Dear Frank,

Publication of Government response to protecting pensions against scams: priorities for the Financial Guidance and Claims Bill

Please accept my unreserved and sincere apologies on this matter. You are correct that this was an administrative error, and I can assure you that it was not my, or indeed the Department's, intention to be discourteous or disrespectful towards the Work and Pensions Select Committee. I received your letter today and have immediately investigated this. It is the case that the Government's response to this inquiry was published on the Department's website on Monday 12 February, and I take this breach of parliamentary protocol very seriously.

This was an unintentional administrative error, and the result of a genuine misunderstanding between DWP officials. I was not personally aware that this took place but take full responsibility for the actions of Civil Servants who mistakenly thought they were doing the right thing. The Government had no desire to publicise its response before sharing this with members of the Committee. This was why the papers were sent to the Committee just after 12.00pm on Monday, and the response was then published after 5.00pm on Gov.uk. Officials believed that they were taking the right approach in doing so. However, I appreciate that this should never have been published by the Department in this way in the first place. I accept that this did not allow sufficient time for members of the Committee to consider the response before it was made publicly available, and that it was a serious error not to inform the Committee of the Department's plans to publish the response.

I have looked into whether the response can be taken down from Gov.uk, but officials tell me that this is not allowed under transparency rules. I have also looked into why the correct process was not followed in this case, and where the breakdown in communication on this occurred. I can assure you that we have put measures in place to ensure that this will not happen again.

Yours sincerely,

Guy Opperman MP
Minister for Pensions and Financial Inclusion