

6 November 2018

## **Invitation to contribute to Inquiry into Bullying and Harassment**

Dear Sir/Madam,

Many of you will be aware of Dame Laura Cox's Inquiry into bullying and harassment of House of Commons staff, and of the report she delivered to the House on 15 October 2018. Dame Laura's important report describes a "*culture in which bullying, harassment and sexual harassment have long been able to thrive and have long been tolerated and concealed.*" The need to change that culture underpins the recommendations she has made in respect of House of Commons staff.

A large number of people who work or have worked within the parliamentary community were not covered by Dame Laura's Inquiry. I have therefore been appointed to conduct an Inquiry covering further groups so that the nature and extent of bullying and harassment (including sexual harassment and any systemic behaviours) in different parts of the parliamentary community can be understood and addressed.

This stage of the Inquiry covers past and present staff of Members of Parliament and others engaged in parliamentary work on their behalf. Although my terms of reference (which are attached to this letter) do not permit me to investigate, and reach conclusions on, specific allegations in individual cases I will, like Dame Laura, be considering the nature and extent of bullying and harassment and making recommendations. Your individual experiences are important and I very much hope that you will be able to share them with me.

It is important that I consider the experiences of those who work or have worked for MPs in any capacity (including for example as researchers, secretaries and interns) both in Westminster and in constituencies. I want to hear from both salaried employees and those who have been paid or unpaid interns of whatever age, experience and length of service.

**I therefore encourage you to provide me with any information you have about bullying and/or harassment, including sexual harassment, in the course of your work for a Member of Parliament. I would also welcome information about any complaint made in relation to such experiences, the way it was dealt with and, if no complaint was made, the reasons for this.**

This Inquiry provides an opportunity for those with experiences of bullying and harassment to write and speak about them in strict confidence. In conducting the Inquiry I will be working entirely independently of the House of Commons, the Whips Offices and the political parties. No contributor's name or details will be shared with anyone. All written contributions and any notes of meetings will be securely stored and will be seen only by me and by Joanna Pollard, another independent barrister who is assisting me in the administration of this Inquiry. My report to the House of Commons will not identify any individual contributor or any alleged perpetrator and you will not be identifiable from

anything contained in it. Further details of the way in which I will process your personal information are provided in the attached Privacy Notice.

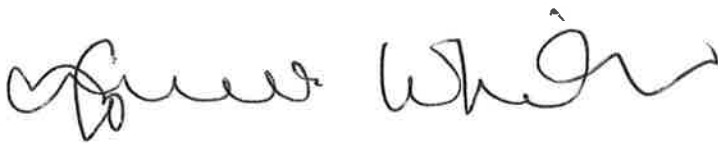
If you think you have information that would be helpful to this Inquiry, please write to me by email at [GWQCInquiry@blackstonechambers.com](mailto:GWQCInquiry@blackstonechambers.com) or in hard copy at **Blackstone Chambers, Blackstone House, Temple, London EC4Y 9BW**, marked “private and confidential”.

I understand that providing a detailed written account of experiences can be difficult and distressing and that some who would like to contribute may not wish or feel able to do so in writing. If you would like to speak to me directly about these matters either in person, by video-link or telephone, please contact me on the email address I have provided above and I will make arrangements for this. If you request a meeting or conversation, I would however ask that you provide me with as much information as you feel able to provide in writing in advance (for example about the background and context such as dates and the capacity in which you were working) so that the meeting time can be used as effectively as possible.

I am asking for written submissions and requests for meetings/conversations to be sent to me by **15<sup>th</sup> January 2019** in order to enable me to arrange meetings, report and make recommendations to the House of Commons within a reasonable timeframe. I am available to meet or speak in November and December so please do not wait until 15<sup>th</sup> January to get in touch.

Finally, I would like to ask for your assistance in ensuring this letter reaches those who no longer work in the parliamentary community but who may have information to contribute. This letter is being sent to those with an active parliamentary email address who are currently working for MPs and in hard copy to all those who have worked for MPs over the past 5 years, for whom IPSA holds contact details. I am also sending it to representatives at MAPSA, Unite, GMB and NUJ and asking them to pass it to their members. MPs are being encouraged to bring it to the attention of their current and former staff. Although I will be able to reach substantial numbers of people this way, I may not reach everyone with relevant experience to contribute. I would therefore be very grateful if you could please pass this letter on to anyone you know who has not received it and who works for a Member of Parliament or has done so in the past.

I thank you in advance for your assistance.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gemma White', written in a cursive style.

Gemma White QC

The Inquiry's Terms of Reference are as follows:

### ***Objectives***

The objectives of the Inquiry are

- To establish the nature and extent of bullying and harassment (including sexual harassment and any systemic behaviours) by past and present Members of Parliament and those working on their behalf, of past and present staff of Members of Parliament and of other people engaged in Parliamentary work on their behalf, and of Members of Parliament themselves;
- To identify any themes or patterns as to how previous complaints about such behaviour were handled or how complainants were treated, or, if no informal or formal complaint was made, the reasons for this;
- To use the experiences of those offering their testimony to consider and comment on the extent to which those working in the Parliamentary Community have been treated with dignity and respect and the extent to which the Parliamentary Community has been open and supportive;
- To consider and make recommendations on the options available to the House of Commons in respect of allegations dating from before June 2017 and to consider and comment on the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme as a means of investigating allegations post-dating June 2017, taking into consideration the recommendations made by Dame Laura Cox in her report of 15<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

### ***Scope and Methodology***

- The Inquiry will proceed in stages, focussing on the experiences of particular groups of individuals as follows:  
Stage One: present and past staff of, and others engaged in Parliamentary work on behalf of, Members of Parliament;  
Stage Two: Members of Parliament.
- At each stage, individuals will be invited to offer in writing and/or orally information about their experiences of bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment and to provide information about how any complaints were handled or, if no complaint was made, the reasons for this.
- All such contributions will be treated in strictest confidence and will not be published or liable to release. Any references to such information in

any report arising from the inquiry will be anonymised. No individual will be identified or identifiable.

- No existing route of complaint open to staff will be affected by the inquiry. Contributors will be provided with information about existing complaints routes, advisory services, support and counselling services available to them.
- The Inquiry will not reopen past complaints of bullying or harassment or investigate new ones against particular individuals. Nor will it reach conclusions or make recommendations on any individual case.
- The Inquiry may invite members of the Parliamentary Community, other than those who provide information about their experiences of bullying and harassment, to provide it with any information which it considers to be relevant to the fulfilment of its objectives. Since its purpose is not to investigate and reach conclusions in relation to particular complaints it will not invite other members of the Parliamentary Community to provide information in relation to any specific instances of bullying and harassment and/or the way in which any complaints about them were dealt with.
- The Inquiry will produce a report (or, if appropriate, reports relating to each individual stage) which will be published direct to the House of Commons. If the report is (or, as the case may be, reports are) not completed before the conclusion of the 6 month review of the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme the Inquiry will contribute in writing to the review in such manner as is appropriate to the stage reached.
- The Inquiry will be provided with all necessary resources under the auspices of the Clerk of the House, who will provide any necessary information and support as requested by the Inquiry in order to help it achieve its objectives.

# INDEPENDENT INQUIRY BY GEMMA WHITE QC INTO BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

## PRIVACY NOTICE TO PARTICIPANTS: 6 NOVEMBER 2018

### Purposes of this Privacy Notice

1. I am a data controller responsible for your personal information processed for the purposes of the inquiry as set out in the attached Terms of Reference (“the Inquiry”). This Privacy Notice is intended to assist you in making informed decisions when engaging with the Inquiry and/or in understanding how your personal information may be processed by me as a result of such engagement. Please take a moment to read and understand it.
2. My registered address is Blackstone Chambers, Blackstone House, Temple, London EC4Y 9BW and my registration number is Z4623878. If you have any questions about this Privacy Notice or want to exercise your rights set out in this Privacy Notice, please contact me by sending an email to [GWQCInquiry@blackstonechambers.com](mailto:GWQCInquiry@blackstonechambers.com).

### The personal information I collect

3. I am collecting personal information directly from you in confidence and solely for the purposes of the Inquiry. When you write to me, I will record and store your name and email address and any other personal information with which you chose to provide me for the purposes of this Inquiry. Such information may include (but will not be limited to) your age, postal address, telephone numbers, job title(s), current or former place(s) of work, location, gender, marital status and employment history. If we meet in person or by video-link or speak on the telephone the information I collect will include any notes of personal information with which you provide me in our meeting or conversation.
4. Some of the information you provide to me, and which I will collect and process for the purposes of the Inquiry, may be sensitive special category personal information which includes information related to race or ethnicity, political opinions, religious or philosophical belief, trade union membership, health related information, and information related to sex life or sexual orientation.

### Purposes of Processing

5. I process your personal data solely for the purposes of carrying out the objectives of the Inquiry, as set out in the attached Terms of Reference. I collect it in order to gather information relevant to the Inquiry. I store and analyse it in order to produce a report to be published to the House of Commons in accordance with the Terms of Reference, and thereafter in order to deal with any issues which may arise as a result of the Inquiry.

