



PACAC (Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee)

House of Commons · London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

Secretary of State, Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities

By email

29th March 2022

Transparency of IGR meetings

It has been brought to our attention that the first meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Standing Committee (IMSC) took place on Wednesday 23rd March. The Committee are concerned that it was not given notice of this meeting or provided a copy of the agenda in advance. We are aware that the Welsh Government provided notice and advance sight of the agenda to the relevant Senedd Committee.

The Committee took seriously the commitments you made to us on 1st March that the UK Government wanted the new intergovernmental relations system to be more transparent. We also took note of your view that the UK Government was being restricted in greater transparency by one or more of the devolved administrations. Moreover, when questioned on the issue of IGR transparency on 22nd March, the Minister for Levelling up, the Union and the Constitution, Neil O'Brien, emphasised to us that it was not possible for one government to act unilaterally on matters of transparency.

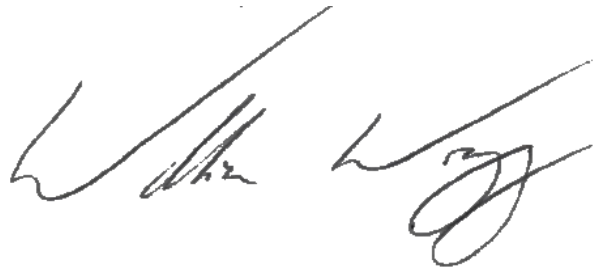
When contacted on this matter to clarify the oversight, your department confirmed that this was not in fact an oversight, but that the position of the UK Government is not provide the agenda for IMSC meetings to this Committee in advance, and the promised transparency would be in the form of a communique published after IMSC meetings.

The Committee is extremely concerned by these events, and the stated position of the UK Government. In this instance, the actions of the UK Government not only fall short of the expected level of transparency and the level of transparency on display by the devolved administrations, it also seems to fly in the face of the statements your department has made to this Committee on two separate occasions in recent months regarding commitments to transparency. Indeed, this position represents a backsliding from the arrangements formerly in place regarding IGR, whereby established practice was that the Committee was given information about IGR meetings in advance.

As we discussed when you appeared before the Committee, there is a need to significantly improve the transparency of IGR so that the new arrangements are open and trusted. The new system provides the opportunity to set up positive practices in this regard from the very beginning. A good first step would be for you to commit the UK Government to maintain, at the very least, the previously existing transparency arrangements by providing adequate advanced notice (a week for planned meetings, and as soon as possible for meeting arranged

for within a week), and the agenda for the meeting to this Committee. This should be the practice for all IGR meetings at Ministerial level and should be established across the UK Government in relation to the relevant Select Committee.

I look forward to your positive response in this regard and clarity on the UK Government's commitment to transparency in these matters.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William Wragg', written in a cursive style.

William Wragg MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
(approved by the Chair remotely)