

Committee of Public Accounts

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 5776 Email pubaccom@parliament.uk Website www.parliament.uk/pac

David Williams
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Defence

16 December 2021

Dear Permanent Secretary,

RE: Ajax programme

We note the publication, on 15 December, of a report by the MOD's Director of Health, Safety and Environmental Protection into the Ajax programme, which as the Minister for Defence Procurement said in the House of Commons:

...[highlights] shortcomings that need to be addressed, not just in health and safety but more broadly.

The Review finds serious failings in the processes followed. The result was that personnel worked on a vehicle that had the potential to cause harm.

...While we cannot yet establish a definitive causal link, it is possible that Ajax may have contributed to the current hearing loss in a small number of individuals. It remains the case that no individuals have had long term restrictions or been discharged as a result of vibration. However, assessment for both hand-transmitted and whole-body vibration take time and require a specialist assessment and these continue.

You will recall that at the Committee's 12th July hearing, members questioned you and the other MoD witnesses about your progress in resolving the noise and vibration issues. In [follow-up correspondence](#), you said:

...No declaration of Initial Operating Capability will be made until solutions have been determined for the long-term resolution of the noise and vibration concerns. Work continues on both with General Dynamics heavily committed to delivering a safe resolution. Until a suitable suite of design modifications has been identified, tested and demonstrated, it is not possible to determine a realistic timescale for the introduction of Ajax vehicles into operational service with the Army. We will not accept a vehicle that is not fit for purpose.

At a 20th July hearing of the Defence Committee, you said:

...we really need to understand the extent to which there were opportunities to identify some of the particular challenges with noise and vibration earlier
[\[Q160\]](#)

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[Subsequent media reports](#) have raised the possibility that senior officials involved in the programme did not clearly clarify the extent of the problems that had been uncovered, prior to the publication of the Government's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy; in order to ensure that the Ajax programme was not cancelled altogether.

In light of these reports, and the Secretary of State's update, I would like to invite you to clarify your comments made to both this Committee and the Defence Committee, and via follow-up correspondence. We would also appreciate your assessment of the outstanding work referred to in the Minister's statement, and the timetable for this work to be completed.

We would be happy to organise a private briefing if that would be a more productive approach to discussing the issues we have raised. I would appreciate it if your officials could liaise with the Committee clerks early in the new year to discuss next steps.

I am copying this letter to the Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood MP, Chair of the Defence Committee, and to the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Yours sincerely,



DAME MEG HILLIER MP
CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS