Dear Gavin,

Defence Fire and Rescue Service

The Committee is concerned by the apparent lack of progress on the Defence Fire Rescue Project.

It is our understanding that this has been running, in one form or another, since 2009. Although your Department has not provided a figure for the costs incurred so far, it is widely accepted that these are likely to be over £30 million, and we note that Mark Lancaster said, in an answer to a Written Question in March 2017, that the whole life cost of the project is expected to be more than £400 million. We also understand that the two final bidders are Capita and Serco and that, as Tobias Ellwood said in an answer to a Written Question in October 2017, you expect the contract to be awarded this year.

In the light of these delays, recent developments and the records of the remaining bidders, the Committee has a number of concerns about the Project, and would urge you to pause any decision, so that you can consider whether it should be abandoned. In the interim, we would be grateful if you could provide an update on developments on the Project, including answers to the following questions:

1. When you expect to award the contract;

2. What savings are expected from the Project;

3. What steps you have taken to ensure that the bidders have the capacity to deliver the Project, given failures in the past;

4. What assessments you have made of efficiencies made by the Defence Fire and Rescue Service (DFRS) and the Defence Fire and Risk Management Organisation (DFRMO) over the last five years and how you have taken them into account in the Project;
5. What consultation you have carried out with the heads of establishments and commanding officers who will be affected by the project and the consequent changes to the DFRS;

6. What account you have taken of the effects on the DFRS of closures of Home Office Fire Service stations;

7. Whether new fire appliances, free use and maintenance of fire stations and other buildings, exemption from VAT, and functional control of RAF firefighters have been offered to bidders;

8. If these have been offered to bidders, whether they have been included in any comparison assessments to the current in-house scheme;

9. Whether RAF and RN firefighters, DFRS personnel employed at US bases, Defence Fire Regulatory Service workers and DFRMO HQ for governance and contract management have been excluded from the contract;

10. What estimate you have made of likely changes to the number of employees of DFRS as a result of the award of the contract; and

11. What effect the contract will have on the provision for pensions of Locally Employed Civilians at the Sovereign Bases in Cyprus.

I should be grateful for a response to this letter by Tuesday 12 June.

Yours ever,

[Signature]

Rt Hon. Dr Julian Lewis
Chairman of the Committee