



PACAC (Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee)

House of Commons · London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London, SW1A 2AS

15th April 2021

Dear Michael,

The Commissioner for Public Appointments

You first wrote to me on 23 September 2020 about the recruitment of a Commissioner for Public Appointments, ahead of Peter Riddell's five-year, non-renewable term coming to an end in April 2021. You subsequently informed me that the competition was launched on 30 October 2020.

Since then, the Committee has heard nothing. I am concerned that this role – a very important regulator of all other public appointments – may remain unfilled. Equally, my Committee would want to examine any request for extension for the current Commissioner, because, although we have no complaints about his performance, Mr Riddell has himself on record his belief that it is very important for the Commissioner to serve only one term thereby protecting his or her independence from Ministers.

I would be grateful if you could provide an update on this post. The Committee has been standing ready to carry out a pre-appointment hearing for the Government's preferred candidate and I am conscious that the upcoming prorogation and Queen's speech would prevent any scrutiny taking place for a number of weeks.

Given the urgency of this issue, I would be grateful for a response by Tuesday 20 April. I will be placing this letter, and your response, in the public domain. I am copying this letter to the current Commissioner.

Yours ever,

William Wragg MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee



Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
Cabinet Office 70 Whitehall London
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Our reference: MC2021/08462

15 April 2021

Dear William,

Commissioner for Public Appointments extension

As you are aware, we have been working to appoint a successor to the Rt Hon Peter Riddell CBE as Commissioner for Public Appointments.

In order to provide sufficient time for pre-appointment scrutiny and consideration of the Committee's report, once a decision is taken, I am writing, in confidence, to inform you that by mutual agreement, Peter's term has been extended. He will continue to serve as Commissioner for Public Appointments until 30 September.

The Cabinet Office will shortly formally announce the extension on gov.uk but given the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee's important role in conducting pre-appointment scrutiny, I wanted to write and inform you of this in advance of the public announcement. This extension will mean that there will now be ample time for the Committee to complete pre-appointment scrutiny for the government's preferred candidate, once announced, and a proper handover period between Commissioners.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Committee on this important appointment.

With every good wish,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Gove".

**Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
and Minister for the Cabinet Office**



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20th April 2021

Dear Michael,

Reappointment of the Commissioner for Public Appointments

Thank you for your very quick reply to my letter of 15th April about the Public Appointments Commissioner where you stated that Peter Riddell has been reappointed until 30 September 2021. The Committee has found Mr Riddell to be very good Commissioner who has both shared best practice to improve public appointments processes and outcomes, and has challenged departments and bodies that have not followed the rules.

However, Mr Riddell himself has stressed in evidence to my Committee that it is very important that this role is a non-renewable appointment. The Commissioner must be independent and be prepared to deliver difficult messages to ministers, and the Committee agrees that it is important that the incumbent does not have an eye on a possible renewal of the role which may make them less likely to challenge those who could renew their contract.

Given that you first wrote to me in September 2020, that the competition was launched November, and that the Government Guidance states that public appointments should take no longer than three months to appointment, I'd be grateful if you could explain:

- why the process has taken so long;
- whether you are re-running the competition or the November process is still proceeding; and
- when the Committee will be able to hold its pre-appointment hearing for the new Commissioner, being mindful of the summer recess.

This also seems an opportune moment to ask about the First Civil Service Commissioner. Appearing before the Committee in March, Sir Ian Watmore said that the process for appointing his successor had not started and that "*it is one of those*



where it is best to get on with it". I'd be grateful for an update on when the process will be launched and when the Committee can expect to hold a pre-appointment hearing for that preferred candidate.

I am copying this letter to the Public Appointments Commissioner, and will place this letter and your response in the public domain.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'W. Wragg'.

William Wragg MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee