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The Rt Hon. the Lord Strathclyde CH.  
Chair  
House of Lords Constitution Committee

26 March 2025

Dear Lord Strathclyde,

Thank you for the Committee's letter, received 29 January, from the former chair Baroness Drake, regarding the Committee's inquiry into *Governance of the Union*. I am responding to you in your capacity as the Chair of the House of Lords Constitution Committee.

You asked whether we intend to update the Devolution Guidance Notes (DGNs). We do not have any immediate plans to review the DGNs. They are part of a wide spectrum of guidance, publications, and training available to civil servants to support devolution knowledge and intergovernmental working skills. In addition, they are supplemented by the extensive Civil Service wide devolution capability programme. Taken all together, they enable civil servants to work across the UK Government, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive. There is always scope to improve engagement and understanding of these processes and I recognise the Committee's view that the DGNs would benefit from updates to reflect current practice. At this stage, the Government's focus is on driving improvement through delivery of our manifesto commitments and improving outcomes across the UK.

With regard to updating the intergovernmental relations (IGR) principles to include a "new principle of positive engagement", the principles for intergovernmental relations are set out in the 2022 Review of Intergovernmental Relations. These principles, alongside the review itself, were jointly agreed between the UK Government and the devolved governments. Accordingly, it is not for the UK Government to reopen the review and update the intergovernmental relations principles contained within it. Upholding the principles within the Review is a joint responsibility shared across all four governments. We are committed to doing our part in upholding those principles while continuing to ensure positive engagement with the devolved governments is demonstrated across all levels of intergovernmental activity.

You asked about the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on legislation. As set out in the 2024 manifesto, we will strengthen the Sewel Convention through setting out a new MoU with the devolved governments. We are committed to delivering effective and meaningful legislation that serves citizens across the UK. Work is underway to deliver the memorandum and initial discussions with the devolved governments took place last year. We hope that an agreed MoU will be published later this year.

We are not planning to accompany the update of the MoU with a review into the operations of the 2022 Intergovernmental Relations structures. The structures set out in the 2022 Review are functioning well and have withstood changes across all governments, especially in the last year.

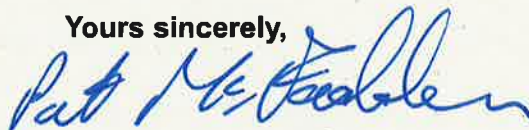
Since July, meetings at each tier have taken place at least once – with the top and middle tier meetings due to take place in the spring. Alongside these formal structures collaboration also happens on a day-to-day basis.

You requested a timetable for finalising the remaining Common Frameworks. The Interministerial Standing Committee in December set the ambition to finalise the Common Frameworks programme by the end of 2025. The UK Government is fully committed to doing so and has been clear that Common Frameworks should be the key fora for collaborative policy-making in the areas they cover. We are working closely with the devolved governments to fully implement all 32 Common Frameworks. One Common Framework, the Hazardous Substances Common Framework, has already been finalised. A further 23 Common Frameworks have been scrutinised by all legislatures and are going through quality assurance or considering legislatures' responses prior to ministerial clearance. The remaining eight Common Frameworks are at earlier stages of development with four awaiting scrutiny by Northern Ireland Assembly committees and four in development ahead of provisional publication for scrutiny.

Thank you for sharing the Committee's reflection on how the Government could share information on intergovernmental transparency. We already take a proactive approach to transparency including through the publication of communiques from the Council of the Nations and Regions and other intergovernmental meetings, alongside annual reports published by the impartial Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat. Last summer, we published our full account of legislative consent motions requested and received during the previous parliament. We are grateful for your suggestions on transparency and we will keep them under review going forward.

Thank you again for your letter and for the Committee's continued interest in the Governance of the Union.

Yours sincerely,



**Rt Hon. Pat McFadden MP**  
**Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster**