



HOUSE OF LORDS

The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP
COP26 President-Designate
Cabinet Office
9 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AG

Cc: The Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP, The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park

29 October 2021

Dear Alok,

Delivering COP26 across Government

I am writing to you regarding the delivery of COP26 across Government, which has been the focus of a recent inquiry by the Committee.¹ We wish you and colleagues the very best of luck to secure a positive outcome from the final negotiations.

We are grateful to Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park and Peter Hill for participating in our recent evidence session on the topic and for their dedication to these pressing issues.

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and, as Peter Hill noted, COP26 will be the largest single political event that the UK has ever hosted. As such we would have expected a full-fledged response from the Government with clear leadership from the top and effective processes in place to coordinate actions across departments. The evidence presented demonstrates that not all departments are as yet sufficiently embedding climate change into their policy-making processes. It is unclear how the centre of Government is firmly holding departments to account, and whether departments have the necessary resources to test policies against Net Zero objectives. On that basis it is hard to conclude—despite heroic efforts from some individuals—that the delivery of COP26 across Government will be equal to the scale of the challenge.

We welcome the recently published Net Zero Strategy's acknowledgement that climate considerations should underpin policy across Government. However, the Government must resolve the overarching issues we highlight below if all departments across Government are to deliver on the strategy, the COP26 outcome, and to bring forward climate credible policies.

As part of the inquiry, we received submissions from nine Government departments setting out what they see as their roles in preparing for COP26 and how they are developing climate-credible policies.² It is evident from these submissions that some departments have made more progress than others. We are especially disappointed with the efforts from the

¹ Committee Members' interests are available on our website:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/6788/documents/72143/default/>

² The written submissions are available here: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/1306/delivering-cop26-across-government/publications/written-evidence/>



Department for Education, Department for International Trade, and the department now known as the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities. We hope these departments will make greater progress on climate change policy under their new leaderships.

We have the following principal concerns arising from our assessment of the departments' submissions and our recent evidence session. They lead to eleven questions on which we would be grateful to receive a response by Friday 10 December.

Cross-Government delivery of COP26 and climate change policy

The absence of an effective machinery of Government for climate change issues has hindered preparation for COP26 and limited the Government's wider progress on climate change. There is a paucity of detail available about meetings of the two Cabinet Committees responsible for climate change decision-making. We are also concerned that existing mechanisms for holding departments to account for developing climate-credible policies are failing. It is imperative that these issues are resolved if sufficient progress is to be made towards the UK's climate change targets.

1. What plans does the Government have to:
 - a. strengthen mechanisms for holding departments to account for developing climate-credible policies;
 - b. review the machinery of Government in place for climate change decision-making?
2. Are the two relevant Cabinet Committees expected to continue in the long-term, and what plans does the Government have to increase transparency around their proceedings?

It is unclear from the evidence we gathered whether there are enough staff with the necessary expertise devoted to climate change issues across Government, including the ability to analyse the climate change implications of policies. These skills will be increasingly important if the Government is to develop new and existing policies to deliver the necessary emissions reductions and adaptation measures. While we welcome the Net Zero Strategy's reference to training on climate change for civil servants, it is unclear if this will be on the scale required.

3. What assessment has the Government made of the staffing and analytical expertise (related to climate change) currently available across departments, and of likely future demand?

We welcome that the Treasury has—through the Net Zero Review—begun giving more consideration to how the costs of achieving Net Zero are distributed and acknowledges that these must be seen alongside the benefits of action and costs of inaction. This must not be a one-off task. The Treasury must support departments across Government on an

ongoing basis to ensure that both the carbon impacts of public spending are considered and that there is a fair distribution of costs and benefits in the transition to a greener economy. The Treasury should also prioritise embedding the Review within the Treasury and regularly report on its progress on the ongoing actions in the Review's Annex C, including the reporting of carbon impacts of fiscal events.

4. What are the key milestones for the Treasury's efforts to consider the carbon impacts of fiscal events, and what plans does the Government have to publish more information regarding the carbon impacts of public spending?