### Confidentiality

6. All contributions to the Inquiry will be treated by me in strict confidence. Your personal information will only be shared with my independent assistant in this Inquiry for the purposes of enabling her to assist me, at my direction, in the administration, management and conduct of the information-gathering and report stages of this Inquiry. Otherwise, your personal information will not be disclosed to any individual. Any references to your information in any

report arising from the Inquiry will be anonymised. No individual will be identified or identifiable in the report.

### **Legal bases for processing**

7. There are a number of different legal bases under which I am lawfully able to process your personal information:
  - a. Processing of the personal information is necessary for the purposes of my legitimate interest in carrying out the Inquiry in order to publish my report to the House of Commons in accordance with the Terms of Reference.
  - b. Processing of the personal information is necessary for the performance of a task carried out by me in the public interest, namely carrying out the Inquiry provided for by the resolution of the House of Commons of 19<sup>th</sup> July 2018.
  
8. There are a number of different legal bases under which I am lawfully able to process your special category personal information:
  - a. Processing of such information is necessary for the purposes of exercising your rights in connection with your past or present employment.
  - b. Processing of such information is necessary for reasons of substantial public interest: namely (i) carrying out the Inquiry provided for by the resolution of the House of Commons of 19<sup>th</sup> July 2018 and (ii) the prevention or detection of an unlawful act.

### **Security of personal information**

9. Personal information will be stored on third party outsourced IT services, cloud-based storage and document storage providers on terms where it is security protected and where I have an appropriate processing agreement (or similar protections) in place. My arrangements with those third parties do not permit transfer outside of the EEA. Any hard copy information will be stored in a locked cabinet.
  
10. I am committed to taking all reasonable and appropriate steps to protect the personal information I collect from you from improper use or disclosure, unauthorised access, unauthorised modification and unlawful destruction or accidental loss. I have taken and will take appropriate information security, technical, storage and organisational measures to such end, including measures to deal with any suspected data breach. My assistant and all those third party outsourced IT services, cloud-based storage and document storage providers who are associated with the processing of your information are obliged to respect the confidentiality of your personal information.

### **The period for which personal information will be stored**

11. I will process your personal information, including special categories of personal information, throughout the course of the Inquiry. Thereafter I will keep such information for such period as may be permitted or required by law (including data protection law) where I consider it necessary to do so for the purpose of a legitimate interest. 12 months after my report is published to the House of Commons, I will determine whether to retain the personal information for any longer period. I will consider the amount, nature and sensitivity of the personal information, the potential risk of harm from unauthorised use or disclosure, the purpose for which I need to process such information and whether I can achieve it through other means.

12. At the end of such 12 month period (or any longer period which I may so determine to be necessary) I will take all necessary and appropriate steps to destroy your personal information or otherwise put it beyond use.
13. If personal information you provide to me is only useful for a short period (for example any temporary contact details or other information which I am able to determine does not need to be kept during the conduct of the Inquiry) I may delete it well before the time periods set out above.

## Your Rights

14. You have no obligation to provide your personal information to me for the purposes of the Inquiry. If you choose to provide your personal information to me, you have the right to request:
  - a. **Access** to your personal information, and the provision of copies;
  - b. **Rectification** of inaccurate or incomplete personal information;
  - c. **Erasure** of your personal information;
  - d. **Restriction** of processing of your personal information; and
  - e. **Data portability**, i.e. transfer of your personal information.
15. If you wish to exercise any of these rights please contact me at **GWQCInquiry@blackstonechambers.com**. Data protection legislation provides for the circumstances in which I must agree to such requests. If refuse, I will explain the legal basis for my refusal. I may keep a record of your communications with me to help me to resolve any issues which you raise.
16. You also have the right to **object** to me processing your personal information where I am processing it because it is necessary for my legitimate interests.
17. **Your right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority** If you have a concern about any aspect of my privacy practices, including the way I have handled your personal information, you can report it to the UK Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). You can find details about how to do this on the ICO website at <https://ico.org.uk/concerns> or by calling their helpline on 0303 123 1113.

## Changes to this Privacy Notice

18. I may make changes to this Privacy Notice from time to time. To ensure that you are always aware of how I use your personal information, I will update this Privacy Notice where I need to reflect any changes to my use of your personal information. I may also make changes as required to comply with changes in applicable law or regulatory requirements. I will notify you of any such changes by email or such other means of communication as may be requested by you.