



Defence Committee

15 October 2026

Luke Pollard MP
Minister for Defence Readiness and Industry
Ministry of Defence
Whitehall
London
SW1H 2AB

Subject: Government response to the committee's report on the Afghan data breach and resettlement schemes

Dear Minister,

Thank you for the government's response to the Defence Committee's First Report of Session 2026-27, Shifting heaven and earth? The Afghan data breach and resettlement schemes.

The committee met on Tuesday to consider the response. We welcome the level of detail and the government's acceptance of many of the report's principal conclusions, including that the breach reflected systemic failings, governance arrangements were inadequate, responsibilities were at times unclear, and lessons must be learned from both the breach and the subsequent response.

However, having considered the response carefully, the committee is concerned that in several areas it does not clearly distinguish between accepting a recommendation, declining a recommendation, and declining to provide information requested by the committee. In some cases, the response acknowledges the concern identified by the committee but does not directly answer the recommendation itself.

Where the government does not intend to accept a recommendation, that position should be stated clearly. Equally, where information requested by the committee is not being provided, the government should explain this directly and set out its reasons. We would therefore be grateful for clarification on the following points.

Action plan

The committee recommended that the government publish a single action plan covering lessons from the breach and the resettlement response, with each action assigned a named owner, timetable for completion, intended outcome and means of reporting progress.

The response describes a range of existing and planned measures and commits to providing six-monthly updates. While the committee welcomes that commitment, those measures are not brought together in the structured action plan requested in the report.

The committee therefore asks either that the requested action plan be published, or that the government state clearly whether it has decided not to accept this recommendation and explain why.

Accountability

The committee recommended that the government explain who held senior official responsibility for data-protection risk within ARAP before the February 2022 breach and whether any disciplinary, performance-management or other accountability processes followed. It also asked how accountability is assigned in comparable high-risk operations today.

The response explains the current governance arrangements for the Afghan Resettlement Programme, addressing the final part of the recommendation, but does not directly answer the questions about responsibility and accountability for the failure itself.

The committee would therefore be grateful if the government could provide:

1. The senior post-holder or post-holders who held responsibility for data-protection risk at the time of the breach.
2. Details of any disciplinary, performance-management, capability or other accountability processes undertaken following the breach, together with their outcomes.

If the government has decided not to provide this information, please state this explicitly and explain the reasons for that decision.

Self-move policy

The committee remains particularly concerned by the response to recommendation 25 and does not consider that recommendation to have been substantively answered.

The recommendation concerned eligible Afghans who cannot safely, lawfully or affordably self-move to a third country. The committee's principal concern is for the most vulnerable among them. This is distinct from the question of whether an otherwise workable self-move can be completed within twelve months.

The response states that more than half of the eligible Afghans who have completed eligibility and biographic checks have already moved to a third country. That figure does not show that the remainder can self-move safely, lawfully or affordably. Indeed, on the government's figures, almost half have not yet done so.

The response also states that exceptional circumstances will be considered where an eligible Afghan cannot self-move within the twelve-month deadline. This appears to provide only for an

extension to the deadline. It does not explain what will happen where an eligible person cannot realistically self-move at all.

The committee therefore asks the government to set out:

1. How it will identify eligible Afghans who cannot safely, lawfully or affordably self-move to a third country.
2. What assistance or alternative arrangements will be available to them.
3. What consequences will follow where exceptional circumstances are accepted, including whether the twelve-month deadline will simply be extended or practical assistance will be provided.

The committee repeats its recommendation that the government publish a clear policy for this group. If the government has decided that no assistance or alternative arrangements will be provided, it should state this clearly and explain the basis for that decision.

Scrutiny and accountability under conditions of secrecy

The committee notes that the government accepts that the super-injunction was exceptional and that important lessons should be learned from the experience.

The committee also notes that the government accepts elements of its recommendation, including the need for active review points, clearer accountability, and appropriate challenge and assurance. It has not, however, accepted the recommendation that clear, generally applicable principles should govern parliamentary notification, review and scrutiny. Instead, it states that the appropriate course should remain a matter for Ministers, determined case by case.

The committee remains concerned that this approach does not address one of the central constitutional lessons of this episode. A major policy response involving risk to life, substantial public expenditure and significant public interest remained largely outside normal parliamentary scrutiny for an extended period. While the committee recognises the exceptional circumstances of the case, it is not persuaded that reliance on future ministerial judgment alone provides a sufficient safeguard against similar difficulties arising again.

The committee would therefore be grateful if the government could explain in greater detail why it has concluded that a more formal framework for parliamentary notification, review and scrutiny is neither necessary nor desirable. In particular, the committee would welcome an explanation of how the government believes effective democratic accountability should be maintained in future cases where legal secrecy prevents the ordinary operation of parliamentary scrutiny for a prolonged period.

Programme assurance

The committee welcomes the government's acceptance that programme performance should be judged not only by speed, but also by the quality and accuracy of decision-making.

However, while the response commits to publishing timeliness measures, it declines to publish quality-assurance indicators and does not identify an equivalent external means by which Parliament can assess whether casework is being completed accurately and consistently, as well as quickly, as the programme is brought to a close.

The committee would therefore welcome further explanation of how Parliament is expected to assess the quality and consistency of decision-making. In particular, please explain:

1. What internal measures are used to assess decision quality and consistency.
2. Whether summary information derived from those measures could be published without creating the unintended consequences identified in the response.
3. If the government has decided not to provide any external reporting on decision quality, why it considers timeliness measures alone sufficient to support parliamentary scrutiny.

I would be grateful for a response by Wednesday 18 November.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T Dhesi', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Tan Dhesi MP
Chair, Defence Committee