



10 DOWNING STREET
LONDON SW1A 2AA

THE PRIME MINISTER

9 January 2024

Dear Sir Bernard,

During my appearance before the Liaison Committee on 19 December, I said that I would write on a number of issues that were raised with me.

Question 2

Dame Karen Bradley asked about the Procedure Committee's Inquiry into the Commons scrutiny of Secretaries of State in the House of Lords.

As I said, it is common practice for Governments of all parties to appoint Secretaries of State from the House of Lords and there is an established process for scrutiny, which has been in operation for a long time, including though Select Committee appearances. I also noted that in Andrew Mitchell MP there is another Cabinet-level Minister in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office who can make statements and take questions from MPs.

Any changes to current arrangements would require consideration to be given to their practicalities and constitutional implications. The Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs recently wrote to the Procedure Committee setting out the above processes in line with the precedent established and maintained by both major parties in Government, while the Leader of the House of Commons and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the Cabinet Office also gave evidence to the Procedure Committee as part of its inquiry. The Government looks forward to considering the Procedure Committee's conclusions and recommendations in due course.

Question 86

Caroline Nokes asked about the Child Maintenance Service's enforcement powers. Child maintenance makes a real difference to the life chances of many thousands of children. Wherever possible, we support separated parents to work together and set up their own family-based child maintenance arrangements. These allow families to create flexible arrangements that work for their individual circumstances. But as I said during my appearance, it is not acceptable for parents to avoid their responsibilities to support their children. It is completely unfair that it can take so long to get children support they are due.

The Child Maintenance Service can and does enforce compliance through a wide range of enforcement powers including removal of passports, although as Caroline noted, this particular power has not been used very much. That is why we want to enable it to act much faster.

The Department for Work and Pensions has just finished consulting on the introduction of new powers to speed up strong enforcement action and other reforms of the Child Maintenance Service. Under the proposals the Child Maintenance Service will be able to use an administrative liability order to recover unpaid child maintenance instead of applying to the courts and waiting up to 22 weeks. Around 10,000 parents a year who wilfully refuse to pay maintenance are estimated to be affected by the new liability order regulations, to the benefit of thousands of children and parents for whom child maintenance is a key source of financial security. The Government will publish a response to the consultation early this year.

Question 87

Turning to the independent review to examine the Child Maintenance Service policy and procedures around domestic abuse, as I said during my appearance, we have accepted the majority – 8 out of 10 – of Dr Callan’s recommendations. The Department for Work and Pensions is working towards implementing them as soon as possible. It provided a detailed update to the Work and Pensions Select Committee on progress to date that can be found on its website.

Question 88

Turning to the issue of *Collect & Pay* and when it cannot be used because the non-paying parent is not traceable via an address. From this year parents on direct pay will start to use the online service *My Child Maintenance Case*. This will mean that when receiving parents report missed payments on direct pay, the Child Maintenance Service will be able to take quicker action to chase the paying parent and move the case to *Collect & Pay* without having to contact the parent in writing.

Question 89

Caroline also asked about action to get women over 50 back into work and in particular the work of the Menopause Employment Champion, Helen Tomlinson.

We want everyone who wants to work, to be able to find a job. That is why Jobcentres offer tailored support for eligible jobseekers aged over 50. We have a dedicated 50PLUS Champion working out of every Jobcentre across Great Britain to promote older workers to employers along with Work Coaches who can help to maximise employment outcomes. Alongside this enhanced offer, Work Coaches have the flexibility to offer all claimants comprehensive support including Restart, Sector-Based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs), the Flexible Support Fund, Mentoring circles, and 50+ Job Fairs.

For women experiencing the menopause, we launched new guidance on the *Help to Grow* website on World Menopause Day providing businesses, large and small, with the resources they need to help educate their organisation and workers. We also published the *No Time to Step Back* policy paper that summarises the work undertaken by Helen Tomlinson since her appointment and sets out plans to provide best practice guidance and education and ensure that all women in the workplace can access the guidance.

Question 94

Sir Robert Goodwill asked whether the Groceries Code Adjudicator should be given more powers. As I said, farmers should absolutely be paid a fair price for their produce. That is why we have a number of regulatory interventions in place to ensure food producers are treated fairly in contract negotiations, including the Groceries Code Adjudicator.

Where producers supply large supermarkets directly, they are protected by the Groceries Supply Code of Practice which is enforced by the Groceries Code Adjudicator. As I said during my appearance, a recent statutory review of the Groceries Code Adjudicator found that the Adjudicator remains a highly effective and valued regulator.

Looking to the future, we are continuing to ensure greater certainty for farmers. The Agriculture Act 2020 contains specific powers to protect farmers from unfair trading practices. We will use these powers to introduce new sector specific statutory codes of contractual practice for the dairy and pig sectors. These are expected to come before Parliament this year. Defra has recently launched reviews exploring the egg and fresh produce sectors.

More generally I also raised the importance of supply chains working effectively. Alongside the Groceries Code Adjudicator, the Competitions and Markets Authority has been monitoring how effectively competition is working in the groceries market.

Yours sincerely,


The Honourable Sir Bernard Jenkin MP