



Karen Bradley MP
Chair
Procedure Committee

By email: proccom@parliament.uk

15 November 2021

Dear Karen

Re: Procedural Reforms

I hope you are well.

I am writing to you in your capacity as the Chair of of the Procedure Committee to ask your committee to consider commencing two inquiries. Both of these have cross party support and has significant potential to improve the standing of the House of Commons in the eyes of the public.

Amendment to Standing Order 39

The events of 3 November 2021 relating to the Standards Committee's report into Owen Paterson has brought the integrity of the House of Commons into question. One of the key issues arising, in the media, the general public and Members of this House, is the fact that Mr Paterson was able to vote on the motion relating to his own suspension.

The conventions governing voting by Members are currently set down in Erskine May's Guide to Parliamentary Practice. This includes guidance as to the circumstances when votes may be disallowed in paragraph 5.17. It states that a motion may be made immediately after a division to object to a Member's vote, where that Member has a "direct, immediate and personal financial interest in a question". This indicates that it would be improper for a Member to vote on a matter in which they have a vested interest in the outcome, however the wording is written in such a way that it is unclear in what circumstances a motion can be brought. Furthermore, the procedure in which a motion would be made immediately after a division, is impractical as it would require Members to have sight of where others are voting at the time of the division, and then to have a seat in the Chamber to make the motion.

It is clear that it is improper for a Member to vote on a motion in which they have an

inherently vested interest such as motions – and amendments to such motions – relating to investigations into their behaviour. I am therefore writing to you to ask that the Procedure Committee open an inquiry and make recommendations relating to amending Standing Order 39, prohibiting Members from voting on investigative reports relating directly to their own behaviour.

Modernisation of House Rules

Second, I am writing to respectfully request that the Procedure Committee open an inquiry into implementing the remainder of the recommendations made by the Reform of the House of Commons Committee (“Wright Committee”) in their 2009 report.

The Wright Committee was formed in the wake of the expenses scandal, with the purpose of restoring confidence in the House of Commons. The principle underscoring their investigation was that the structure of parliamentary process had created the culture which allowed for the expenses scandal to take place. The report concluded that this culture could be changed by strengthening the House and giving Members sitting on the backbenches a more meaningful role in its business. In turn this would restore public faith in our parliamentary democracy.

A number of recommendations were made by the Wright Committee, the majority of which have been implemented. It is now hard to imagine a time without elected select committee chairs, or the backbench business committee. There remains one group of recommendations unimplemented: those governing House time.

It is my understanding that implementing these remaining reforms, including the formation of a House Business Committee, would augment the scrutiny powers of opposition and backbench Members. I have been further advised, that although the Wright Committee failed to set out explicit recommendations, that the report’s statement that “The House should decide its own agenda and sitting pattern” should include greater powers relating to recess dates, recall, and prorogation.

This is not a partisan issue. Whichever party is in government, it is vital that parliament is able to properly scrutinise its policies. I am therefore asking that the Procedure Committee start an inquiry into the implementation of the remaining recommendations of the Wright Committee relating to House time, with the power to make additional recommendations.

I would be happy to discuss either of these inquiries with you. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Wendy Chamberlain

Member of Parliament for North East Fife