



**Permanent Secretary**

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT

Mr Clive Betts MP  
Chair, Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee

Sent via e-mail

23 April 2024

Dear Clive,

Thank you for your letter dated 15 April regarding the Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities Committee inquiry into *children, young people and the built environment*.

You are right to say that this inquiry relates to the policy remit of a number of Government Departments, and the Department for Education (DfE) have and are available to engage with the inquiry in so far as is appropriate and proportionate to our remit in the areas you are investigating.

Your letter sets out a series of questions which I will answer below:

- 1) *Has the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Permanent Secretary directly discussed our children, young people, and the built environment with you?*

The Permanent Secretary for DLUHC and I regularly speak to each other across a number of issues where our Departments hold connections. The children, young people and the built environment inquiry has been raised. The primary communication on this has been between teams in our Departments.

- 2) *Please could you set out what wider discussions the DLUHC Parliamentary Team and other officials have had with their DfE counterparts?*

I cannot provide details of all discussions between the DLUHC parliamentary team and other officials with their DfE counterparts as our departments work well and regularly together.

On the issue of this inquiry, I know that colleagues in the DLUHC parliamentary team and the Permanent Secretary's private office had a brief discussion with their counterparts on 14 March. They discussed responsibility for the areas covered with the inquiry. It was agreed that the DfE is one of many Departments with an interest, but that we do not hold formal joint

responsibility for the inquiry. DLUHC colleagues agreed to communicate this to the committee clerks, and subsequently confirmed to the DfE that this conversation has taken place.

3) *Has there been or is there currently any joint responsibility for the policy areas raised in our Children, young people and the built environment inquiry between the Department for Education and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities?*

DfE does not hold formal joint responsibility for the policy areas in the inquiry's terms of reference. We are one of many departments with an interest in the issues raised. This does not extend to joint responsibility.

4) *In your view, is Minister Johnston's portfolio related to the policy areas raised within our inquiry?*

Minister Johnston is the Minister for Children, Families, and Wellbeing. There are some areas of his portfolio which are somewhat related to the policy areas raised within your inquiry. For example, his portfolio includes children and young people's mental health within education settings (wider responsibility for the mental health of children and young people sits with the Minister for Mental Health and Women's Health Strategy, Maria Caulfield MP).

As the remit of the inquiry is so broad, it is unsurprising that there are connections to many Ministers' portfolios. Other obvious Departmental interests include those of DfT, DHSC, DCMS, and DESNZ.

5) *Why was Minister Johnston unable to attend our oral evidence session on 25 March 2024?*

The invitation was extended to Minister Johnston on 13 March. This was 7 working days before the session was due to take place. After a further phone conversation with the committee staff, it was confirmed that the committee were looking to hear from the Minister with joint responsibility. As he does not hold formal joint responsibility for the areas under discussion, he did not rearrange other commitments at short notice to attend. We did, however, originally offer the attendance of Baroness Barran, who was available, and whose portfolio includes school buildings; this offer was not taken up.

Yours sincerely,



**SUSAN ACLAND-HOOD  
PERMANENT SECRETARY**