The COP26 outcome, global and domestic implications, and links to COP15

We welcome that the Government has articulated priority areas for COP26 around its four-fold mantra of coal, cars, cash, and trees. However, there remains a lack of clarity on what will be considered the minimum benchmarks for success at the event.³ We hope that the Government will show leadership by clearly communicating its view on this to international partners in the last stages of the negotiations and by making an open appraisal of the event outcome. The latter will be critical for prioritising issues for the rest of the UK's United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Presidency as well as ongoing trust in the UNFCCC process.

5. In your view, what outcomes have been achieved at COP26 in relation to the Government's four priority areas of coal, cars, cash, and trees, and what are your main disappointments?
6. What are your priorities for the duration of the UK's UNFCCC Presidency, and how have these been affected by the COP26 outcome?

It appears probable at this stage that COP26 will not secure the commitments necessary to limit global warming to 1.5°C. If so, it will be a foremost priority to develop plans to get on a path to 1.5°C and to adapt to the consequences should that not be achieved. The increased frequency of extreme weather events associated with global warming above 1.5°C will bring many challenging consequences. There will be human costs, including refugees from homes made inhospitable, and financial and economic costs, from damage to property and infrastructure, among others.

7. What is the Government doing to anticipate the issues arising from global warming above 1.5°C domestically, and how will adaptation be taken forward at a global level through the rest of the UK's UNFCCC Presidency?

³ This issue was raised by the House of Commons Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Committee back in March: <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/365/business-energy-and-industrial-strategy-committee/news/149569/cop26-government-should-spell-out-how-it-will-measure-success-at-the-un-climate-change-conference/>



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8. What adaptation and crisis planning processes are in place across and between departments and with other bodies, such as civil society groups, for issues arising from global warming above 1.5°C?

It is essential that tackling climate change and restoring nature are done together. While we recognise the current legal status of the UN processes responsible for climate change and biodiversity, we are concerned that Peter Hill's comment about treating them as "distinct processes" suggests the Government may not be seeking to maximise the links between the two. As we noted in a summative letter for our recent inquiry on the UN biodiversity conference, COP15 (which is to be hosted by China), the Government should seek to build lasting links between the UNFCCC and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) beyond COP26 and COP15.⁴ We look forward to announcements on nature at COP26, and we urge the Government to use its whole COP26 Presidency and the real opportunity presented by the delay to COP15 to promote concrete links between the two processes. More widely, the points we have made above in relation to the machinery of government and staffing and analytical expertise also apply in relation to the Government's efforts for restoring nature.

9. After COP26, how will the Government promote links between the UNFCCC and CBD throughout its UNFCCC Presidency?
10. How is the Government making use of the opportunity presented by the delay to COP15 to work with China to ensure it is a success?

The Government has organised several welcome small-scale initiatives in the run-up to COP26, but there is no indication of a strategic approach to public engagement for the event or on climate change and nature more widely. Such an approach is critical to underpin the actions that will be needed to achieve the UK's medium and long-term climate change targets. While we welcome the Net Zero Strategy's consideration of public engagement, the actions it mentions are unlikely to achieve the step-change required. The Committee will be looking at public engagement around climate change and sustainability as part of its next inquiry.

11. What are the main lessons learnt from the Government's public engagement around COP26, and how will these be taken forward in future public engagement on climate change and nature?

As we highlighted in our earlier letter to the Leader of the House of Lords,⁵ we were disappointed that we did not receive the fullest Government cooperation with this inquiry, including that neither yourself nor a BEIS Minister came before the Committee to give evidence. We hope and expect that there will be better Government engagement with the

⁴ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/6943/documents/72688/default/>

⁵ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7638/documents/79827/default/>



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Committee's future work. In the near term, we hope that after COP26 you will be willing to participate in an evidence session exploring the implications of the event outcome.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Parminter".

Baroness Kate Parminter

Chair, Environment and Climate Change Committee