



Culture, Media and Sport Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Lucy Frazer MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport

By email

12 December 2023

Dear Lucy,

I am writing to express the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's concern about your Department's engagement with our work.

The Committee is holding its pre-appointment hearing for the Chair of the BBC on 13 December, the date for which was agreed in principle between the Clerk of the Committee and the Department's Parliamentary Clerk in early September. Since then we have received repeated reassurance that the appointment process was continuing in line with this.

The Cabinet Office's guidelines require that committees have at least seven working days notice of candidate details and the submission of the necessary papers ahead of a hearing.¹ It was therefore deeply frustrating that the Department only contacted the Clerk of the Committee at the expiry of this deadline, on Monday 4 December, to request an extension until Wednesday 6 December without providing any reasons.

While the Committee and its staff reluctantly agreed to accommodate this delay to ensure the hearing could take place before the Christmas recess, it is unacceptable that Dr Samir Shah's status as the Government's preferred candidate appeared in the media on the Wednesday morning and that it took a further four hours for the Department to provide us with the required information for us to hold the hearing.

After providing the Committee with only four and a half working days to prepare for the hearing, the Department also opted not to provide the Committee with any notice of Thursday's announcement on the BBC licence fee, although the Department had given notice to the House of its intention to issue a written 'BBC Update.' The future of the licence fee and the funding of the BBC are integral issues for us to discuss as part of the pre-appointment hearing, and so this lack of notice compounds the challenge as we prepare for this important session.

We have agreed to go ahead with the pre-appointment hearing on the planned date, as it is in the interests of the BBC to have certainty about its future Chair as early as possible, but the Department's approach has been unhelpful for the Committee, for Dr Shah as the Government's preferred candidate as Chair, and for Parliamentary scrutiny overall.

Unfortunately, this lack of engagement is not an isolated incident. The Committee has repeatedly been invited to grant extensions to the Department because DCMS has not been able to meet the two month deadline for responses to our reports. It is also rare that the Committee receives advance notice or sight of announcements from the Department. Advance notice enables the Committee to prepare appropriately for

¹ Cabinet Office, [Guidance on pre-appointment scrutiny of public appointments](#) (January 2019), para 20

announcements, is in the interests of both Parliamentary scrutiny and those of the wider public. Instead, information is usually made available in media briefings and press releases, eventually followed by statements to the House and then eventually correspondence with the Committee.

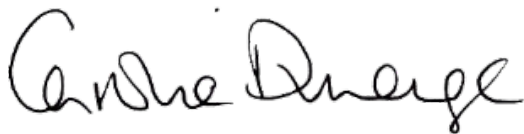
The exception to this experience has been the Committee's pre-legislative scrutiny with the Draft Media Bill, where officials and Ministers worked constructively with the Committee to ensure that the Bill was scrutinised effectively and in a timely manner. Both the Committee and the Department were able to share information in confidence, leading to improvements to the Bill, and support for the early introduction of the Media Bill in this session of Parliament.

While our role is to scrutinise the work of the Department, we are often working towards shared aims: supporting our artists and creative industries to thrive, ensuring media regulation is fit for the future, or working towards a more sustainable football pyramid. Engaging with the Committee is an opportunity for the Department to drive cross-party support on important issues such as these, and the Media Bill is testament to the benefits of this.

I hope that you will take this opportunity to raise this matter with your Ministerial colleagues and officials, with the aim of improving the Department's engagement with our work.

I am copying this letter to Sir Bernard Jenkin MP, Chair of the Liaison Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Caroline Dinenage'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Caroline' written in a larger, more prominent script than the surname 'Dinenage'.

Dame Caroline Dinenage DBE MP
Chair, CMS Committee