



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Dame Karen Bradley
Chair
Procedure Committee,
House of Commons,
London,
SW1A 0AA

21 March 2024

Dear Dame Karen,

I am writing to you today regarding the continual failure of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to answer named day written parliamentary questions within the scheduled timeframe.

On Tuesday 12th March, I tabled three questions to the Department with a response date of Friday 15th March regarding their ongoing government planning for the event of the financial collapse of Thames Water, codenamed 'Project Timber'. However, four working days after this planned response date, I have still yet to receive an answer.

The questions are as following:

1. To ask the Secretary of State for DEFRA, how many meetings the permanent secretary of his Department has held with Thames Water on Project Timber in the last 12 months.
 2. To ask the Secretary of State for DEFRA, if he will publish the minutes of meetings that officials in his Department have had with Thames Water on Project Timber in each of the last 6 months.
 3. To ask the Secretary of State for DEFRA, when the Permanent Secretary of his Department last met officials from Thames Water to discuss Project Timber.
- Unfortunately, these delays have become regular for the Department. Indeed, these delays seem to occur when the questions regard sewage pollution, or water companies - two issues which are of great importance to my constituents and many people across the country.

With the Procedure Committee having investigated the subject of written parliamentary question responses in 2021, I therefore ask you to do so again now for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Particularly, I ask you to ascertain why these delays are happening, and if they are happening deliberately as part of a wider effort from Ministers to avoid scrutiny.

I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Olney
Member of Parliament for Richmond Park