Congratulations on your recent appointment as Minister for the Cabinet Office.

As you are aware, the Cabinet Office plays a leading role in developing and overseeing Single Departmental Plans [SDPs] across Whitehall. It is also responsible, along with DFID, for the domestic implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals [Global Goals].

The Government's 25-Year Plan for the Environment states:

“We are committed to delivering the SDGs across government and have set up a cross-Whitehall Sustainable Development Forum to co-ordinate and facilitate implementation of SDGs in the UK, with ongoing scrutiny from the Environmental Audit Committee who will hold us to account on SDG reporting and delivery.” (p 116)

We would like to know which departments sit on the cross-Whitehall Sustainable Development Forum, whether it as an official or ministerial-level body, when it was established, how often it has met and what its outputs are to date. To assist the process of ongoing scrutiny we would like see agendas for future meetings of the Forum.

In its response to my Committee’s report on The Sustainable Development Goals in the UK, the Government committed to embedding the Goals within SDPs across Whitehall:

“The Goals are an integral part of other departments’ work and embedding the Goals in Single Departmental Plans will enable progress against them to be reported publicly in departments’ Annual Report and Accounts.”

The Government produced a short document – Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals – alongside the SDPs. We were disappointed that only two Departments – DFID and HMRC – mentioned the Goals in their SDPs. We found that the read across from the Goals to identified departmental priorities was rarely explicit and sometimes obscure. For example, the Department for Education has told us, in the attached letter, that it is not considering adjusting its Single Departmental Plan to include a specific aim of raising awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals among young people. This is concerning as, according to your report, the Department for Education has responsibility for 9 actions, covering 4 of the 17 SDGs. In the absence of well-defined references to the Goals, we would like to know
how the Government intends to deliver on its commitment to report publically on progress against the Goals in its Annual Reports and Accounts.

In its response the Government also made a welcome commitment to undertake a Voluntary National Review (VNR) of its progress against the Goals in 2019. We would like to know when the process for undertaking the VNR will begin and which Department will be leading on it.

Finally, the Cabinet Office Annual Report and Accounts for 2016-17 state “The Cabinet Office endeavours to embed the targets and indicators of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals into operational service delivery.” We urge the Government to embed delivery of the Goals into any new contracts put out to tender or taken in-house following the collapse of Carillion.

I am writing in similar terms to Rt Hon Penny Mordaunt MP, Secretary of State for the Department for International Development.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Creagh MP

Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee