



House of Commons
Liaison Committee

**Pre-Appointment
Hearings: Further
Government Response
to the Committee's
Second Report of
Session 2009–10 (The
Work of Committees in
2008–09)**

**Second Special Report of Session
2010–11**

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Liaison Committee

The Liaison Committee is appointed to consider general matters relating to the work of select committees; to advise the House of Commons Commission on select committees; to choose select committee reports for debate in the House and to hear evidence from the Prime Minister on matters of public policy.

Current membership

Sir Alan Beith MP (*Liberal Democrat, Berwick-upon-Tweed*) (Chair)

The Chair of the following Select Committees are all members of the Liaison Committee:

Administration – Rt Hon Sir Alan Haselhurst (*Conservative, Saffron Walden*)

Backbench Business – Natascha Engel MP (*Labour, North East Derbyshire*)

Business, Innovation and Skills – Mr Adrian Bailey MP (*Labour/Co-op, West Bromwich West*)

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Standards and Privileges – Rt Hon Kevin Barron (*Labour, Rother Valley*)

Statutory Instruments – Mr George Mudie MP (*Labour, Leeds East*)

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Treasury – Mr Andrew Tyrie MP (*Conservative, Chichester*)

Welsh Affairs – David T C Davies MP (*Conservative, Monmouth*)

Work and Pensions – Miss Anne Begg MP (*Labour, Aberdeen South*)

Powers

The powers of the Committee are set out in House of Commons SO No 145. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/liaison-committee/>.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Jacqy Sharpe (Clerk), Philippa Helme (Second Clerk), Paul Evans, (Clerk to the National Policy Statements Sub-Committee), Kevin Candy (Senior Committee Assistant) and Lee Chiddicks (Committee Assistant).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerks of the Liaison Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5675; the Committee's email address is liaisoncommittee@parliament.uk

Second Special Report

The Liaison Committee published its Second Report of Session 2009-10, *The Work of Committees in Session 2008-09*, on 16 March 2010, as House of Commons Paper HC 426. The main part of the Government's response was received on 20 July 2010, and was appended to the Committee's First Special Report of this Session (HC 415). The Government's response to the recommendations on pre-appointment hearings was received on 27 October 2010. This is appended below.

Appendix

Letter to the Chair from the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, Rt Hon Francis Maude MP

I attach the Government's response to the recommendations on pre-appointment hearings set out in the Liaison Committee's Second Report of Session 2009-10 (HC 426). As you know, the Government is committed to strengthening the role of select committees in scrutinising major public appointments. I hope this response will be seen as a significant step towards delivering that commitment.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the response and to hear first hand your views and those of Committee members. I understand that such meetings have previously been held in private to allow a full and frank exchange of views.

I look forward to hearing from you.

22 October 2010

Government response

Scrutiny of major public appointments

1. (Recommendation 6) The Government's original rationale for pre-appointment hearings was based on "increasing democratic scrutiny of public appointments" and on providing "greater public reassurance that those appointed to key public offices are appointed on merit". The UCL Report concludes that this objective "has been achieved" although the improvement brought about was "simply an incremental step - and quite a small one". On balance, we concur with the cautious assessment of the new arrangements and in principle support the continuance of the pre-appointment hearings on a permanent basis... (Paragraph 68)

The Government welcomes the Committee's support for pre-appointment hearings. In line with our commitment to strengthen the powers of select committees to scrutinise key appointments, this Government will offer pre-appointment hearings for major public appointments to select committees on a permanent basis. It will, of course, remain a matter for individual select committees to decide whether or not to hold hearings on a case by case approach.

2. (Recommendation 7) We recommend that a list of criteria governing the posts subject to pre-appointment hearings be established and a revised list of such posts agreed between the Government and the Liaison Committee. (Paragraph 70)

The Government agrees. The current list is illogical and inconsistent. As an early priority, the Government will work with the Liaison Committee to review and agree new criteria and to revise the list of posts suitable for pre-appointment scrutiny.

3. (Recommendation 8) We recommend that departments consult the relevant select committee on the job specification of any post that is to be subject to a pre-appointment hearing prior to the start of the recruitment process. (Paragraph 71)

The Government is committed to strengthening the role of committees in scrutinising major public appointments. However, we are equally committed to maintaining an appointments process that is proportionate, attracts candidates of the highest quality and represents value for money for the taxpayer. The Government will, therefore, need to consider this recommendation further to be satisfied that this would not result in additional delays in making public appointments or deter good candidates. We would also need to be reassured that such an approach was compliant with the requirements and principles of the *Code of Practice* issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

4. (Recommendation 6) We recommend that existing guidance relating to the hearings process be consolidated—if agreed between the Cabinet Office and the Liaison Committee—in a single document containing precise indications of the purpose and possible content of pre-appointment hearings. (Paragraph 68)

5. (Recommendation 9) We recommend that the revised set of guidelines governing pre-appointment hearings include provision for a private meeting between a Minister and a committee at the committee's discretion, in cases where a committee is inclined to make a negative report on the preferred candidate for an appointment. (Paragraph 72)

The Government will explore with the Committee the need for consolidated guidance. As part of this, we will examine further the need for new procedures in cases where committees are minded to recommend against Ministers' preferred candidates.