

Liaison Committee

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**Promoting national  
strategy: How select  
committee scrutiny can  
improve strategic thinking  
in Whitehall: Government  
response**

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First Special Report of Session 2024–25

HC 846

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# Liaison Committee

The Liaison Committee is appointed to consider general matters relating to the work of select committees; to advise the House of Commons Commission on select committees; to choose select committee reports for debate in the House and to hear evidence from the Prime Minister on matters of public policy.

## Current membership

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## Powers

The powers of the Committee are set out in House of Commons Standing Order No.145. The Standing Orders are available on the Internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

## Publication

This Special Report, was Ordered by the House of Commons, on 3 April 2025, to be printed. It was published on 4 April 2025 by authority of the House of Commons. © Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2025.

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## Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Liaison Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is Media: 020 7219 8211. The Committee's email address is [liaisoncommittee@parliament.uk](mailto:liaisoncommittee@parliament.uk). You can follow the Committee on X (formerly Twitter) using [@CommonsLiaison](https://twitter.com/CommonsLiaison).

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# First Special Report

Our predecessor Liaison Committee published its First Report of Session 2023–24, [Promoting national strategy: How select committee scrutiny can improve strategic thinking in Whitehall](#) (HC 31) on 29 May 2024. The Government Response was received on the 31 March 2025 in the form of a letter from the Prime Minister and is appended below.

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## Appendix: Government Reponse

I would like to thank the Liaison Committee and its members, in both its current and previous form, for the important work it delivers. All committees deliver a key function in scrutinising the Government and I will always undertake to engage constructively with their work.

I was interested to read the Committee’s report, *Promoting national strategy: How select committee scrutiny can improve strategic thinking in Whitehall*. As I stated in my letter to the Committee on 13 December 2024, this was a valuable resource as the Government brought together the Plan for Change.

The Government has considered the detailed findings and welcomes the opportunity to respond. Strategic thinking is at the heart of how the Government operates. That is why we have set out a clear vision for a Government of Service in the Plan for Change.

I am providing you with a written response on progress made to date on embedding national strategy into our mode of governing. Each recommendation has been considered carefully and grouped thematically into the below response.

## **What is strategy?**

*The Committee's recommendation regarding the parity of definitions across Government.*

The Civil Service Policy Profession supported work on strategic capability, bringing together a community of civil servants working in strategy roles to share best practice. This led to a working definition of government strategy designed to capture the range of activity that can fall under it: *Strategy in government is the coherent mobilisation of capabilities, levers, resources and partnerships towards successfully achieving public policy outcomes.*

The strategic capability work also collated available learning and toolkits to support those working in this area across the typical project lifecycle: from creating a strategic vision, to delivery and monitoring and evaluation; and articulated the typical skills required of civil servants in strategy jobs.

## **Strengthening capacity for national strategy**

*Recommendations that highlight the Committee's view that a new 'National School for Government and Public Services' should be established.*

The National School of Government was closed in 2012 by the Coalition Government. While a broad and comprehensive offer of professional development courses and programmes are available to the Civil Service at all grades, officials are currently considering what training delivery model will best ensure the public sector and Civil Service has the skills needed to support the delivery of the Government's priorities. Decisions on a future model will be taken in the context of the Spending Review.

The Committee will be aware of the project undertaken by the Policy Profession as set out above. The Government People Group is continuing the Profession's work by embedding strategy in the core skills curriculum for civil servants and supporting the strategy community.

With regards to training for Ministers, a programme of on-demand training is available throughout the year. It is offered to Ministers in their appointment letters. The sessions provide access to expert officials, and peer to peer learning from experienced Ministers. Following the 2024 General Election, an induction programme was delivered to new Ministers, designed to give an early, high-level understanding of their new responsibilities, and the support available to them in departments as well as through the cross-Civil Service functions and professions. Sessions include insight into national security responsibilities, crisis communications, working with officials to get things done in government, and managing relationships with Parliament.

Any future development of such a training scheme for MPs would need to consider several issues including funding, sponsorship, how to ensure that the security of information and advice is not compromised, and how to give members across both Houses opportunities to inform the development of the programme. There is already a range of training available to all Parliamentarians through the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The House of Commons offers a broad training package to all MPs on the work and procedures of the House. It may wish to consider providing a scheme to understand the work of government as part of a wider package of support to MPs.

Furthermore, senior UK civil servant Lucy Smith has been appointed as the third Heywood Fellow at the Blavatnik School of Government and Hertford College. During her Fellowship, Lucy will examine how governments can succeed at long term strategy.

### **Leading strategy from the centre of Government and governing for the future**

*Recommendations that address the dual topics of leading strategy from the centre of Government and governing for the future, which can be addressed by outlining the work of the newly established Mission Delivery Unit.*

Missions are a new way of governing, focusing on delivering long term, ambitious outcomes that make a meaningful difference to people's lives. Missions combine long term renewal with shorter term deliverables; they cover both long-term outcomes which mark the destination and the steps on the way - changes that the public should see this year, next year and throughout the Parliament.

Each mission is led by a Secretary of State and a Director General Senior Responsible Officer. They are supported by the Mission Delivery Unit that has been set up in the Cabinet Office. The Mission Delivery Unit works closely with departments delivering the missions across Government, and with No10 and HM Treasury to drive progress.

Clara Swinson has been appointed as the Second Permanent Secretary to the Cabinet Office and the Head of the Mission Delivery Unit, and Sir Michael Barber has been appointed as the Prime Minister's Adviser on Effective Delivery. He has worked closely with a number of Prime Ministers and Ministers in different administrations, most recently as adviser on skills delivery to the former Chancellor of the Exchequer the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP and former Secretary of State for Education, the Rt Hon Gillian Keegan from 2022 to 2023.

By breaking down departmental silos and focusing on delivering the missions, we will instil a culture of ‘mission first, not department first’ for spending in key areas such as research and development and procurement.

As the Committee knows, before Christmas I launched the Plan for Change, our strategy for a decade of national renewal. This emphasises the need for reform and collaboration across government and sectors in order to secure our foundations and deliver our five missions.

The Plan for Change sets out the next phase of mission-led Government, which will require relentless focus and prioritisation. The milestones set out in the Plan for Change reflect the priorities of working people and will make the greatest difference to their lives by the end of this Parliament. They are not the limit of the Government’s ambitions, but they signal the areas we will continue to prioritise.

### **Scrutiny by Parliament and the role of select committees**

*The final recommendations outline the Committee’s view on scrutiny by Parliament and the role of select committees.*

The Government appreciates the value of forward-looking scrutiny of national strategic objectives. However, the Government is not convinced that the establishment of a Committee on National Strategic Priorities (or a “Committee of the Future”) is required. Existing select committees have an established role in scrutinising the strategic priorities of relevant departments as part of their work, allowing a broad range of scrutiny across the House. Committees have also demonstrated the benefits of working together to scrutinise strategy and policy that sits across departments, and the Government would encourage such collaborations to continue in future. The Government notes the Committee’s suggestions on how select committees might improve scrutiny of strategic priorities, while recognising that approval of any changes to the core tasks is a matter for the House.

I thank the predecessor Committee for the thorough and detailed report they delivered and will be happy to keep the Committee informed of progress.

Keir Starmer