



Our Ref: AL/MP417

14 June 2018

Dear Sarah

I am grateful to the Liaison Committee for its report on *Changing Committee practice and procedure: enhancing effective working*. Committees play a vital role in scrutinising the work of Government and I agree that enabling them to work in the best possible way is important to ensure that they maximise their effectiveness.

After consultation and discussion with colleagues in Government, I am pleased to inform you that the Government accepts the recommendations made in this report, subject to the reassurances that I am seeking in this letter.

I will bring forward your proposal on the “guesting” of members between committees as I recognise this has the potential to enhance effective working between committees. However, I have some concerns about the attendance of a Chair’s personal staff at private committee meetings. While I acknowledge that this change may be helpful to Chairs, it is not immediately obvious how committee effectiveness is enhanced as a result. It may therefore be helpful for the Liaison Committee to consider how committee effectiveness has improved as a result of this pilot.

Attendance at private committee meetings would also give a Chair’s personal staff access to sensitive and confidential information. Such access must only be allowed with robust safeguards in place. I note that the report itself recognises the need for safeguards, which you have stated will include the exclusion of a Chair’s personal staff if any member of the relevant committee indicates objection at any time. I would suggest that the Liaison Committee should also set conditions ensuring that as and when new members are appointed to a committee, they are made aware of the arrangements in respect of a Chair’s personal staff and given the opportunity to approve or object to these arrangements. I would also like to seek reassurance that the Liaison Committee will set conditions that make provision for additional safeguards to ensure that a Chair’s personal staff are briefed on the confidentiality of committee proceedings. It is important that staff are fully aware of the need to carefully handle sensitive information provided by Government and others engaging with committees. Ultimately Chairs will be accountable for the actions of any personal staff that are given such privileged access to the private deliberations of a committee.

Providing that you are able to reassure me with regard to the points in this letter, I will look to table the motion as soon as possible in order to give the House the opportunity to approve the Liaison Committee's recommendations in full.

Best  
Andrea

**RT HON ANDREA LEADSOM MP  
LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS**

Dr Sarah Wollaston MP  
House of Commons