



UK GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Engaging with Parliamentary Select Committees

What are select committees?

Select Committees are set up in the House of Lords, the House of Commons and jointly in both Houses to oversee and scrutinise the work of government departments and agencies. They have a clear influence upon policy developments and public debate and have grown in profile and power since the Wright Committee reforms of 2010, which introduced the election of Select Committee members and chairs by secret ballot.

Select Committees have the power to force witnesses to appear before them, with non-attendees facing the threat of being held in contempt of parliament. They also have the power to call for papers, a power which is increasingly likely to be used.

The Committee's conclusions on the evidence they receive are published in a report to which the Government responds.

What are the risks for individuals and the organisations that they represent in giving evidence?

Giving evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee can be a daunting experience. Committee hearings are high-profile events which attract media attention. Videos of evidence sessions are now available online, meaning a witness's performance is widely accessible on-line, and is sometimes the subject of further media coverage. Evidence sessions expose witnesses to cross-examination by MPs or Peers, which at times can be hostile, particularly in certain Commons Committees such as the Public Accounts Committee.

It follows that Select Committee appearances present both personal and reputational challenges. A badly handled Select Committee appearance can cost reputations, sales and even senior level jobs. Conversely, a well-prepared

appearance can be a visible platform on which to improve the profile and reputation of an individual or organisation.

How can DLA Piper help?

Anyone appearing before a Select Committee should be fully briefed and prepared, understand how the Select Committee in question operates, how to deal with the personalities involved, and what questions to expect.

Our team, led by Lord Tim Clement-Jones CBE, has wealth of experience of advising on government affairs in the UK and supporting leading organisations operating in highly regulated fields.

Comprised of former and current Members of Parliament, parliamentary advisors and civil servants, we offer expert strategic advice that draws on distinctive perspectives, expertise and influence. Backed up by specialist legal and sectoral knowledge, we provide a unique and comprehensive Select Committee engagement and training service, tailor-made to support those asked to appear before one.

Our strategy ensures that:

- you give your best evidence to inform the Committee and answer questions competently;
- your organisation's brand and reputation are not unwittingly damaged;
- the right information is researched and communicated to the Committee;
- thought is given to likely questions so that they can be answered fully and to the satisfaction of the Committee;
- you are trained to give effective evidence with confidence to Select Committees; and
- you are equipped to present yourself and your evidence

efficiently and confidently even under pressure.

1. SUPPORT WITH WRITTEN EVIDENCE

Providing written and oral evidence is an important opportunity to promote and defend your organisation and industry priorities and influence the policy and regulatory landscape.

Our team can help you identify opportunities to engage with Committees and ensure written submissions are researched and drafted with technical parliamentary and legislative expertise and focus on the best outcomes for your organisation in the given regulatory environment.

Written evidence can be submitted voluntarily by any organisation either as a stand-alone document, or following a call for evidence by a Committee in advance of a forthcoming appearance, which should be consistent with any oral evidence provided.

2. PREPARATORY WORK

Prior to your appearance before the Select Committee we will undertake all necessary preparatory work which may include:

- an analysis of the issues to be considered by the Committee generally and how it affects the role of your organisation;
- an analysis of the broader context of the inquiry (for example, regulatory implications, future legislation being envisaged), including cross-cutting issues of relevance to your industry;
- liaison with the Committee's staff prior to your appearance before the Committee; and
- preparing biographies of Select Committee members, an analysis of their political interests, and the approaches they are likely to take to certain issues.

3. TRAINING SESSIONS FOR WITNESS APPEARANCES

Our formal training can take place over one or two sessions and can be tailored to reflect the level of experience of the witnesses preparing for an appearance. The aims of the session will be developed and agreed in advance. A typical session structure includes:

- an introduction, which will include details of the Committee, the inquiry and its remit, the powers of the Committee, and the approaches and personalities of key members;
- a briefing on potential lines of questioning, based on research into Committee members, previous evidence sessions, discussions with your organisation and our own analysis of likely areas of questioning; and

- formulation of key corporate aims and means of dealing competently and confidently with negative questioning.

At the heart of our training is a rigorous mock evidence session, which will leave no stone unturned. This will follow the structure of a real House of Commons or Lords Select Committee meeting, with members of the DLA Piper team adopting the roles of Committee members, complete with a Committee Chair to direct and lead the Committee in questioning the witnesses. Feedback can either be provided after set periods of questioning or at the end of the session as a whole.

As a result of this session, our team can also provide advice on the individuals from your organisation best equipped to appear in front of the Select Committee.

If two sessions are held, we will provide feedback from the first session, including assessments looking at the most effective presentation of your evidence, the personal performance of individuals, and areas which require additional work.

At the end of this training process, participants will feel confident that their performance will be strong enough to protect and promote both the status of the organisation they represent and their personal reputation.

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