

Statement to Parliament: A Statement on the Independent Complaints and Grievance Policy

Thank you Mr Speaker, with permission I will update the House on steps being taken to tackle harassment and abuse in Parliament.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister has made clear – there can be no place for harassment, abuse or misconduct in politics.

I said we would take action in days, not weeks and that is exactly what we have done.

Getting this right matters to everyone here – and I want to thank the Honourable Member for Birmingham Yardley – who I know is taking a keen interest in this matter.

I hope today's statement will answer some of her questions.

Last week, the Prime Minister convened a meeting of the party leaders to discuss this matter.

All party leaders attended and there was agreement to work together to make swift progress.

The proposals outlined by the Prime Minister for an independent grievance procedure have been embraced across this House, and I am reassured by the consensus.

All parties have acknowledged that any proposal must adhere to three specific criteria: it must have cross-party agreement, it must include both Houses of Parliament and it must be independent.

The new system will be available to all who work here – including all MPs' staff, Lords staff including cross-benchers, interns, volunteers, journalists, and constituency staff.

It was agreed that the political parties would establish a cross-party working group to take this work forward, and I am pleased to report that the group met for the first time on Tuesday.

The working group is made up of representatives from every party and from both Houses – Conservative, Labour, SNP, Lib Dem, Plaid Cymru, DUP, Green, and cross-benchers.

Very importantly, MAPSA, the Members and Peers Staff Association, and UNITE are representing parliamentary staff on the group, and are ensuring that their experiences, and their requirements, are taken fully into account.

The first meeting of the working group made clear that the voices of staff will be at the heart of this process. Any new system will need the absolute confidence of those who will use it.

The working group also agreed that the new procedure must be independent of the political parties – and that to inform the group over the next two weeks, we will hear from a number of different contributors.

This will include hearing from staff directly, as well as groups including ACAS, IPSA, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, and experts on a range of topics that will help us to shape a new process.

Anyone wishing to submit their own thoughts or suggestions to the group in writing is also very welcome to do so.

This is early days for the working group, and we will certainly be working quickly but thoroughly to make sure we create a new procedure that provides confidence to all who use it.

I know that in addition, many members of staff have expressed an interest in the provision of HR training, as well as better employee support for staff.

All those employing staff need a certain amount of guidance and training that will enable them to be good employers.

This week the working group heard directly from the Clerks of the two Houses – who provided a very helpful account of the procedure used by House staff.

Whilst we have recognised that the Respect policy used by the House authorities provides an excellent reference point, the independent procedure we are seeking to build will take into account the specific needs of Parliament, and the group has acknowledged the need for more than just mediation.

The working group agreed a new system should provide support, advice and action on a wide spectrum of complaints around bullying and harassment.

We will do everything in our power to ensure the solution is transparent, fair, and effective.

And this fairness, Madam Deputy Speaker, must also apply to MPs and Peers, because we do recognise that right across both Houses we have many model employers who genuinely care about, and look after, their staff extremely well.

We are working to a tight timeframe – but we have all acknowledged that it is right we address this issue with urgency.

The publication of the final proposal will balance the need for fast action with the need for due diligence.

The working group, including staff representatives, are considering the timetable carefully, and aim to report back to the House before the House

rises for Christmas recess.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you and the Speaker have said that you hope all parties will live up to their responsibilities by demonstrating both an appetite for change and a practical means of delivering that change.

That is exactly what we intend to do and I want to thank all parties for working together in a supportive fashion. We share this duty to bring about positive change.

People come to work in this place for a number of reasons – out of public service, to support the party of their choice, or to gain new work experience.

Nothing should deter them from pursuing those ambitions, and I know we are all determined to ensure that this is a safe and fair place to work.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.