National Audit Office

The UK's independent public spending watchdog

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Toby Perkins MP
Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee
House of Commons
By email: toby.perkins.mp@parliament.uk

Date 18 September 2026

Dear Mr Perkins,

GREENING GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS

I am writing to draw your attention to the 18-month delay in the Government's publication of updated Greening Government Commitments (GGCs) and progress reports.

Since 2011, the GGCs have set out requirements for UK government departments and agencies to reduce their impact on the environment. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is responsible for publishing and monitoring progress. However, the most recent commitments expired on 31 March 2025.

I am concerned that the delayed publication of new targets may make it harder for MPs to understand government's progress in improving its environmental impact, and to hold it to account. It may also affect the practical progress that departments are making.

Continued absence of a target for greenhouse gas emissions reduction

I understand that Defra hopes to publish new GGCs in autumn, but that these may be only partial. Greenhouse gas commitments may be left until next year, to allow further time for negotiation across government. However, publication could be as late as the end of 2027. Your committee might be interested to explore why new targets have been delayed; whether departments are applying draft or provisional targets; and whether Defra has provided any guidance to departments on planning, delivery and reporting in the absence of published targets.

I understand that, although preparation of new GGCs for 2026-2030 began in 2023, Defra has not been able to secure cross-Whitehall ministerial agreement to proposed new commitments. The main point of disagreement appears to be the appropriate level of greenhouse gas reductions targets, with some departments pushing for government to align its own operations with UK-wide statutory carbon targets, while others are concerned about whether this is achievable within existing spending allocations.

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Publication of progress reporting

Defra's most recent progress report on the GGCs covered the period up to 31 March 2024. This found that overall government emissions were 41% below the 2017-18 baseline, compared with a target of 42% by March 2025 – i.e. good overall progress. However, performance varied significantly between departments. Defra has not yet published a progress report for 2024-25.

If this is of interest, I will arrange for my team to get in touch.

Yours sincerely



GARETH DAVIES