



House of Commons

Levelling Up, Housing and
Communities Committee

**The Department for
Levelling Up, Housing
and Communities'
response times to the
Committee's reports**

**Third Special Report of Session
2022–23**

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 18 September 2023*

Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee

The Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

Current membership

[Mr Clive Betts MP](#) (*Labour, Sheffield South East*) (Chair)

[Bob Blackman MP](#) (*Conservative, Harrow East*)

[Ian Byrne MP](#) (*Labour, Liverpool, West Derby*)

[Natalie Elphicke MP](#) (*Conservative, Dover*)

[Ben Everitt MP](#) (*Conservative, Milton Keynes North*)

[Kate Hollern MP](#) (*Labour, Blackburn*)

[Paul Holmes MP](#) (*Conservative, Eastleigh*)

[Andrew Lewer MP](#) (*Conservative, Northampton South*)

[Mary Robinson MP](#) (*Conservative, Cheadle*)

[Nadia Whittome MP](#) (*Labour, Nottingham East*)

[Mohammad Yasin MP](#) (*Labour, Bedford*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2023. This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright-parliament/

Committee's reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/luhc and in print by Order of the House.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Wesley Arruda (Committee Operations Officer), Gary Calder (Media and Communications Manager), Previn Desai (Clerk), Jack Edwards (Committee Specialist), Jonathan Edwards (Second Clerk), Eleanor Ferguson (Committee Specialist), Eldon Gallagher (Committee Operations Officer), and Whitley Lane (Committee Operations Manager).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 8389; the Committee's email address is luhccom@parliament.uk.

You can follow the Committee on Twitter using [@CommonsLUHC](https://twitter.com/CommonsLUHC)

1 The Department's response times

1. We have been appointed by the House to scrutinise the spending, policy and administration of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (the Department). Throughout this Session, we have published and continue to publish reports and correspondence on important areas which matter greatly to parliamentarians, our stakeholders and the wider public. We wish to bring the attention of the House to our concern and disappointment at the Department's failure to respond to our key outputs within a reasonable timeframe.

2. It is a well-established convention that government departments should respond to all select committee reports within two months.¹ Although a longer delay may be permissible in some circumstances, it is standard practice and common courtesy for such delays to be communicated to the committee concerned with as much notice as is possible.

3. However, in this Session, the Department has not responded to any of our seven reports within two months of publication. Moreover, the Department has regularly failed to proactively inform us of delays to its responses to our reports or substantively explain why such delays have occurred.

4. Furthermore, the Government responses that we have received to our reports have been **5.8 months late on average** in this Session. In one extreme case, we received the Department's response to our *Permitted Development Rights* Report (published in July 2021) 20 months later than the two-month deadline. Further information is set out in Table 1 below.

¹ See, for example: Erskine May, 25th edition, Part 6, Chapter 38, paragraph [38.54](#)

Table 1: Summary of Government responses to Committee reports during Session 2022-23

Report title	Report publication date	Government response received
Seventh Report — Reforms to national planning policy (HC 1122)	14 July 2023	Overdue since 14 September 2023
Sixth Report — Funding for Levelling Up (HC 744)	26 May 2023	Published 24 August 2023 (four weeks late) ²
Fifth Report — Reforming the Private Rented Sector (HC 624)	9 February 2023	Overdue since 9 April 2023
Fourth Report — Draft Strategy and Policy Statement for the Electoral Commission (HC 672)	1 December 2022	Published 20 June 2023 (four months late)
Third Report — Exempt Accommodation (HC 21)	27 October 2022	Published 27 June 2023 (six months late)
Second Report — Long-term funding of adult social care (HC 19)	4 August 2022	Published 15 June 2023 (eight months late)
First Report — The Regulation of Social Housing (HC 18)	20 July 2022	Published 20 July 2023 (10 months late)
Third Report of Session 2021-22 — Permitted Development Rights (HC 32)	22 July 2021	Published 23 May 2023 (1 year and eight months late)

5. The Department has previously been identified as having failed to respond to our reports in a timely manner. For example, the Chair of the Liaison Committee highlighted the failure of several government departments to publish timely responses to select committee reports in correspondence to the Rt Hon. Mark Spencer MP, the then Leader of the House of Commons, last year.³ Specifically, the Department was identified as a repeat offender — it was responsible for five of the 13 examples of “egregiously overdue” Government responses.⁴

6. We have regularly asked for updates on why responses to our reports are overdue. For example, in January 2023, we asked Jeremy Pocklington CB, the then Permanent Secretary at the Department, for an update on overdue responses to our reports. He told us that “[w]e need to make sure that it is an important responsibility of the Department that we respond on time.”⁵

2 A Government response was first received on 10 August 2023. This was subsequently corrected and we received a final version on 24 August 2023.

