



# Liaison Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Tel: 020 7219 5675 Email: [liaisoncommittee@parliament.uk](mailto:liaisoncommittee@parliament.uk)

Website: <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/103/liaison-committee-commons>

From Sir Bernard Jenkin MP, Chair

Rt Hon Mark Spencer MP  
Leader of the House  
House of Commons

By email

30 March 2022

Dear Mark,

## **Re: Timeliness of Government responses to Select Committee reports**

Towards the end of last year I exchanged letters with your predecessor about the general expectations of Select Committees in relation to appearances by Ministers. I was encouraged by the response and I hope that we can continue to work together to improve Committee scrutiny of Government

I am now writing to raise concerns which have been shared with me by a number of Committee Chairs about the quality and timeliness of Government Responses to Select Committee Reports. As you will know, since the advent of the modern Select Committee system Government has maintained a commitment to responding to reports from Select Committees within two months, and to engage with the Committee to explain any significant delay.

There have undoubtedly been some challenges over the last two years which may have impacted on Departments' ability to keep to this timetable, but as we begin to move beyond Covid the trend towards late responses appears to be worsening, rather than improving, and there are a number of Committees for which responses are egregiously overdue.

I enclose a list of responses which I am aware are overdue (and some which have recently been received substantially after the deadline) to which further examples may well need to be added. I would particularly highlight the response to the Scottish Affairs Committee inquiry on Immigration and Scotland, which is some four years overdue, and the response to the Levelling Up Committee's inquiry on cladding remediation which is 10 months late. There have also been a number of examples of Departments requesting regular extensions from Committees without clear justification.

I would be grateful if you and the Cabinet Secretary (to whom I am copying this letter), could ensure that these outstanding responses are provided as soon as possible, and take steps to reiterate to both Ministers and Officials that Government responses to Select Committee reports should be provided within two months unless there are exceptional circumstances preventing this.

Of equal concern to the Committee is the quality of the responses received from Government. A number of Chairs have raised concerns about responses that do not directly address the



## Liaison Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Tel: 020 7219 5675 Email: [liaisoncommittee@parliament.uk](mailto:liaisoncommittee@parliament.uk)

Website: <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/103/liaison-committee-commons>

From Sir Bernard Jenkin MP, Chair

recommendations made by Committees – indeed during my time on the Public Administration Committee we sought a commitment from Government that each recommendation would receive a specific response rather than being amalgamated with others and it is concerning to hear that this is still a problem.

By way of example, the Joint Committee on Human Rights wrote to me this week to highlight the unsatisfactory response they had received from the Lord Chancellor to the Committee's report on the Independent Review of the Human Rights Act. The Committee's report, published last July, contained some 43 recommendations. In December of last year, three months after the deadline for a response, the Lord Chancellor wrote a two-page letter to the Committee, announcing a consultation into the Human Rights Act. Despite pressing the Lord Chancellor for a full and proper response to the report, he has indicated that he sees the letter and the accompanying consultation document as sufficient. This is clearly inadequate.

I am sure that you will agree that Select Committees can provide constructive challenge to Government that can be of great assistance in formulating policy, and that this collaboration is most useful to Government when Departments engage fully and constructively with Select Committees. It is not acceptable for Departments to ignore Committee scrutiny where it might be inconvenient. The provision of a response from Government to a Committee's report is an important part of Government accountability to Parliament. I would be grateful if you could remind Ministerial colleagues of the importance of the responsibility to respond fully to recommendations from Committees and ensure that the Ministry of Justice provides a full and proper response to the Joint Committee on Human Rights forthwith.

*Yours ever*

**Sir Bernard Jenkin MP**

**Chair of the Committee**

**cc. Simon Case, Cabinet Secretary**



## Liaison Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

Tel: 020 7219 5675 Email: [liaisoncommittee@parliament.uk](mailto:liaisoncommittee@parliament.uk)

Website: <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/103/liaison-committee-commons>

From Sir Bernard Jenkin MP, Chair

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Report:</b>	<b>Response due:</b>	<b>Received/Expected:</b>
Scottish Affairs	<i>Immigration and Scotland</i>	11 Sept 2018	-
Joint Committee on Human Rights	<i>Contact tracing</i>	7 July 2020	Response received March 2022
LUHCC	<i>Cladding Remediation follow-up</i>	29 June 2021	-
Scottish Affairs	<i>Universities and Scotland</i>	28 July 2021	-
LUHCC	<i>Future of planning</i>	10 August 2021	-
Health	<i>Workforce burnout report</i>	8 August 2021	Response received 17 February 2022
Health	<i>The treatment of autistic people and people with learning disabilities</i>	13 September 2021	-
LUHCC	<i>Permitted Development rights</i>	22 September 2021	-
Home Affairs	<i>The Macpherson Report: Twenty-two years on</i>	30 September 2021	-
Justice	<i>Covid and Criminal Law</i>	24 November 2021	
LUHCC	<i>Progress of Devolution in England</i>	1 December 2021	Response received late Feb 2022.
S&T and H&SC	<i>Coronavirus: lessons learned to date</i>	12 December 2021	-
LUHCC	<i>High Streets</i>	10 Feb 2022	-