



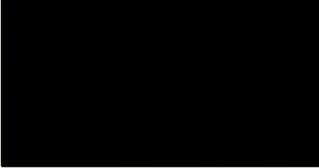
## Defence Committee

Chairman, Rt Hon Dr Julian Lewis MP

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Sir Mark Sedwill KCMG  
Cabinet Secretary



24 October 2018

*Dear Sir Mark,*

On behalf of the Defence Committee I would draw your attention to the attached exchanges in recent evidence sessions before our Committee with the MoD Permanent Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence. These covered the visit by the Secretary of State to Plymouth on 8 October, which was to make an announcement regarding future frigate maintenance work in that city. The base is in the Plymouth Sutton and Devonport constituency, represented in the Commons by a Labour member, Luke Pollard, who was informed of the visit. However, while three Members from neighbouring constituencies, all Conservatives, were invited to the event, Mr Pollard was not.

This is clearly discourteous to a Member of Parliament. It could also be argued that it is an improper and partisan use of public funds, and therefore a breach of propriety. We would be grateful if you could look into this, and await your response. Because the issue raises the question of the proper role of Members of Parliament, I am copying this letter to Mr Speaker and to the Leader of the House, as well as to the Defence Secretary.

*Yours*

*Julian Lewis*

*PS Congratulations from the Committee on your new appointment*



## Defence Committee

### Oral evidence: Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts, HC 1559

Tuesday 9 Oct 2018

**Q1 John Spellar:** Before we get into the main subject, I have a question for the Permanent Secretary. The Committee works very much in a bipartisan manner on defence; we are not divided on political issues, although politics comes into it. We were therefore very concerned to hear that when the Secretary of State went to Plymouth—yesterday, I think—to announce support for the future frigate programme, which is clearly welcome news there, he invited three Members from his own party to the event but not the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard)—the clue is in the name—whose constituency contains the naval base, although his office was notified that the Secretary of State would be visiting his constituency. That strikes us as beyond the bounds of propriety. As the custodian of that, we would be grateful if you could look into it.

**Stephen Lovegrove:** I will happily look into that, Mr Spellar. I understand the concern.

### Oral evidence: Departmental priorities post-NATO summit, HC 1560

Wednesday 17 October 2018

**Q2 John Spellar:** I asked this question to the permanent secretary last week, but as he has not come back to us yet, I will pose it to you. Basically, why were Members for Plymouth from all political parties not invited to attend the announcements on 8 October regarding the Albion-class vessels and Type 26 basing in the city?

**Gavin Williamson:** I will chase up with Stephen why he has not replied to you. My understanding is that we informed local Members on 4 October that I would be going to Plymouth Devonport, in line with the ministerial code.

**Q3 John Spellar:** That informed Members, and that is perfectly proper. However, it appears that three Members from one political party were invited to attend the event, but the Member in whose constituency the base actually is was not.



**Gavin Williamson:** What was so fantastic about that announcement is that Members from right across Cornwall and Devon, who are so passionate about the basing of the Type 26s, really welcomed that the Type 26s were to be based in Plymouth. It is a real credit to all those involved in campaigning for that. I certainly note your comments.

**Q4 John Spellar:** Sorry, Secretary of State, but parliamentary propriety is that the first priority is the Member in whose constituency the event is. I understand that Ministers often visit bases and so on and do not always invite Members along, and if they are making an announcement, or having a meeting that is then given publicity, they do not necessarily have to invite Members. However, if they do invite Members, first, they should clearly be invited on a completely non-partisan or unbiased basis, and secondly, the Member for the constituency concerned should definitely be invited.

This is not about people standing on ceremony. It is a basic principle. It is one of the reasons why, for example, Ministers and Members have to notify other Members if they are going to their constituency. If that is in a Government role, it is frankly stretching the limits of propriety not to invite the Member of Parliament for that area.

**Gavin Williamson:** My understanding is, and I will double-check the ministerial code, that the key thing is to notify Members if you are visiting their constituency. I understand that was done on 4 October. You also mentioned the Albion class vessel. My recollection was that in terms of Albion I announced it at the Conservative party conference. I am very happy if anyone wishes to defect to the Conservative party in order to be able to—

**Q5 John Spellar:** Secretary of State, don't be frivolous. It is an important constitutional issue of the rights and propriety of Members of Parliament. I would argue, and I think we might need to take it further in Government, that it is improper to invite Members of Parliament from your own party and not the relevant Member of Parliament who happens to be from the Opposition. On this Defence Committee, we work together as one in the interests of defence, and I would hope the Ministry of Defence would be doing the same.

**Gavin Williamson:** As we always do, Mr Spellar. You raised two issues. You raised the basing of the Type 26 and you raised the issue of the Albion—

**Q6 John Spellar:** I'm not worried about that. I am worried about the announcement in Plymouth on 8—

**Gavin Williamson:** You did raise the Albion.

**Q7 John Spellar:** I am talking about 8 October and I am talking about the invitation to Members of one party, but not the relevant constituency Member.



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**Gavin Williamson:** And I informed the individual Member, in line with the ministerial code, which we would always follow. If we look at what the announcement was, this is something that I am sure you and hopefully all Members of the Committee welcome. We have taken the decision to base the eight Type 26s in Plymouth. It is an important part of the development of our carrier strike capability. It was important that that announcement was made. It was important that the announcement was made in relation to the Albion class amphibious assault vessels. That was done at Conservative party conference.

I note your comments. I have no doubt that hopefully in the future I will be able to meet with Mr Pollard in Devonport—

Q8 **John Spellar:** I think we need to move on, Chair, but I have to say that the Committee will have to take this up with the Cabinet Office. I think it is a grave affront to Parliament and to Members of the House, and I regret that, rather than seeking to remedy it, you are just seeking to brazen it out. I think that is unfortunate and is not in the spirit of bipartisanship in which this Committee operates.

**Chair:** For the future, Secretary of State, could you bear in mind the strong feeling of the Committee? We work on a cross-party basis and we try to help you on a cross-party basis, even when we sometimes have to criticise things at the MoD. This has just not really struck the right note, to put it mildly.

**Gavin Williamson:** As I said, hopefully I will have the opportunity of visiting Plymouth again in the not-too-distant future and hopefully I will have the opportunity to meet Members.