

Written evidence submitted by Dame Caroline Dinenage MP (WRP 21)

I understand that the Procedure Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into Written Parliamentary Questions.

Whilst the inquiry is no longer accepting evidence, I want to highlight my experience which demonstrates a particularly egregious failure of Government Departments to answer Written Questions.

On 17 March I submitted an identical question to two Government Departments – Health and Social Care, and Justice – for answer on 23 March. A holding answer was provided by DHSC a day late, informing me that it would not be possible to answer the question within the time period.

I might understand a delay if the question had been a taxing one – but it wasn't. I asked both Departments whether they were responsible for reforming the regulation of funeral directors. It was a simple question of Departmental responsibility. Yet over a month later neither Department has been able to respond.

The only possible explanations are that either the respective Departments do not know their own areas of responsibility, which I find unlikely, or that the questions have been forgotten and overlooked by civil servants, special advisors, and Ministers. This would suggest that the processes and procedures for processing and dealing with Written Parliamentary Questions in Departments are not working effectively.

I would appreciate my evidence being included in your final report and I look forward to reading its conclusions.

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