



Liaison Committee

Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of
Lancaster

By email

31 March 2023

Dear Oliver,

As part of its remit the Liaison Committee has a role in examining the functioning of Select Committees. The Committee and its predecessors have routinely considered how to improve Committee Scrutiny, whether through wide ranging inquiries or by engaging with Government on specific issues.

In line with this, the Committee is contemplating an inquiry into the effectiveness of select committee scrutiny in respect of long-term strategic thinking in Whitehall. This would be looking at –

- How individual Select Committees consider long-term strategic questions;
- The engagement of individual departments, and Whitehall as a whole, with Select Committees on long-term strategic questions;
- How Select Committees can work together more effectively on cross-departmental long-term strategic questions, such as on Net Zero, health promotion, or countering extremism;
- What additional machinery of Government, knowledge and skills are necessary to support long-term strategic thinking within Whitehall;
- Where Select Committees should direct their recommendations on long-term strategic thinking, particularly on cross-departmental issues; and
- How Select Committees can monitor the progress of implementing recommendations made by Select Committees.

The Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) and then its successor (PACAC) carried out a series of inquiries into Whitehall capacity for long-term strategic thinking from 2010-2019. During that period, the conversation has moved forward, with initiatives from successive Cabinet Secretaries –

- Sir Jeremy Heywood introduced a programme of horizon scanning and technological 'foresight';
- Sir Mark Sedwill introduced 'Fusion Doctrine' into national security thinking (a 'whole of Government approach'); and
- Simon Case has responded further by commissioning papers to develop the strategic thinking capability of the Senior Civil Service Policy Profession.

While it is for individual Select Committees to monitor activities in their respective departments, traditional departmental structures are not always conducive to clear decision making and it can be



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difficult for Committees to access information about how strategic issues are being addressed across Government.

Select Committees show an increasing appetite for thinking long-term on a cross-party basis. Where there is a cross-party consensus, Select Committees have a role to play in promoting long-term strategic policy by the conduct of their inquiries, strategic scrutiny and by their recommendations. Better scrutiny of strategic thinking by Parliament will promote better strategic thinking within Government.

Before we embark on this inquiry, please could you respond with your thoughts about how Select Committees could be engaged by Government to help promote long-term strategic thinking within Government, and specifically what Government might be able to offer to Select Committees, to facilitate open and effective scrutiny of these important issues and encourage forward accountability, that will serve the interest of the public and the nation.

I look forward to your response, which we will publish on the Committee's website alongside this letter. I am also copying this letter to the Cabinet Secretary.

Yours ever

Sir Bernard Jenkin MP
Chair of the Committee

cc. Simon Case, Cabinet Secretary