



Ministry  
of Justice

The Right Honourable  
**David Lammy MP**  
Deputy Prime Minister  
Lord Chancellor & Secretary  
of State for Justice

**Emily Thornberry**  
Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
SW1A 0AA

1 June 2026

Dear Emily,

### **APPOINTMENT OF LORD MANDELSON AS AMBASSADOR TO USA**

Thank you for your letter on 21 May. In the spirit of transparency this government has applied to this very serious issue, I will answer each of your questions in full.

At the heart of this is Peter Mandelson's relationship with Jeffrey Epstein, an appalling criminal who committed horrific crimes against women and girls. Peter Mandelson's relationship with Epstein, the depth of which was revealed by Bloomberg's reporting and then the US Department of Justice's release of files earlier this year, included behaviour which fell shockingly far below the standards expected of any Minister or civil servant. Our priority throughout this process must be the victims of Epstein. It is right that the Cabinet Secretary, with the Prime Minister's support, took the decision to refer material to the police, and there is now an ongoing criminal investigation.

Please find my responses to your questions below.

- 1. When were you first aware that the Prime Minister was considering a political appointment to replace Dame Karen Pierce in Washington? Had you had any discussions about Dame Karen's performance as Ambassador and her success at building relationships with the Trump team before inauguration?**

Shortly before the 2024 General Election, early discussions began with the then Leader of The Opposition's – and now Prime Minister's – team about the next UK Ambassador to the United States, as we were understood Dame Karen Pierce's tenure was nearing its end. These discussions included general discussions about the potential to make a political appointment.

However, no decisions were taken until after the 2024 US election in November.

Both in Opposition and as Foreign Secretary, I saw up close and discussed Dame Karen's excellent performance in the role, and in particular the success she had building relationships with the incoming Trump administration, which also praised her.

In access talks before the 2024 election, I was asked by the then PUS, Sir Philip Barton, if I was content with the previous Foreign Secretary's decision to extend Dame Karen's posting until January 2025, and

I confirmed I was content. Later, as Foreign Secretary, I told Sir Philip that I was in favour of a further extension until at least Spring 2025.

**2. Were you asked for your view either on Lord Mandelson or any other candidates who were suggested for the role?**

I discussed a range of candidates. Prior to the US Presidential election, as Foreign Secretary, I suggested to No 10 that David Miliband, Dame Valerie Amos and Dame Cathy Ashton should be included on any shortlist of potential political appointees, if there was a Democrat Administration. After President Trump's election, and No10 had decided a political appointee would be most appropriate, I suggested George Osborne should be considered on any shortlist given his close links with senior Republican figures, at a time when negotiating a trade deal with the United States, and providing the best possible protection for UK jobs and growth from any potential tariffs, were our top bilateral priorities.

**3. Did you see the due diligence report on Lord Mandelson (or on any other candidate) that was carried out by the Cabinet Office, either before Lord Mandelson's appointment or at any other time before it was published in response to the Humble Address?**

No. The due diligence report was submitted by the Cabinet Office to No10, rather than to the FCDO.

**4. Did you express any concerns about Lord Mandelson as Ambassador, either before the appointment was announced or before he took up post in Washington? Did anyone raise concerns with you?**

At that point, I was not aware of the depth of Peter Mandelson's relationship with Epstein, nor the subsequent revelations revealed in the Department of Justice's release of files. However, in conversations with No 10, I did discuss some concerns I had about Peter Mandelson, as well as his perceived attributes.

As above, I suggested George Osborne should be considered as a candidate UK Ambassador to the US under a Republican Administration. However, as I have said since to the media, I apologise for the role I played in Peter Mandelson's appointment and I deeply regret that he was ever appointed in the first place.

Once Peter Mandelson's name had emerged in the press as a potential candidate, some Cabinet Ministers and Labour figures also raised some concerns with me, while others expressed their belief that it would make a strong appointment in the context of a Trump Presidency.

**5. Were you aware that Lord Mandelson's appointment was conditional on his obtaining security clearance? If so, how was that made clear to you?**

The FCDO is a 'DV by default' department. My expectation was, as with all Ambassadorial appointments, security clearance would be necessary for Peter Mandelson to carry out the role of UK Ambassador to the United States. The details of Peter Mandelson's security clearance were not raised with me, as is standard practice for Ambassadorial appointments.

