



THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE  
HOUSE OF COMMONS, LONDON SW1A 0AA

*Dear Rebecca,*

23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018

Thank you for your letter of 19 March concerning recent allegations on Newsnight of harassment and bullying of House of Commons staff. I understand the Commission's interest in these reports.

I do indeed understand my responsibilities, and those of the House of Commons Commission which employs staff of the House, for protecting staff against discrimination or harassment, and it is of course something we take very seriously.

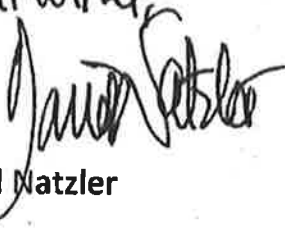
You may have seen the recently announced decision by the Commission on 19 March to task the two non-executive members of the Commission, Dame Janet Gaymer and Jane McCall, to oversee the setting up of an independent inquiry into the matter. The Commission agreed 'that an inquiry into the bullying and harassment of House staff should be initiated immediately, and tasked its Non-Executive members with appointing an independent expert to lead the inquiry and with developing terms of reference.' There is nothing I can add to that. I do not know if the Inquiry would wish to hear from the Equality and Human Rights Commission but that must be a possibility.

You refer to improvement of our procedures for dealing with complaints of bullying or harassment, and to the recent report of the cross-party Working Group endorsed by the House last month. There is now an implementation programme underway, which it is hoped will lead to finished policies and a Code of Behaviour being put to the House for its approval in July. It now seems overwhelmingly likely that House staff will want to use these new procedures, which are built upon improving the existing Respect policy. At the same time there are several strands of work dealing with cultural change, which are intended to produce a safer workplace where these behaviours do not occur in the first place.

David Natzler, Clerk of the House, Palace of Westminster, London SW1A 0AA

In requesting a meeting after Easter, you set out various issues you wish to raise and discuss. I must confess that I am not quite sure how much more I can usefully say on any of them, and on some I am bound by a degree of confidentiality as I am sure you will understand, particularly on the progress of discussions with our trade union side, and in relation to the House of Commons Commission. I would also be grateful for some clarification of the terms of the proposed meeting, in terms of any recording or onward reporting by you of what is discussed. My assumption is that you are requesting an informal meeting rather than a formal one.

But if you consider that a meeting would assist you and the Equality and Human Rights Commission in the performance of your duties I would not dream of refusing one. I have therefore asked [REDACTED] my Private Secretary, to arrange a day and time with Matthew Smith, and to liaise with him to gain a shared understanding of the nature of the meeting and who you would propose to bring to it.

Best wishes,  


David Natzler

Clerk of the House