff and others until such time as they may choose voluntarily to withdraw.

As the Women and Equalities Committee said in its recent Gender Sensitive Parliament report, in other workplaces, suspension of employees under investigation for sexual misconduct is rightly considered the norm. It noted that the trade unions had argued for temporary exclusion from the estate for MPs but that this was not straightforward. We welcomed its recommendation that:

[...] the House of Commons Procedure Committee seek fuller advice from the House's procedural and legal advisers on the issues around balancing protecting people, in Parliament and constituencies, from harm, and constituents' rights to political representation. The Procedure Committee should consider, in the light of this advice, whether to inquire into this matter further and bring forward recommendations, taking into account the need to:

- maintain confidentiality for complainants and respondents;
- maintain a presumption of innocence and ensure fair investigations; and
- mitigate any undue risk of vexatious allegations. (Paragraph 111)

We believe that the time for such consideration has very much arrived and request that the Procedure Committee agree promptly to produce a draft timetable for an inquiry, to which the unions will of course be happy to contribute.

Parliament has taken several significant steps forward in terms of its culture in recent years, the ICGS itself being the prime example of this. The unions believe that the ability to exclude an MP from the Parliamentary Estate is the next step in cultural and reputational terms and urge that the Procedure Committee—and Parliament as a whole—act to prioritise this issue.

Regards

Ken Gall  
Trade Union Side President

cc Members and Clerk of the Procedure Committee