



House of Commons
Defence Committee

**The work of the
Committee in 2005 and
2006: Government
Response to the
Committee's Fifth Report
of Session 2006–07**

Sixth Special Report of Session 2006–07

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 27 February 2007*

The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

Rt Hon James Arbuthnot MP (*Conservative, North East Hampshire*) (Chairman)
Mr David S Borrow MP (*Labour, South Ribble*)
Mr David Crausby MP (*Labour, Bolton North East*)
Linda Gilroy MP (*Labour, Plymouth Sutton*)
Mr David Hamilton MP (*Labour, Midlothian*)
Mr Mike Hancock MP (*Liberal Democrat, Portsmouth South*)
Mr Dai Havard MP (*Labour, Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney*)
Mr Adam Holloway MP (*Conservative, Gravesham*)
Mr Bernard Jenkin MP (*Conservative, North Essex*)
Mr Brian Jenkins MP (*Labour, Tamworth*)
Mr Kevan Jones MP (*Labour, Durham North*)
Robert Key MP (*Conservative, Salisbury*)
Willie Rennie MP (*Liberal Democrat, Dunfermline and West Fife*)
John Smith MP (*Labour, Vale of Glamorgan*)

The following Members were also Members of the Committee during the Parliament.

Mr Colin Breed MP (*Liberal Democrat, South East Cornwall*)
Derek Conway MP (*Conservative, Old Bexley and Sidcup*)
Mr Mark Lancaster MP (*Conservative, North East Milton Keynes*)
Mr Desmond Swayne MP (*Conservative, New Forest West*)

Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at:

www.parliament.uk/defcom

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Philippa Helme (Clerk), Eliot Wilson (Second Clerk), Ian Rogers (Audit Adviser), Stephen Jones (Committee Specialist), Adrian Jenner (Inquiry Manager), Richard Dawson (Committee Assistant), Sheryl Dinsdale (Secretary) and Stewart McIlvenna (Senior Office Clerk).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Defence Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5745; the Committee's email address is defcom@parliament.uk. Media inquiries should be addressed to Alex Paterson on 020 7219 1589.

Report



The Defence Committee published its Fifth Report of Session 2006–07 on the work of the Committee in 2005 and 2006 on 22 January 2007, as House of Commons Paper HC 233. The Government's response to this report was received on 26 February 2007. This is appended below.

Appendix: Government response

Letter from the Secretary of State for Defence to the Chairman of the Committee

1. I am writing in response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2006–07: The work of the Committee in 2005 and 2006, published on 22 January.
2. I and my colleagues welcome the Committee's report and the valuable work carried out by the Committee during the Session. I note that the Committee has found the Department to be generally helpful and efficient in meeting its requests for information, but that the Department is less proactive in providing information that might be of interest to it. I will ensure that the MoD does its best in future to proactively provide information that is likely to be of interest to the Committee.
3. I also note your recommendation that MoD should inform the Committee of major appointments, which we have hitherto done on an ad hoc and informal basis. In future, I will ensure that the Committee is informed of key civilian and service appointments once they have been made.
4. I am also content to accept the Committee's recommendation that Government responses should deal more fully with the whole argument contained in reports and not to restrict themselves purely to the recommendations and conclusions. I also agree that responses should acknowledge where Committee inquiries have contributed to changes in Government Policy. We take the Committee's inquiries and reports very seriously indeed, as we do the quality of Government Responses to those reports.
5. Paragraph 77 of the Committee's report mentions the issue of the Committee Staff having to communicate via the MoD Liaison Officer and wanting direct contact with policy officials on particular inquiries and visits, an issue we have already discussed.
6. The Committee Staff liaised directly with officials in the case of the arrangements for some of the more complex overseas visits and officials dealing with the Armed Forces Bill and, more recently there was a meeting between Committee Staff and MoD officials to discuss the provision of financial information to the Committee. As discussed, while we will continue to take a flexible approach, I feel it is important that the Committee Staff should maintain their principal lines of communication with the Department through the Liaison Officer. This ensures there is a central point for co-ordinating the Committee's work within the MoD, and in turn the Liaison Officer can ensure that the Committee's requests for information continue to be given their proper priority within the department.
7. Finally, my MoD Ministerial colleagues, officials and I very much welcome the effective and important role that the Committee undertakes in scrutinising the work of the MoD and the Armed Forces. We too are keen to ensure that the constructive and positive relationship that exists between the Committee and the Department will continue in the Sessions ahead.

Rt Hon Des Browne MP

22 February 2007