

COMMITTEE ANNOUNCEMENT

Committee of Privileges inquiry into select committees and contempt – call for evidence

The Committee of Privileges launches an inquiry into the exercise and enforcement of the powers of the House in relation to select committees and contempts, following the resolution of the House of 27 October 2016.

In the vast majority of cases, witnesses cooperate fully and willingly with select committees. This inquiry relates particularly to the infrequent occasions upon which witnesses are reluctant to accept invitations to give oral or written evidence. It also covers cases where committees consider that witnesses have failed to give truthful evidence.

The Committee has received a memorandum from the Clerk of the House of Commons setting out the options for changing the process by which the House ensures that committees receive the cooperation they need from witnesses to carry out their scrutiny functions.

The Committee has published the Clerk's paper on [its website](#) and invites submissions on the three options it identifies: to do nothing, to reassert the House's existing powers by amending Standing Orders or by Resolution, or to legislate to provide a statutory regime.

In particular, the Committee would like to hear views, focusing in particular on the following questions:

- What are the benefits and drawbacks of the options for change? Is change necessary?
- What are appropriate sanctions for non-compliance or other contempts on the part of witnesses? How should these be applied?
- What protections or safeguards are necessary for witnesses within either a changed or the current system?
- Are there any other issues which the Committee should consider?

The deadline for submission of evidence is Tuesday 18 April at noon.

You can submit evidence through the select committees and contempt [inquiry page](#).

Launching the inquiry, Kevin Barron MP, Chair of the Committee, said: "Select committees rely on evidence provided by witnesses. Most people are more than happy to accept an invitation to appear before a committee, but there are rare occasions when witnesses are less willing or where there is concern about the truthfulness of the evidence given. Our inquiry will examine how the House exercises and enforces its powers to compel the attendance of witnesses, and to take action against those who do not attend or who attempt to mislead committees.

"The House of Commons needs to be able to ensure that committees can carry out their valuable work. It also needs to ensure that witnesses are treated fairly. We welcome views on how these two factors should be balanced in making the system fit for the 21st century."

Notes to Editors

1. Committee Membership is as follows:

Kevin Barron (Chair)

Mr Dominic Grieve

Sir Paul Beresford

Susan Elan Jones

Tom Blenkinsop

Tommy Sheppard

Mr Christopher Chope

2. More information on the Committee, including publications, can be found on the Committee website at: www.parliament.uk/privileges
3. [Guidance: written submissions](#)
4. Media Enquiries: Sophia Linehan – Tel: 020 7219 7394 / 07917 488 544 | Email: linehans@parliament.uk
5. Watch committees and parliamentary debates online: www.parliamentlive.tv/commons