

Bullying and harassment in Parliament: monitoring Parliament's response – 'explainer'

Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS)

The leaders of the political parties established a cross-party, bicameral (both Houses) Working Group on an Independent Complaints and Grievance Policy in November 2017. The Working Group published its Report on 8 February 2018.

The key proposals of the Working Group Report were:

- a new Behaviour Code for Parliament, applicable to all people on the parliamentary estate or engaged in parliamentary business away from Westminster;
- the provision of effective support to those who feel that they may be the victim of bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct;
- new policies and procedures on (a) bullying and harassment and (b) sexual misconduct to ensure consistent and independent investigation of allegations; and
- a programme of culture change and training.

Following publication of this Report, a Programme Team was established to implement the proposals of the Working Group, under the supervision of a bicameral Steering Group chaired by the Leader of the House of Commons. The Programme Team published its [Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme Delivery Report](#) on 17 July 2018.

The House of Commons implemented a package of ICGS-related changes in July 2018 to incorporate the [Behaviour Code](#) into their Code of Conduct. They also committed to undertaking 6-month and 18-month reviews of how the new provisions are operating.

The [House of Commons Commission has appointed Alison Stanley](#) to lead the 6-month review of the ICGS and agreed the membership of the advisory review panel supporting the review.

[Dame Laura Cox Report: The Bullying and Harassment of House of Commons Staff](#)

On 15 October 2018, Dame Laura Cox published the report of her independent inquiry into the nature and extent of bullying and harassment of House of Commons staff.

The 3 fundamental recommendations highlighted by Dame Laura on page 6 of her report are:

- The "Valuing Others Policy" and the "Revised Respect Policy" should both be abandoned as soon as possible, and members of House staff wishing to complain about bullying, harassment or sexual harassment should no longer be required to use them.

- The new Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme should be amended, so as to ensure that those House employees with complaints involving historical allegations can access the new Scheme.
- Steps should be taken, in consultation with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and others, to consider the most effective way to ensure that the process for determining complaints of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment brought by House staff against Members of Parliament will be an entirely independent process, in which Members of Parliament will play no part.

Gemma White QC inquiry

On 7 November 2018 it was [announced that Gemma White QC had been appointed](#) by the House of Commons to conduct an inquiry into the harassment and bullying by members of MPs' staff and others in the Commons not covered by the Cox Report. The inquiry is expected to report in the spring of 2019.

Working group on independence of complaints process

At the [debate on the Committee on Standards' report, Implications of the Dame Laura Cox report for the House's standards system: Initial proposals](#) the Leader of the House said that the House of Commons Commission had agreed in December to establish a small, informal working group to examine and report on the Cox recommendation on the independence of the process for determining complaints of bullying and harassment brought by staff against MPs.

Naomi Ellenbogen QC inquiry

On 19 December 2018 [Naomi Ellenbogen QC was appointed](#) by the external members of the House of Lords Commission to carry out an independent inquiry into bullying and harassment in the House of Lords. The inquiry is underway.

Implementing the ICGS in the House of Lords

In July 2018 the House of Lords Commission endorsed the Behaviour Code for Parliament. The ICGS was extended to cover staff of the Lords Administration in November 2018.

In respect of Lords members and Lords members' staff, the Sub-Committee on Lords' Conduct was tasked with considering how to integrate the ICGS with the Code of Conduct, the Guide to the Code of Conduct and the Code of Conduct for Members' Staff; and how the proposed independent reporting and investigatory service can best sit with existing procedures for investigating breaches of the Codes. The Committee for Privileges and Conduct is expected shortly to bring recommendations to the House.