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Dear Garry and Dave

Thank you for your letter about the role of the Speaker and asking for a commitment to better support Parliamentary staff.

We are living and working in tumultuous times. The issues raised in Dame Laura Cox's report and by Gemma White are pressing and need to be firmly tackled. I am proposing a clear agenda to address the challenges our Parliament faces now and in the coming years. If this is not tackled now it will become the next expenses scandal. My message may not be popular with all MPs but I am determined to stand up for all staff in Parliament and press for change.

While much of the debate in the race will be about the Chamber and MPs own needs, I am clear that we need significant change outside the Chamber. Bullying and harassment continues to be an issue. Most MPs are not outright bullies but some clearly are and many more need to embrace better management and the concept and practice of co-professionalism.

I am determined that we grapple with the issue of bullying and harassment once and for all. While some good work has been done by the Standards Committee and others I have spoken with many staff who are fearful of speaking out. In many cases they are subject to poor work practices or worse from MPs and other staff. I have also liaised with MAPSA and MPs staff unions on these issues.

Clearly, we need independent structures in place and I am fully committed to pressing ahead if I am elected. But by the time these are invoked it is often too late. I want to see much better support for all MPs from day one. We need a properly focused HR system and the resources to ensure that all members can employ a suitably senior and qualified office manager who can deliver the best working practice in our offices and help change the MPs approach to their own staff. This is an opportunity to tackle this issue once and for all and the Speaker has a powerful

role in setting the tone. We should be setting the example of best employment practice.

I would develop a mechanism to hold the Speaker's office to account – while independence is important this is no excuse for a lack of accountability or openness. Staff are key in delivering a world class House of Commons and should not be at the end of the line in discussions about how we modernise. As Chair of the Public Accounts Committee I have produced an annual report and I would do this as Speaker – clearly setting out progress on promises made and being transparent about any delays or problems. Too often staff tell me that their complaint or feedback goes into a black hole and they don't see progress.

I would immediately seek to change the statutes to allow staff to be members of SCIPSA and the House of Commons Commission. I would seek to allow staff to attend even before the rules were changed. I have taken a similar approach as Chair of the PAC where I created a deputy chair role despite it not being within the rules. This has improved working relations between the committee and House staff.

I'd like to see a modernisation of recruitment practices – where application forms are the norm. As you know all the research shows that this improves the chances of people from a diverse range of backgrounds securing a job interview.

I welcome your support in this endeavour. If elected I would hope that you and other staff representative bodies would want to engage fully in delivering a modern, inclusive workplace of co-professionals delivering the important work of Parliament.

At this stage I am concerned that the issues around staffing is the dog that has not barked in the Speakership contest. Brexit is dominating Parliamentary and political discourse and the issue has not cut through. Many MPs recognise the need to tackle it but media coverage and discussion among MPs is still very focused on what happens in the Chamber. There is a broad agreement among the nine candidates running about how to improve the running of Parliamentary business. I have a clear, worked up (and roughly costed) approach which I hope will gain traction with colleagues.

Any support that you could offer as key advocates of a modern, professional approach to employment would be welcome.

Yours sincerely



MEG HILLIER MP