



Procedure Committee

Tom Brake
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16 March 2022

Dear Tom

Thank you for your letter of 16 February, which the Committee discussed at its meeting of 28 February. You raise two issues in your letter: the role of the Speaker and the efficacy of existing procedural means for challenging statements made by Ministers. The principles which underpin the practice and procedure of the House in this area are accuracy and self-correction. The Committee believes that these principles are the right ones: Ministers must give accurate information to Parliament and correct the record when they have not. We do not believe it would be in the interests of the House to do anything which would relieve obligations on Ministers.

As you acknowledge, and as the Speaker has made clear on several occasions, it is not the Speaker's role to become involved in the substance of proceedings. You recognise that changing this would be 'problematic'. We would go further: in our view it would fundamentally alter the Speaker's role and diminish the neutrality and independence of the Chair.

As you may be aware, the Committee declined to inquire into whether new procedural mechanisms for challenging statements made by Ministers in June last year on the grounds that the existing mechanisms had been used sparingly by Members. Since then, we have had one example of a relevant substantive motion on an Opposition Day. We remain of the view that the procedural means are there to be used and do not believe a wider inquiry would be justified at this time.

The House's arrangements for corrections are the product of an inquiry conducted by a previous Procedure Committee in 2007. The Committee's recommendations created a clearer process by which the record could be corrected. Since then, profound changes in the accessibility and publication of parliamentary proceedings mean that there may be further improvements to the transparency and clarity when corrections are made. The Committee will consider whether to undertake new work in this area in the new Session.

Yours sincerely

Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP
Chair of the Procedure Committee