



Joint Committee on Human Rights

Committee Office · House of Commons · London · SW1A 0AA

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From Rt Hon Harriet Harman MP, Chair

The Rt Hon Suella Braverman KC MP

Secretary of State for the Home Department

Home Office

[BY EMAIL]

18 July 2023

Dear Home Secretary,

I am writing to you to draw to your attention delays in responding to correspondence from my Committee, and to seek a response to outstanding urgent correspondence. As you will be aware, the Joint Committee on Human Rights has written to you on a number of occasions, most recently as part of our work on the human rights of asylum seekers and on legislative scrutiny of the Illegal Migration Bill. I am extremely concerned that, more than once, your Department has not met our reasonable deadlines for providing responses.

On 31 March, we sent you a joint letter with the Home Affairs Select Committee about unaccompanied children who have gone missing from asylum accommodation. This followed a written answer from the Immigration Minister, informing the House that, between September 2021 and February 2023, there had been 444 “missing episodes” involving children in accommodation, and that, by 6 March 2023, on only 253 of those occasions had the young person been found.¹ We gave you until 17 April to respond to us. We have yet to receive a response to this letter. My Clerks contacted your office via email on 20 June to seek a reply, but that email also did not receive a response. Given the urgency of this matter, which involves vulnerable children who may be at risk of serious harm, the continued lack of response is very concerning.

More recently, we wrote to you on 13 April, with a series of questions relating to the human rights implications of the Illegal Migration Bill, as you were unable to attend an oral evidence session with the Committee. On that occasion we asked that you respond by 24 April, in time for Report stage in the Commons. We only received a response from you on 2 June, after the Bill had already completed all its Commons stages.

¹ [PQ 156233](#) [Asylum: Children], 6 March 2023



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From Rt Hon Harriet Harman MP, Chair

While we understand the severe pressures that you and the Home Office are under, we can only effectively carry out our duties to scrutinise Government if Departments reply to our correspondence within reasonable timeframes. In particular, it is highly unusual for us to not receive any response at all to one of our letters. This consistent lack of engagement with the Committee risks appearing discourteous to us and Parliament as a whole.

I note that in its 2014 memorandum on giving evidence to Select Committees, the Government has itself stated that it “is committed to being as open and as helpful as possible with Select Committees. The presumption is that requests for information from Select Committees will be agreed to. Where a department feels that it cannot meet a Committee’s request for information, it should make clear its reasons for doing so.”²

We would be very grateful if you could provide an explanation for these delays, and if you would commit to responding to our correspondence within reasonable timeframes in future. We also ask that you urgently respond to our letter about unaccompanied children sent on 31 March, no later than by the end of July.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Harriet Harman MP

Chair of the Joint Committee on Human Rights

² Cabinet Office. [Giving Evidence to Select Committees: Guidance for Civil Servants](#). October 2014