3 [Letter from the Chair of the Liaison Committee to the Leader of the House](#), dated 30 March 2022, in relation to the timeliness of Government responses to Select Committee reports

4 [Letter from the Chair of the Liaison Committee to the Leader of the House](#), dated 30 March 2022, in relation to the timeliness of Government responses to Select Committee reports

5 Oral evidence to our non-inquiry session: [Departmental Annual Report and Accounts 2021-22](#), HC 962, [Q119](#) (Jeremy Pocklington)

7. We have consistently attempted to constructively engage with Department Ministers and officials through formal and informal avenues about when the Department is likely to respond to our reports. This takes up a disproportionate amount of time and energy which should be spent on delivering our priorities.

8. We expect the Department to engage with our reports with the utmost seriousness and in a timely manner. The lack of timely responses to our reports significantly inhibits our constitutional role to scrutinise the work of the Department as well as to inform the House, our key stakeholders and the public.

Reforming the Private Rented Sector Report

9. We published our *Reforming the Private Rented Sector Report* on 9 February 2023. Despite our best efforts, we are yet to receive the Department's response to this Report.

10. On 3 May 2023, the Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, wrote to us explaining that the response would be published "alongside the introduction of the Renters (Reform) Bill".⁶ On 17 May 2023, the Government introduced the Renters (Reform) Bill to Parliament. Despite the Secretary of State's letter, we did not receive the Department's response. Moreover, the Department has still not provided its response.

11. We have pressed the Department as to when a response will be forthcoming on a number of occasions and have received some conflicting replies, including:

- [6 April](#): Correspondence from Rachel Maclean MP, Minister for Housing and Planning, regarding the Department delaying its response until the introduction of the Bill;
- [3 May](#): Correspondence from the Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, confirming his intention to publish the response alongside the introduction of the Bill;
- [25 May](#): Correspondence to the Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP, following up on the response because it was not published upon introduction of the Bill on 17 May;
- [2 June](#): Correspondence from Rachel Maclean MP, regarding the Department delaying its response until the second reading of the Bill;
- 7 June: We raised the lack of response with Rachel Maclean MP during a private oral briefing;
- [12 June](#): Correspondence to Rachel Maclean MP following up on the response and outlining concerns with the Bill;
- [5 July](#): Correspondence from Rachel Maclean MP says that the Department will respond and address our concerns "as soon as possible"; and

6 [Letter from the Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to the Chair](#), dated 3 May 2023, regarding his appearance before the Committee on 27 March

- 10 July: We raised the overdue response several times with Rachel Maclean MP during a bespoke oral evidence session on the topic of the Renters (Reform) Bill.⁷

12. The lack of any formal response to our Report is a persistent and unnecessary obstacle to us being able to pursue holistic and constructive scrutiny of the Bill and the Government's work in the related policy area.

13. **In Session 2022-23, the Government has not responded to our reports within the expected two-month timeframe with responses received almost six months late on average. We have spent, and unfortunately continue to spend, excessive time and resources on seeking updates from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities about its responses to our reports but this is often to no avail.**

14. **In particular, we published our Report on Reforming the Private Rented Sector on 9 February 2023. On 3 May 2023, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities wrote to us to confirm that the Department's response to this Report would be provided to the Committee "alongside the introduction of the Renters (Reform) Bill". However, the Bill was introduced to the House on 17 May 2023 and no response was received. We have made over seven separate formal requests (and many more informal requests) for an update on the Department's response to the Report. It is deeply disappointing and frustrating that we have still not received the response.**

15. *The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities should provide the Department's response to our Reforming the Private Rented Sector Report within two weeks of publication of this Special Report; and also explain what caused the delay.*

16. *The Cabinet Secretary should provide his assessment of why the delay has occurred (including with the work of the team responsible for Private Rented Sector Policy and its role in producing a response to our Reforming the Private Rented Sector Report); and what steps are being taken to rectify this.*

17. *We very much hope the Liaison Committee will consider conducting a formal review of the Government's response times to and communications with select committees about their reports. It would be useful for such a review to take into account our experiences with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.*

7 Oral evidence to our non-inquiry session: [Follow-up: Private rented sector report and the Renters \(Reform\) Bill](#), HC 1481, [Qq. 35-37](#), [Q92](#) (Rachel Maclean MP). We also received other conflicting updates on the response in other correspondence from Ministers. See, for example, [Letter from the Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to the Chair](#), dated 17 May 2023, which stated that a full Government response would be published "very soon".