



House of Commons
Communities and Local
Government Committee

Work of the Committee in 2007

Fourth Report of Session 2007–08



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Report, together with formal minutes

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Communities and Local Government Committee

The Communities and Local Government Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Department for Communities and Local Government and its associated bodies.

Current membership

Dr Phyllis Starkey MP (*Labour, Milton Keynes South West*) (Chair)

Sir Paul Beresford MP (*Conservative, Mole Valley*)

Mr Clive Betts MP (*Labour, Sheffield Attercliffe*)

John Cummings MP (*Labour, Easington*)

Jim Dobbin MP (*Labour Co-op, Heywood and Middleton*)

Andrew George MP (*Liberal Democrat, St Ives*)

Mr Greg Hands MP (*Conservative, Hammersmith and Fulham*)

Anne Main MP (*Conservative, St Albans*)

Mr Bill Oler MP (*Labour, Nuneaton*)

Dr John Pugh MP (*Liberal Democrat, Southport*)

Emily Thornberry MP (*Labour, Islington South and Finsbury*)

The following members were also members of the Committee in 2007

Lyn Brown MP (*Labour, West Ham*)

Martin Horwood MP (*Liberal Democrat, Cheltenham*)

David Wright MP (*Labour, Telford*)

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/clgcom

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Huw Yardley (Clerk of the Committee), David Weir (Second Clerk), James Cutting (Committee Specialist), Sara Turnbull (Committee Specialist), Clare Genis (Committee Assistant), Gabrielle Henderson (Senior Office Clerk), Kerrie Hanley (Secretary) and Laura Kibby (Select Committee Media Officer).

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1 Introduction

1. The purpose of this Report is to provide an account of the Communities and Local Government Committee's activities during 2007. As well as serving as a progress report to the Liaison Committee, we hope that this Report will prove a useful reference source to those with a general interest in the work of our Committee, and to those with a wider interest in how Parliament carries out its scrutiny functions.¹

2. This has been a particularly productive year for the Committee. We have produced eight Reports, in comparison to the five we produced in the previous year. Our achievements should not, though, be judged against quantitative outputs alone. They can be seen in our ability to hold the Government to account and influence Government policy for the benefit of the public.

¹ The Liaison Committee consists of the chairmen of departmental and some other select committees. It has several formal functions relating to select committees, including recommending reports for debate in the House and in Westminster Hall, and authorising budgets for overseas travel.

2 Overview of the Committee's activities

3. Our remit covers the wide range of policy areas that are under the departmental responsibility of the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). This diverse remit is reflected in the range of our inquiries. Our major inquiries have included the situation of English *Coastal Towns*, our inquiry *Is there a future for Regional Government?*, *Refuse Collection*, and our continuing inquiries into *The Supply of Rented Housing* and *Existing Housing Stock and Climate Change*. A full list of subjects into which we inquired is set out in the table below:

Table 1: Subjects covered by the Communities and Local Government Committee, 2007

Subject	Evidence sessions in 2007 held	Output
Coastal Towns	0	Report March, 2007 ²
DCLG Annual Report 2006	0	Report, March 2007 ³
Is there a future for Regional Government?	0	Report, March 2007 ⁴
Refuse Collection	3	Report, July 2007 ⁵
Equality	2	Report, August 2007 ⁶
Local Government Finance: Supplementary Business Rate	1	Report, August 2007 ⁷
Local Government Finance: Council Tax Benefit	1	Report, August 2007 ⁸
The Supply of Rented Housing	5	Oral evidence concluded, Report in preparation ⁹
Leasehold and Major Works	1	Oral evidence, March 2007 ¹⁰
Planning White Paper	1	Oral evidence, June 2007 ¹¹
Housing Green Paper	1	Oral evidence, October 2007 ¹²

² Second Report of Session 2006-07, HC 351

³ Third Report of Session 2006-07, HC 106

⁴ Fourth Report of Session 2006-07, HC 352-1

⁵ Fifth Report of Session 2006-07, HC 536-I

⁶ Sixth Report of Session 2006-07, HC 468

⁷ Seventh Report of Session 2006-07, HC 719-I

⁸ Eighth Report of Session 2006-07, HC 718-I

⁹ A further two evidence sessions were held in the previous Session. We plan to report during Session 2007-08.

¹⁰ Leasehold and Major Works, oral evidence taken on 5 March 2007, HC 380

¹¹ Planning White Paper, oral evidence taken on 11 June 2007, HC 671-I

¹² Housing Green Paper, oral evidence taken on 9 October 2007, HC 1038-I

Ordnance Survey	0	Report in preparation
Existing Housing Stock and Climate Change	3	Oral evidence concluded, Report in preparation ¹³

4. We made three visits in March 2007 as part of our continuing inquiry into *The Supply of Rented Housing*. Our first was in London where we met people living in temporary accommodation and learnt from them about their experiences of overcrowding. Our second visit was to Manchester where we learnt about the constraints and challenges facing housing associations in providing new social housing. Finally, we visited the Netherlands. This visit provided invaluable information on social and private rented housing models and policy initiatives that differ from those in the UK. These visits will help shape our conclusions and recommendations in our future Report on *The Supply of Rented Housing* and inform our ongoing scrutiny of Government policy on housing.

¹³ We plan to report during Session 2007-08

3 The Committee's effectiveness

5. The Liaison Committee has identified a set of core objectives and tasks for departmental select committees.¹⁴ These provide a framework for examining the effectiveness of our work. Four core objectives have been set, which are to examine the policy (A), expenditure (B) and administration of the Department (C), and to assist the House in debate and decision (D). In addition to those core objectives, the Liaison Committee also set 10 core tasks to assist in monitoring the work of departmental select committees. Our performance on these tasks is set out in Annex 1. Details of our activities in relation to the core objectives are set out below.

Objective A: to examine and comment on the policy of the Department

6. The central focus of our work is on examining current and possible future Government policy, relating primarily to the departmental responsibilities of CLG. Although we focus on the policy responsibilities of CLG, the cross-cutting nature of the issues for which the Department is responsible means that we inevitably touch upon a broad range of Government policy. In examining deficiencies in existing policy and suggesting improvements, we have been very successful in influencing Government policy. Our most significant achievements stem from our inquiries *Coastal Towns*, *Is there a future for Regional Government?* and *Refuse Collection*. As well as examining policy proposals, work continues on following up on our previous Reports and on our ongoing inquiries.

Examining existing Government policy

Securing a second Government response (Coastal Towns)

7. Our Report on *Coastal Towns*—followed by persistent lobbying—resulted in the Government taking the unusual step of issuing a second response. In it, the Government, finally, accepted a number of our recommendations.¹⁵

8. We had considered the impact of a diverse range of Government policies that affect coastal communities.¹⁶ We concluded that the Government failed to appreciate and respond to the specific needs of coastal towns, and in particular we found the lack of cross-departmental liaison disappointing. We made 33 recommendations calling for Government action across a range of policy areas. Our key conclusions and recommendations were on the need for national co-ordination of policy affecting coastal towns, the sharing of best practice on regeneration, and addressing the distinct economic needs of coastal communities. We called for Government to establish a cross-departmental working group on coastal towns led by CLG.¹⁷ On the economy, we made one key

¹⁴ Following a Resolution of the House made on 14 May 2002.

