



HOUSE OF LORDS

Public Services Committee
House of Lords
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Rt Hon Baroness Evans of Bowes Park
Leader of the House of Lords
House of Lords
London SW1A 0PW

29 September 2021

Dear Natalie,

Government engagement with the Public Services Committee

On 15 September the-then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, was due to give evidence to the Public Services Committee inquiry into '[The role of public services in addressing child vulnerability](#)'. However he withdrew a few days before, citing "diary pressures".

We were very disappointed by Mr Gove's decision. This is an important inquiry, which has already attracted many concerning submissions about how child vulnerability has increased markedly in recent years and has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

We would hope that the Government would treat such an inquiry with the seriousness that it requires. Despite repeated requests, since the Committee was established 18 months ago we have been unable to secure a meeting in private or public with Mr Gove. We are concerned that the Government is avoiding parliamentary scrutiny on its support for vulnerable children and other pressing questions – such as how public services responded to COVID-19.

As you know, our Committee has a cross-departmental remit. We aim to investigate how the Government deals with the most difficult and wide-ranging issues across public services. Given its role in coordinating the delivery of public services, we had hoped to establish a constructive working relationship with the Cabinet Office. We wanted to hear more about how it planned to coordinate joined-up cross-Government activity as the country emerges from the pandemic, including, in particular, to hear more about the Cabinet Committee, formerly chaired by Mr Gove, on the post-COVID recovery of public services. Engagement with the Cabinet Office is therefore important to us, and it is frustrating that we have had little such engagement thus far.

We have invited the new Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP, to give evidence to our inquiry on 13 October. It is imperative that the Government's position on vulnerable children is reflected in our final report, which we will publish in the next few weeks. We hope that you will urge Mr Barclay to confirm his appearance as soon as possible, and remind your Government colleagues of their duty to make themselves available to Lords Select Committees as we carry out our important role in holding the Government to account.

I have copied this letter to the Senior Deputy Speaker, Lord Gardiner of Kimble. We look forward to receiving your response shortly.

Yours,

Hilary

Rt Hon Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top
Chair, House of Lords Public Services Committee