Dear Home Secretary

The Public Accounts Committee held an evidence session on Wednesday 18 October, about the growing threat of online fraud. The Committee heard from a number of witnesses including two representatives of the Home Office, Permanent Secretary Philip Rutnam and Richard Riley, the Director of Serious and Organised Crime. Mr Rutnam and Mr Riley were accompanied by Ian Dyson, Commissioner of the City of London Police.

During the session one issue the Committee raised was about the difficulties people face when trying to report online fraud and the lack of clarity around who to contact.

I was interested to read in the press on Thursday that plans for a new fraud hotline have been in place for over a month. The article detailed a new 555 number which victims could call to report instances of fraud. The article quoted a member of the Taskforce’s board. Details of this initiative were not shared with the Committee at our hearing on Wednesday despite ample opportunity to do so.

In the meeting, I raised concerns over the lack of transparency of the workings of the Joint Fraud Taskforce – a taskforce set up by the now Prime Minister. Before this week, the website of the Taskforce contained minimal information and did not appear to have been updated since its launch.

At midday on 17 October – the day before the Committee’s hearing on online fraud – the website was amended to include minutes of meetings of the oversight board, as well as further information. The information concerning the plan to introduce a new fraud hotline was buried away in the minutes of the Taskforce’s oversight board meeting held on 11 September. I am also aware that minutes from meetings of the management board were also added to the website, although these were subsequently removed. The Joint Fraud Taskforce website states “In the interests of transparency we regularly publish information relating to the Joint Fraud Taskforce”. I note that, prior to 17 October, no information had been published since the Taskforce’s launch in February 2016.
Given this is the biggest growing area of crime it would be helpful if you could set out your views of measures in pace to tackle the issue, in particular the details of the 555 hotline. I would hope that you would also be able to underline a commitment to transparency so that members of the public are able to understand the actions that Government is undertaking to protect them.

I would like to know why plans for the reporting hotline were not raised in the hearing despite questioning by the Committee on this very subject. Furthermore, I would also appreciate a clarification regarding the reasons for the removal of the management board minutes from the website.

I would be grateful if you could write to the Committee clarifying the above points by 1 November 2017.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

MEG HILLIER MP
CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS