Procedure Committee

Rt Hon Steve Reed MP
Secretary of State
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
Via email only

Tuesday, 7 April 2026

Dear Steve,

Written Parliamentary Questions – Departmental performance in Session 2024-26

I am writing to you regarding the concerning performance of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in responding to Written Parliamentary Questions (WPQs).

As you know, my Committee has routinely monitored departmental answering performance since 2010. It is expected that departments meet a certain performance standard, namely 85% of named day questions answered on time and 85% of ordinary questions answered within five days. Where poor performance has been identified, the Committee has previously invited Ministers to give oral evidence to set out the reason(s) for the deterioration in performance and what remedial measures will be put in place to improve performance back to the expected standard.

Having reviewed the performance of MHCLG in the present Session, we were concerned about the declining performance of your department recently, despite a strong start to the Session in the period up to 6 December 2024. We note that in the most recent period that we examined, covering 9 December 2024 – 28 November 2025, MHCLG's performance has fallen to 73% of named day and 76% of ordinary questions answered on time.

We recognise that MHCLG has seen a significant increase in the volume of WPQs received per sitting day in this Session up to November 2025, of 169% compared with the 2023-24 Session. Nevertheless, many other departments have also seen large increases in volumes but have not seen their performance deteriorate to the same degree. We would therefore be grateful if you could update us as to:

- What factors (other than volume) underpin the continued decline in answering performance?
- What staffing levels are allocated to WPQs and what capacity there is for increased resourcing to respond to WPQs in a timely manner?
- When the Department expects to reach the 85% threshold in terms of timely responses across both named day and ordinary questions?

House of Commons
Palace of Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

proccom@parliament.uk
+44 (0)20 7219 3351
Social: @CommonsProcCom

Procedure Committee

In addition to responding to the above questions, we strongly suggest that you and your officials work with Ministerial colleagues and officials at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to share best practice, as that department has timely response rates of almost 100% across both categories, despite receiving 50% more questions this session. To that end, I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, to encourage cross-Whitehall collaboration on this matter.

I would be grateful of a response to this letter by **5pm on Tuesday 28 April 2026** at the latest.

I am copying this letter to the Leader of the House and the Principal Clerk of the Table Office, as well as the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, Florence Eshalomi MP. A copy of this letter, and any response received, will be published on the Committee's website in due course.

The Committee looks forward to hearing back from you soon on this matter.

Yours ever,



Cat Smith MP
Chair of the Procedure Committee

House of Commons
Palace of Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

proccom@parliament.uk
+44 (0)20 7219 3351
Social: @CommonsProcCom

Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Cat Smith MP
Chair, Procedure Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

27 April 2026

Dear Cat

Thank you for your letter of 7 April regarding my Department's performance in responding to Written Parliamentary Questions (WPQs).

My Department takes its responsibilities to Parliament very seriously and recognises the importance and value of scrutiny.

As the Committee recognises, MHCLG has experienced an exceptional increase in the number of WPQs during this session. So far, it has received the second highest number of Commons WPQs across government. As of 13 April, the Department has received over 11, 000 WPQs this session, compared with 3,961 received over the entirety of the 2019–21 session, which was also a start of a new Parliament. Additionally, the Department received around 5,500 WPQs during the 2017-19 parliamentary session.

This substantial increase in volume has placed pressures across the Department and had an impact on departmental performance. We have faced particular pressure points following parliamentary recesses. For example, following the most recent Conference recess the Department received over 300 WPQs on the first day back, more than 200 WPQs after the Christmas recess, and 271 WPQs after the most recent Easter recess. These surge in questions inevitably creates a backlog within the wider system, which has a knock-on effect on our performance.

Nonetheless, we of course take your concerns seriously and are committed to improving our performance. We have undertaken multiple steps and measures to do so. These include:

- On an ongoing basis, the Permanent Secretary and her Executive Team review department performance. Regular performance reporting of timeliness statistics are shared with teams and Ministers on a weekly basis.
- The MHCLG parliamentary team has delivered, and will continue to deliver, training across the Department to strengthen officials' understanding of the WPQ process and to support more timely drafting and clearance of responses.
- We have recently adopted AI to support the way in which WPQs are allocated across the Department, to ensure they are passed on to the relevant team swiftly and are progressed in a timely manner.

I have answered your specific questions in turn below.

What factors (other than volume) underpin the continued decline in answering performance?

As previously noted, the substantial increased volume of WPQs this session has affected the Department's ability to meet deadlines, particularly while trying to maintain the quality of responses.

While high volumes remain the primary driver of the decline in performance, there are also a few other contributing factors.

One issue routinely faced is where a WPQ includes multiple distinct questions or strands. This can make it more difficult to respond in a timely manner, due to the number of policy officials that need to contribute to the response. If such questions were separated into individual WPQs, this could make it easier to provide timely answers; however, we recognise that this would also increase overall volume.

Another challenge is repetitious WPQs. Often where the Department may already have answered the question and where the information is readily available in the public domain we believe it would be easier for Members to refer back to the previous answer, seek to answer the information online, or use the excellent services provided by the House Service including the House of Commons Library.

Finally, a separate issue is the transfer process, whereby WPQs are on occasion allocated initially to the incorrect department. This can take time to resolve while questions are transferred to the appropriate department for a response.

Notwithstanding the above, my Department are determined to improve our performance and will continue to make efforts to do so.

What staffing levels are allocated to WPQs and what capacity there is for increased resourcing to respond to WPQs in a timely manner?

The MHCLG parliamentary team includes a dedicated group of staff working full time on WPQs, supported by wider team members as required. We are currently onboarding an additional full-time member of staff.

Generally, policy teams across the Department have dedicated resources within teams to manage WPQs relating to policy in their remit. The sustained high volumes have in many cases required additional capacity to be drawn from elsewhere, which has a knock-on effect on other department work.

When the Department expects to reach the 85% threshold in terms of timely responses across both named day and ordinary questions?

As set out earlier we have implemented a range of measures to improve performance, including adjustments to internal processes and enhanced guidance for officials. Taken together, these actions are intended to provide a more consistent and resilient approach, and we anticipate they will support improved performance over time. Our internal reporting suggests performance of around 77% in the first two months of 2026, and we are committed

to achieving 85% as soon as practically possible, taking into account the significant increase in volume and its impact on overall performance. However, we ask that the Committee continue to review the overall system and note the sustained and significant high volumes.

On cross departmental engagement on WPQs, we note your suggestion. Regular discussions take place with other government departments to share and promote best practice. My officials attend these meetings regularly and will continue to do so.

Thank you for your letter. I understand and recognise the importance of this subject.

I am copying this letter to the Leader of the House of Commons and the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, Florence Eshalomi MP.

Yours sincerely,



RT HON STEVE REED MP
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government

OFFICIAL