



Procedure Committee

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From Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP, Chair

Caroline Lucas MP
House of Commons

25 May 2021

Dear Caroline

Thank you for your email of 4 May and copy of your letter to Mr Speaker of 16 April, both of which were discussed by the Committee at its meeting last Wednesday. The Committee agrees with you that ministerial accountability to the House is of the utmost importance and noted Mr Speaker's statement at the beginning of the Parliament, that:

The Speaker does not have the power to police the accuracy of Members' contributions. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Members to be accurate in what they say in this House. But if a Member is inaccurate by mistake, they should correct that mistake as soon as possible. (HC Deb 11 May 2021 col 2)

We therefore do not agree that the Speaker's role is constrained any further than it is intended to be. We also do not agree that the rules of the House impede Members' ability to hold the Government to account. Ministers do correct the record and have indeed resigned when it has transpired that they have been inadvertently inaccurate. While it is certainly true that assertions of dishonesty are not in order, there is no such bar to its demonstration, should proof be available. Members may table substantive motions criticising the conduct of Ministers (for example HC Deb 13 June 2012 col 339), seek to initiate debates on the detail of Government policy and table questions to pursue statements made at the Despatch Box.

On the question of the Ministerial Code, the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee has drawn attention to his Committee's current interest in the Ministerial Code. This letter is copied to him as a Member of our Committee but you may wish to make separate detailed representations to him on the Cabinet Secretary's review and the process by which the Code is upheld. On the Nolan principles, this too is a matter for PACAC as the select committee with responsibility for oversight of the Cabinet Office.

On corrections, you are right to highlight that the system presumes that this would be a Minister correcting the record. This follows from the principle that Ministers are responsible for the accuracy of the information that they provide to the House. As you stated in your letter to Mr Speaker, it is the job of MPs to hold the Government to account. We see nothing to suggest that this cannot be as effective as Members are willing to make it through persistence and initiative.

For the House to introduce an independent means of correction would seem in principle to run counter to Article IX of the Bill of Rights, which provides that “the Freedom of Speech and Debates or Proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any Court or Place out of Parliament.” This would be a fundamental constitutional line for the House to cross.

You may be aware that the current corrections process has its origins in the Committee’s Second Report of 2006-07 *Corrections to the Official Report* (HC 541). We agree with you that there may be improvements to the visibility and transparency of corrections and intend to take evidence on the corrections process as part of other ongoing work. I hope that we will be able to learn more about the system you mention in the Scottish Parliament and see whether it—or something like it—could be adopted in the House.

I am copying this letter to Mr Speaker, the Chairman of Ways and Means and the Clerk of the House and will publish it on the Committee’s website.

Yours sincerely



Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP

cc. Mr Speaker
Chairman of Ways and Means
Clerk of the House
Rt Hon Ian Blackford MP
Rt Hon Ed Davey MP
Rt Hon Liz Saville Roberts MP
Colum Eastwood MP
Stephen Farry MP