



# Committee of Public Accounts

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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David Williams  
Ministry of Defence  
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Zone D, Main Building  
Whitehall  
London  
SW1A 2HB

20 September 2021

Dear David,

## **RE: ACCOUNTING OFFICER ASSESSMENT LETTER – FLEET SOLID SUPPORT SHIPS**

In June 2021, I received your letter relating to an Accounting Officer Assessment of the Fleet Solid Support (FSS) Ship programme. This followed a previous assessment of the programme that you sent in November 2020, triggered by the abandonment of the competition for the manufacture of the ships.

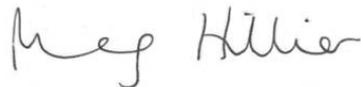
I note that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) issued a contract notice in May to signal the official restart of the competition. I understand that negotiations will continue with the chosen bidders following the issue of a draft manufacture contract later in 2021, before submission of bids for manufacture in 2022.

As a Committee, we continue to monitor closely the introduction of Carrier Strike. It would therefore be very helpful if you could provide additional information on the following:

- The NAO report *Improving the performance of major equipment contracts* noted that the initial competition failed because potential suppliers did not consider the required level of capability deliverable within the cost parameters set by MOD. What assessment have you undertaken of the likely build and support costs, and have you made full provision for this in your Equipment Plan budget?
- I note that the government has reclassified the FSS as a warship, which allows the MOD to exempt the programme from the UK Public Contracts Regulations and specify that bids must contain 'UK integration elements'. Can you set out what arrangements you are putting in place to enable or encourage winning bids to effectively work together?
- The NAO's 2020 report *Carrier strike - preparing for deployment* described how support ships are crucial to the deployment of Carrier Strike. The MOD's

requirement, as set out in the contract notice, is for three new support ships to be delivered by 2032, which is 3 years later than you told the Committee in September 2020. You have confirmed that *RFA Fort Victoria* will continue to operate until the new ships comes into service. Can you confirm that you are on track to meet this revised timetable; explain how these arrangements affect the way in which Carrier Strike can be deployed before 2032; and set out the additional costs of maintaining Fort Victoria during this period.

Your sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Meg Hillier".

**DAME MEG HILLIER MP**  
**CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**