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Our ref: PS/0569

Sir Bernard Jenkin MP
Chair, Public Administration
And Constitutional Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

28th August 2018

Dear Bernard,

PACAC INQUIRY INTO PRE-APPOINTMENT HEARINGS


Further to my oral evidence on 3 July, I am pleased to provide you with additional information on two areas that were of interest to the Committee and on which I promised to write.

Firstly, I would like to reassure the Committee that the Government takes seriously any failures to follow the agreed processes to support Parliament in its pre-appointment hearings. Both the Chancellor for the Duchy of Lancaster and I have made it very clear that we must learn from the recent mistakes and take measures to make sure that both officials in the Cabinet Office and across government departments understand the importance of adhering to the guidance. To this end, the Public Appointments Team in the Cabinet Office has:

- documented the recruitment process for Cabinet Office roles to mitigate against the loss of corporate memory. This has been disseminated to the relevant Cabinet Office teams ("sponsorship teams") which hold the policy responsibility for the Arms-Length Bodies and therefore carry out the appointments process;;
- established regular meeting with sponsorship teams across Cabinet Office to remind them of their responsibilities and offer guidance on the correct processes;
- worked with departments across government to identify those roles which are subject to pre-appointment scrutiny and to ensure that these reflect any changes to the machinery of government and those roles agreed to through bilateral agreements; and
- run a session on pre-appointment hearings at its regular interdepartmental meetings.

I spoke about the work Cabinet Office are planning on the list of roles subject to pre-appointment scrutiny and any changes in guidance that may result from that. We will use the outcome of this work - and its publication - as a further opportunity to remind those making appointments across Whitehall of the process.

The Committee was also interested in the types of roles that women are being appointed to on the boards of public bodies. The Public Appointments Diversity Action Plan gives further information on this area (page 9). Of the 5,500 public appointees in post in March 2017, 30% of Chairs (including Chair equivalent roles, such as Ombudsmen) were women compared to 44% of Board Members being women. We do not hold the figures for those women who were newly appointed in 2016/17. However, we will be in a position to provide your Committee with a breakdown of the figures for 2017/18 in our annual stocktake which we will be publishing later in the year. It is vital that we build upon the good progress we have already made in encouraging more women into public appointments and this includes getting more women on to Boards as Chairs.

Yours ever,


Oliver Dowden CBE MP