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## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE REPORTS

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### INTRODUCTION

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**6.1** Following Committee hearings, the NAO prepares a report in discussion with Members setting out the Committee's findings and making recommendations. Once members have agreed the Report, it is published as a House of Commons Paper. The Report sets out the Committee's findings, and publishes the Minutes of Evidence of the hearing and any subsequent information provided to the Committee. This process usually takes on average six months after the hearing. An embargoed copy of the final Report is sent to departments at least a day before publication.

### PUBLIC COMMENT ON COMMITTEE REPORTS

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#### Basic Principle

**6.2** Paragraphs 98-101 of the Osmotherly Rules provide guidance on commenting on Departmental Committee reports. As with NAO reports, Accounting Officers may find some read-across with commenting on Committee reports.

**6.3** In giving immediate comment on Committee reports Departments should be careful not to pre-empt or prejudice the Government's final and considered reply to the Committee's recommendations which must first be given to Parliament. This means that comments given to the media or in other statements, especially outside the House, on publication of the Report, or in the intervening period up to the delivery of the Government's reply, should not seem (or be seen) to anticipate that reply.

#### The 1990 convention

**6.4** In a letter from the then Lord President to the Chairman of the Liaison Committee, the Government set out its understanding of the position. The main points were: departments may respond immediately in order to correct misstatements of fact; to provide background information; or to draw attention to particular passages in the Committee's Report or in the published Government evidence to the Committee;

**“Ministers have a right to respond publicly to criticisms of the Government as robustly as seems appropriate: this would include criticisms in the Committee's Report itself, inaccuracy or misstatement in media reporting, or public criticisms made by individual Committee members;**

**It is not the Government's intention that recommendations in Committee Reports should be subject to snap responses without detailed Government assessment. Nonetheless Ministers would feel free to respond immediately to certain recommendations, either positively or negatively, where the Government's position was established and clear, or where an early response was needed in order to influence fast-moving events.”**

**6.5** Similar considerations apply to immediate comment on Reports from the Committee. Departments' public comment on Committee Reports that have financial implications, or which might affect substantively the subsequent Treasury Minute, should be cleared first with the relevant Treasury expenditure team.

## RELEVANT GUIDANCE

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DAO(R)1/92 “Letter from Lord President of the Council to Chairman of the Liaison Committee dated 5 June 1990” summarised in the Osmotherly Rules at paragraph 99. On the Cabinet Office’s website at:

- [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/propriety\\_and\\_ethics/select\\_committees/responses.asp](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/propriety_and_ethics/select_committees/responses.asp)