



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Sue Gray
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The Baroness Andrews OBE
Chair, House of Lords Common Frameworks Scrutiny Committee
House of Lords
SW1A 0PW

19 April 2022

Dear Baroness Andrews,

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence to the Common Frameworks Scrutiny Committee alongside my colleague, Tom Cartlidge. I would also like to thank the Committee for its continued scrutiny of the UK Common Frameworks programme. During the evidence session I agreed to follow up with some further details on a number of points, and these are addressed in turn.

The UK Government is committed to working with all devolved governments to the benefit of people in every part of our country, building on hundreds of years of partnership and shared history. The Common Frameworks programme is a good example of effective collaboration with devolved governments to deliver for citizens across the UK, grounded in the spirit of cooperation.

OGD focus on delivery of frameworks

The Common Frameworks team remaining in the Cabinet Office will continue to support other Government departments and monitor progress as they take Frameworks through scrutiny to final implementation. During the evidence session, I indicated that I was unaware of any situations where other Government departments were not fully committed to the delivery and implementation of Common Frameworks. Going forward, I will ensure that this remains the case and that the Cabinet Office will continue to engage with their counterparts across the UK Government to complete the delivery of the Common Frameworks programme. I am also keen to encourage active and ongoing consideration of new Frameworks and we will use all resources within my Group - both in Cabinet Office and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities - to encourage departments and the Devolved Governments to consider new Frameworks as appropriate.

To that end Cabinet Office officials already have weekly meetings with Framework-owning UK Government departments, as well as officials in the Devolved Governments to discuss the development of the remaining Frameworks. Further, regular Frameworks Working Group meetings are carried out on a cross-Whitehall basis as a wider forum to communicate and discuss programme

level information. The engagement at such meetings has been both positive and sustained, and these meetings will continue to run during Northern Ireland's pre-election period and beyond.

Quarterly Reporting to include update on Common Frameworks

As I mentioned to the Committee, there is a UK government-produced quarterly report for Intergovernmental Relations in which I indicated our intention to include information on the use of Common Frameworks. I note that some Frameworks topics have been included in that report historically - including in the quarter 3 and 4 reports for 2021. Covering off Frameworks routinely would therefore not represent a major change in principle to the report, but could allow for additional useful information to be included. We are also in discussions with the Devolved governments on how best to conduct reporting on the operation of each Framework. Our approach to quarterly reporting will form part of these discussions and I hope you and Committee members will see the results of this approach as a matter of routine in future quarterly reporting publications.

Secretary of State's Common Frameworks Meetings

You asked specifically about the discussions the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities/Minister for Intergovernmental Relations has had regarding Common Frameworks. As you know, the Secretary of State is in regular contact with the First Ministers of each of the Devolved Governments and he has regularly discussed Common Frameworks with them. I am pleased to say that the First Ministers of both Scotland and Wales have indicated to the Secretary of State that Frameworks are functioning well and improving ways of working across the UK.

Future transparency and scrutiny

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you on behalf of myself and my teams for your continued work in scrutinising the UK Common Frameworks programme, and your excellent chairing of such an effective and constructive committee. It has been a pleasure working with you and your Committee.

As I said during the session, the Committee has done a tremendous job in raising both the profile and understanding of what Common Frameworks are and how they operate. Transparency and accountability across the Common Frameworks programme remain a priority for the Government and I am committed to maintaining transparency across the Common Framework programme, ensuring adequate Parliamentary scrutiny. I look forward to discussing with you soon how to ensure transparency and effective scrutiny continues for the Common Frameworks and joint work between the UK and Devolved Governments more broadly.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sue Gray". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly informal style.

Sue Gray, Second Permanent Secretary