



Procedure Committee

Wednesday, 11 December 2024

Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
via email only

Written Parliamentary Questions

Dear Steve,

Since 2010, the Procedure Committee has routinely monitored and reported on departments' performance in answering Written Parliamentary Questions (WPQs). My Committee intends to continue this important work during this Parliament and is currently reviewing departmental performance during the 2023–24 Session.

You may be aware that our predecessor committee raised concern regarding Defra's performance during the 2022–23 Session. It wrote to the then Secretary of State in September 2023 to note a sharp decline in the timeliness of responses to WPQs.¹ In her response, the then Secretary of State explained that this was owing to performance and operational issues, and assured our predecessor that measures had been put in place "to ensure a sustained and timely performance".²

Whilst Defra's performance did improve during the latter half of the 2022–23 Session, it fell sharply again during the first half of the 2023–24 Session:

Defra WPQ performance in Session 2023–24

Period	Named Day answered on time	Ordinary answered on time
7 Nov '23 to 8 Feb '24	68/271 (25%)	293/586 (50%)
16 Feb '24 to 21 May '24	91/296 (31%)	411/580 (71%)

¹ [Correspondence from the Chair of the Procedure Committee to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs](#), dated 25 September 2023

² [Correspondence from the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to the Chair of the Procedure Committee](#), dated 25 October 2023



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This drop in performance has occurred despite a slight decrease in the average number of WPQs per day compared to the previous Session.

The cross-Whitehall standard is for 85% of WPQs to be answered on time. I am sure you will therefore agree with me that Defra's performance during the last Session of the previous Parliament is deeply concerning.

I would be grateful if you could write to explain what assessment you have made of your department's answering performance since your appointment in July, and to set out what steps you have taken or intend to take to ensure that this performance improves significantly during this Session and beyond.

The data provided in this letter is taken from the WPQ system. Please do contact the Committee clerks if you believe this data is incomplete or inaccurate.

I am copying this letter to the office of the Leader of the House and the Principal Clerk of the Table Office.

My Committee would be grateful for your response by 7 January 2024 at the latest.

A copy of this letter, and your response, will be published on the Committee's website.

Yours ever,

Cat Smith MP
Chair of the Procedure Committee