



Ministry
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The Lord Sewel CBE
Chairman of Committees
House of Lords
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21st
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Dear Lord Sewel,

SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE INQUIRIES ACT 2005

Thank you for your letter of 9 June regarding the Lords Select Committee report on the Inquiries Act 2005 and the debate on its recommendations to which my Ministerial colleague Lord Faulks responded on 19 March. I am responding as the Minister responsible for this area of policy. Please accept my apologies for the delay in replying to you.

It is excellent that the Liaison Committee is now reviewing the work of ad hoc committees a year after publication of their reports. I know that considerable effort goes into the work of these committees so it is important that their recommendations are followed up.


You will be pleased to read that Lord Shutt recently met with Cabinet Office and Ministry of Justice officials for an update on the work to implement the recommendations of his ad hoc committee. I understand that it was a very productive meeting and that Lord Shutt was reassured that work was progressing at a reasonable pace.

Lord Shutt accepted that there is neither the resource nor is it necessary to have a standing central unit to support inquiries. Instead, the Cabinet Office Propriety and Ethics Team has been strengthening its processes for support and assistance including engaging dedicated resource and convening a cross-Whitehall group of those with experience of running inquiries as secretaries and lawyers, to share knowledge and experience and make sure that new inquiries can start work efficiently and effectively. In addition, further work is in hand to strengthen the draft inquiries guidance, taking into account comments from Lord Shutt's committee, lessons learned from recent inquiries and expertise from the cross-Whitehall group. Lord Shutt will also be consulted before it is finalised.

In light of the strength of argument in the debate on 19 March we accept that the process of Maxwellisation and the related rules should be reconsidered to see whether greater clarity can be given to both chairmen and those who may be criticised in inquiry reports. Rules 13 to 15 will therefore be reviewed as we take forward work to amend the Inquiry Rules 2006 which Lord Shutt's Committee recommended. The changes to the Rules are in hand and other recommendations that require primary legislation will be made when a suitable legislative vehicle becomes available.

I note that you have asked for the Government's position on the Committee's conclusion that it was right that evidence given to an inquiry, and findings based upon such evidence, could be used as evidence in subsequent inquiries. This was not one of the Committee's recommendations and consequently not a point on which we consulted. We would be happy to look into this proposal but I hope you understand that we would need to work through the detail before coming to a position.

In light of the letter Sir Simon Hughes wrote to Baroness Buscombe in March, and the points made during the course of the debate, I do not consider that there is now any outstanding response.

yours


CAROLINE DINENAGE