**6. Were you aware of pressure being put on the FCDO from No 10, and specifically pressure on your private office, to speed up the vetting process and other preparation so that Lord Mandelson could take up his post in Washington ahead of the inauguration?**

As I have said previously in public interviews, I was aware of some time pressure given No 10 wanted a new Ambassador in place in time for President Trump's inauguration. Ultimately, this did not happen in time for inauguration, and as Sir Oliver Robbins has said, time pressure did not affect the outcome of the process. I told Sir Olly that I was content for Dame Karen's tenure to be extended further, while the necessary processes around Peter Mandelson's appointment were ongoing.

**7. Were you aware that Sir Olly Robbins was asked to consider a Head of Mission post for Matthew Doyle, then Director of Downing Street Communications - either at the time or at a later date? Was it appropriate for Sir Olly to be approached in this manner?**

No 10 did not inform me that this was a consideration. I was informed by my team who found out after the fact that Sir Olly had been asked to consider whether Matthew Doyle might be suitable for a diplomatic position. At the point I was told, I was informed this would not be progressing any further, and so I considered the matter closed.

I was concerned that Sir Olly was approached in this manner, but I have since been told by No 10 that this was an early conversation and that I would have been consulted had the idea progressed any further.

**8. Did you have plans for further political appointments in the FCDO?**

During my tenure as Foreign Secretary, outside of the UK Ambassador to the United States, the only political appointment to a Head of Mission position was the reappointment of Ed Llewellyn in Rome, who had previously been appointed by the Conservative government. I had no plans to make any further political appointments to any Head of Mission post.

I made a small number of political appointments to Special Envoy positions or similar, including Harriet Harman as the Special Envoy for Women and Girls and Baroness Hodge as the Anti-Corruption Champion. At the time I left the FCDO in September 2025, there were a small number of Envoy appointments under consideration, where a political appointment may have been considered alongside candidates from the diplomatic service.

**9. With the benefit of hindsight, do you have views on how political appointments should be better managed between No 10, the Cabinet Office and the FCDO?**

The Prime Minister has changed the process so that public announcements about direct ministerial appointments can now not be made until security vetting has been completed. I support this and the other changes outlined by the Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David', followed by a long horizontal flourish.

**RT HON DAVID LAMMY MP  
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER  
LORD CHANCELLOR AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR JUSTICE**



**Foreign Affairs  
Committee**

21 May 2026

**Rt Hon David Lammy MP**  
**Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Justice**

[by e-mail]

*Dear David*

**Appointment of Lord Mandelson as Ambassador to the USA**

As you will be aware, my Committee has been examining the process for appointing Lord Mandelson as Ambassador to the USA at the end of 2024. The Committee has taken evidence from the then Permanent Undersecretary at the FCDO, Sir Philip Barton, and his successor, Sir Oliver Robbins, both of whom commented on your role in the process, but of course weren't able to speak for you.

To complete the picture, I would be grateful if you could answer some questions about your role in the appointment.

1. When were you first aware that the Prime Minister was considering a political appointment to replace Dame Karen Pierce in Washington? Had you had any discussions about Dame Karen's performance as Ambassador and her success at building relationships with the Trump team before inauguration?
2. Were you asked for your view either on Lord Mandelson or any other candidates who were suggested for the role?
3. Did you see the due diligence report on Lord Mandelson (or on any other candidate) that was carried out by the Cabinet Office, either before Lord Mandelson's appointment or at any other time before it was published in response to the Humble Address?



## Foreign Affairs Committee

4. Did you express any concerns about Lord Mandelson as Ambassador, either before the appointment was announced or before he took up post in Washington? Did anyone raise concerns with you?
5. Were you aware that Lord Mandelson's appointment was conditional on his obtaining security clearance? If so, how was that made clear to you?
6. Were you aware of pressure being put on the FCDO from No 10, and specifically pressure on your private office, to speed up the vetting process and other preparation so that Lord Mandelson could take up his post in Washington ahead of the inauguration?
7. Were you aware that Sir Olly Robbins was asked to consider a Head of Mission post for Matthew Doyle, then Director of Downing Street Communications – either at the time or at a later date? Was it appropriate for Sir Olly to be approached in this manner?
8. Did you have plans for further political appointments in the FCDO?
9. With the benefit of hindsight, do you have views on how political appointments should be better managed between No 10, the Cabinet Office and the FCDO?

As is customary, I will place this letter and your response in the public domain. I would be grateful for your response by Monday 1 June to enable the Committee to continue its work on this issue.

**Dame Emily Thornberry MP**  
**Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee**