Dear Permanent Secretary,

Thank you for the evidence that you and Stephen Webb provided to my Committee on 27 June 2018 regarding the Emergency Services Network programme.

This was the fifth time that my Committee has taken evidence on the Emergency Services Network programme and we continue to be greatly concerned by the Home Office’s progress in delivering it. As you are aware, the programme is spending large amounts of public money but not delivering what it promised, while your review of the programme has itself also been delayed.

You told us that you expect to conclude your review of the programme in July 2018 and we understand that the National Audit Office will be undertaking further work on this topic. In advance of this, I have set out below our areas of continued concern in relation to the Home Office’s delivery of this critical programme and what we expect to see from your review.

We welcome your assurance that you were content with the quality of the review work undertaken so far. We are, however, concerned that you could not guarantee that the review would be complete by the end of July and your acknowledgement, one month from its planned completion, that there are still key elements outstanding. It is also concerning that the need for decisions by others, such as Ministers, the Cabinet Office and Her Majesty’s Treasury, could create additional delays. It was not clear from your evidence whether you have yet understood what has gone wrong with the delivery of this programme, or what lessons need to be learned from these failures. It is essential that your review establishes this, in order to ensure the successful delivery of this critical national capability in future.

Your responses on the proposed incremental approach to the rollout of the programme lacked clarity or detail, beyond your suggestions about specific ambulance trusts’ early use of the ESN network for data, and Immigration Enforcement on critical voice. We understood from the evidence you provided that the two conditions necessary for the continued use of Airwave are in place: i) arrangements for the replacement of the time division multiplex system and ii) provisions for the extension of the contract with Motorola. However, you were not
clear in our evidence session about the timescales for replacing Airwave or the costs of its continued use.

When your review is complete, we expect it to include an explicit identification of what has gone wrong with the programme. If, following your review, you choose to continue with the programme, we expect to see:

- A plan for the successful delivery of the programme, including commercial arrangements and user engagement.
- The cost and time implications of the revised approach.
- What the impact will be on users of the technology.
- A re-calculation of the programme's costs and benefits.

My committee will continue to be concerned about the progress of this programme until the Home Office has a clear plan for delivery and can demonstrate that it is meeting its revised milestones to deliver the programme. We look forward to using the National Audit Office's next report on the programme to inform our future work. I am copying this letter to the Comptroller and Auditor General and to the Treasury Officer of Accounts.

MEG HILLIER MP
CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS