



House of Commons
Public Administration Select
Committee

**The Governance of
Britain**

**First Special Report of Session
2006–07**

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 10 July 2007*

The Public Administration Select Committee

The Public Administration Select Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, of the Health Service Commissioners for England, Scotland and Wales and of the Parliamentary Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, which are laid before this House, and matters in connection therewith, and to consider matters relating to the quality and standards of administration provided by civil service departments, and other matters relating to the civil service.

Current membership

Dr Tony Wright MP (*Labour, Cannock Chase*) (*Chairman*)
Mr David Burrowes MP (*Conservative, Enfield Southgate*)
Paul Flynn MP (*Labour, Newport West*)
David Heyes MP (*Labour, Ashton under Lyne*)
Kelvin Hopkins MP (*Labour, Luton North*)
Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger MP (*Conservative, Bridgewater*)
Julie Morgan MP (*Labour, Cardiff North*)
Mr Gordon Prentice MP (*Labour, Pendle*)
Paul Rowen MP (*Liberal Democrats, Rochdale*)
Mr Charles Walker MP (*Conservative, Broxbourne*)
Jenny Willott MP (*Liberal Democrats, Cardiff Central*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 146. 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/pasc>.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Eve Samson (Clerk), James Gerard (Second Clerk), Anna Watkins (Committee Assistant), Louise Glen (Secretary) and James Bowman (Senior Office Clerk).

Contacts

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The Governance of Britain

1. On 3 July 2007, the Prime Minister, Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP, announced to the House of Commons that he hoped to agree “a new constitutional settlement that entrusts more power to Parliament and the British people”.¹ He set out two objectives for this new settlement: to hold power more accountable, and to uphold and enhance the rights and responsibilities of the citizen.² The Government has set out its proposals in a Green Paper published by the Ministry of Justice. The Paper does not seek to set out a final blueprint for a constitutional settlement, but “is the first step in a national conversation”.³ The Prime Minister has called on the House to work with the Government “in a spirit that takes us beyond parties and beyond partisanship”.⁴

2. The Public Administration Select Committee welcomes the Prime Minister’s statement, and the wide-ranging programme of reforms set out in the Green Paper. We particularly applaud the manner in which the statement was made—in that the proposals were made to Parliament rather than to the media—and the call for wide consultation and cross-party input. If power is to be devolved from the Executive to Parliament and to the public, it is only right that Parliament and the public should be at the centre of agreeing the terms of the devolution. While we are in broad agreement with the direction of travel, there is undoubtedly much debate to be had on the details of all of these proposals. The goals of the new constitutional settlement are ambitious and laudable, but they will only be achieved if considerable care is taken in turning them from visions into reality.

3. This Committee has long been an advocate of rebalancing the relationship between Government, Parliament and the public. We are pleased to see so many of our recommendations being acted on by the Government. A Civil Service Bill is crucial to protecting the permanence and impartiality of our public administration. In 2003, we took the unprecedented step (for a Select Committee) of drafting such a Bill;⁵ we are now told that the Government will introduce a Bill of its own in the next session. We welcome too the acknowledgement of our 2004 report into the Royal Prerogative; we noted then that this was “unfinished constitutional business”.⁶ We will work with the Government to ensure a full and sensible review of the prerogative powers.

4. Much more of our work has been relevant to the debate on constitutional reform in this country. Since 2001 we have produced reports on public appointments; on the relationship between Ministers and Civil Servants; on the role of Special Advisers; on the Ministerial Code of Conduct; on the rules for business appointments; on changes to the machinery of government; on changes to the honours system; and on the regulation of standards in public life. All of these pieces of work, and the inquiries which led to them, could and

1 HC Deb, 3 July 2007, col 815

2 As above

3 Ministry of Justice, *The Governance of Britain*, Cm 7170, July 2007, p 5

4 HC Deb, 3 July 2007, col 815

5 Public Administration Select Committee, First Report of Session 2003-04, *A Draft Civil Service Bill: Completing the Reform*, HC 128, January 2004

6 Public Administration Select Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2003-04, *Taming the Prerogative: Strengthening Ministerial Accountability to Parliament*, HC 422, March 2004

should contribute to the discussion and debate on a new constitutional settlement. All are relevant to the proposals set out by the Prime Minister. We expect to revisit some or all of these topics as we respond to the Government's Green Paper.⁷

5. Other Select Committees will offer expertise in different areas of the debate. Where appropriate, we will work with those Committees and look for wider consensus. The task of reshaping the constitution of this country is a daunting one, but Select Committees are perhaps uniquely placed to inform the successful achievement of this task. We hope that the Government will draw on this, and take advantage of the substantial contribution that we and our colleagues can make. We look forward to the challenges ahead.

⁷ A full list of PASC inquiries since 2001 is annexed to this Report.

Annex - Reports from the Committee since 2001

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2006-07

First Report	The Work of the Committee in 2005-06	HC 258
Second Report	Governing the Future	HC 123 (<i>Cm 7145</i>)
Third Report	Politics and Administration: Ministers and Civil Servants	HC 122
Fourth Report	Ethics and Standards: The Regulation of Conduct in Public Life	HC 121
Fifth Report	Pensions Bill: Government Undertakings relating to the Financial Assistance Scheme	HC 523
Sixth Report	The Business Appointment Rules	HC 651
Seventh Report	Machinery of Government Changes	HC 672

Session 2005-06

First Report	A Debt of Honour	HC 735
Second Report	Tax Credits: putting things right	HC 577 (<i>HC 1076</i>)
Third Report	Legislative and Regulatory Reform Bill	HC 1033 (<i>HC 1205</i>)
Fourth Report	Propriety and Honours: Interim Findings	HC 1119
Fifth Report	Whitehall Confidential? The Publication of Political Memoirs	HC 689
Sixth Report	The Ombudsman in Question: the Ombudsman's report on pensions and its constitutional implications	HC 1081
Seventh Report	The Ministerial Code: the case for Independent Investigation	HC 1457
First Special Report	The Attendance of the Prime Minister's Strategy Adviser before the Public Administration Select Committee	HC 690
Second Special Report	Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report (Session 2004-05)	HC 853
Third Special Report	Inquiry into the Scrutiny of Political Honours	HC 1020

Session 2004-05

First Report	Government by Inquiry	HC 51-I
Second Report	Work of the Committee in 2004	HC 306
Third Report	Response to the Government's Consultation on the Civil Service Bill	HC 336
Fourth Report	Choice, Voice and Public Services	HC 49-I

Fifth Report	Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions	HC 449-I
Session 2003–04		
First Report	A Draft Civil Service Bill: Completing the Reform	HC 128-I (<i>Cm 6373</i>)
Second Report	The Work of the Committee in 2003	HC 229
Third Report	Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions	HC 355 (<i>HC 1262</i>)
Fourth Report	Taming the Prerogative: Strengthening Ministerial Accountability to Parliament	HC 422 (<i>Cm 6187</i>)
Fifth Report	A Matter of Honour: Reforming the Honours System	HC 212-I (<i>Cm 6479</i>)
First Special Report	Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2003–04	HC 1262
Session 2002–03		
First Special Report	The Public Service Ethos: Government's Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2001–02	HC 61
First Report	Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions: The Government Response to the Ninth Report from the Committee (Session 2001–02)	HC 136
Second Report	The Work of the Committee in 2002	HC 447
Third Report	Ombudsman Issues	HC 448 (<i>Cm 5890</i>)
Fourth Report	Government By Appointment: Opening up the Patronage State	HC 165-I
Fifth Report	On Target? Government By Measurement	HC 62-I (<i>HC 1264</i>)
Sixth Report	On Target? Government By Measurement: the Government's Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1264
Session 2001–02		
First Report	Public Participation: Issues and Innovations: The Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2000–01	HC 334
Second Report	The Ministerial Code: Improving the Rule Book: The Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2000–01	HC 439
Third Report	Special Advisers: Boon or Bane: The Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2000–01	HC 463
Fourth Report	Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions: The Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2000–01	HC 464
Fifth Report	The Second Chamber: Continuing the Reform	HC 494-I (<i>HC 794</i>)
Sixth Report	The Second Chamber: Continuing the Reform: The Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 794

Seventh Report	The Public Service Ethos	HC 263-I (<i>HC 61</i>)
Eighth Report	"These Unfortunate Events": Lessons of Recent Events at the Former DTLR	HC 303-I (<i>Cm 5756</i>)
Ninth Report	Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions	HC 1086 (<i>HC 136</i>)

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 10 July 2007

Members present:

Dr Tony Wright, in the Chair

Paul Flynn

David Heyes

Kelvin Hopkins

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger

Mr Gordon Prentice

Paul Rowen

Mr Charles Walker

Jenny Willott

Draft Report [*The Governance of Britain*], proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 5 read and agreed to.

Annex agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Special Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

[Adjourned till Thursday 12 July at 10.30 a.m.]