¹⁵ First Report of Session 2007-08, *Coastal Towns: the Government's Second Response*, HC 69

¹⁶ Second Report of Session 2006-07, *Coastal Towns*, HC 351

¹⁷ Second Report of Session 2006-07, *Coastal Towns*, HC 351, para 109

recommendation and reached one key conclusion. First, we asked Government to investigate the disproportionately high rise in the number of people claiming sickness and disability benefit in coastal towns in comparison to the average across Great Britain.¹⁸ Secondly, we commented on the Department for Work and Pensions' failure to recognise the significance of seasonal work in coastal towns; we viewed this as indicative of a wider lack of Government understanding of the coastal economy.¹⁹ All these recommendations and conclusions were rejected or dismissed by the Government in its initial response.²⁰

9. We were deeply disappointed with the Government's response. Our Chair, Dr Phyllis Starkey, wrote to Rt Hon. Hazel Blears, then newly appointed as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, outlining our concerns and requesting a further, more considered response, which the Government subsequently gave.²¹ Its second response accepted a number of our recommendations—in contrast to the first—demonstrating our ability to influence Government policy. The Government is now committed to establishing a cross-departmental working group on issues affecting coastal towns and forming a coastal network with Regional Development Agencies and other bodies. It has also recognised our concerns on benefit dependency and seasonal work in coastal communities. We look forward to receiving updates from Government on the issues we raised in our Report, and we will continue to monitor progress in addressing the needs of coastal towns.

The establishment of Regional Committees (Is there a future for Regional Government?)

10. In our inquiry *Is there a future for Regional Government?* we recommended that regional select committees be established, a view which the Government now shares. We examined the effectiveness of current mechanisms for scrutinising Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and concluded that improvements were needed to enhance accountability and transparency. Our Report contained a number of proposals to enhance regional scrutiny, including ways to strengthen Parliamentary oversight.²² In July 2007, the Government published the Sub-National Review; which supported the Committee's views on the importance of parliamentary oversight of regional institutions.²³ The Government has stated it believes the best means of achieving regional scrutiny is through the establishment of nine regional committees—noting and accepting our recommendation for their establishment.²⁴

11. During this inquiry, we also examined the Government's policy on city-regions and proposals for their development. We found the economic case for the development of city-regions persuasive.²⁵ We called on the Government to provide greater clarity on the

¹⁸ Second Report of Session 2006-07, *Coastal Towns*, HC 351, paras 48-53

¹⁹ Second Report of Session 2006-07, *Coastal Towns*, HC 351, para 67

²⁰ Cm 7126

²¹ First Report of Session 2007-08, *Coastal Towns: the Government's Second Response*, HC 69

²² Fourth Report of Session 2006-07, *Is there a future for Regional Government?*, HC 352-I

²³ HM Treasury, *Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration*, July 2007, p 9

²⁴ Ministry of Justice, *The Governance of Britain*, July 2007, Cm 7170, p 38

²⁵ Fourth Report of Session 2006-07, *Is there a future for Regional Government?*, HC 352-I

governing arrangements for city-regions, and on how the geographical boundaries would be defined. The Sub-National Review set out the Government's position on city-regions, including allowing groups of local authorities to establish statutory sub-regional arrangements.²⁶ The Government has not provided the level of detail that we sought; we will watch the development of city-regions with interest.

Action on Alternate Weekly Collection and Food Waste (Refuse Collection)

12. Our inquiry on *Refuse Collection* provides further examples of our influence on policy. We examined the Government's policy on waste, including its Waste Strategy, and its approach to alternate weekly collection and food waste.²⁷ We found that the alternate weekly collection of refuse is not appropriate to all areas, particularly highly populated urban centres with crowded streets and limited storage space for bins. We also expressed concerns over the potential risks of fortnightly collection of food waste. One of the key recommendations was for the Government to take action to encourage householders and retailers to cut down on food waste. Following our Report's publication progress has been made in line with our recommendations. In July 2007 the Waste Reduction and Action Programme (WRAP)—a not-for-profit company funded by Government—issued revised guidance on alternate weekly collection to local authorities, which reflected our view on the need for food waste to be collected weekly. In November 2007, WRAP also launched a food waste reduction campaign.

Securing a White Paper on introducing Business Rate Supplements (Local Government Finance)

13. In August 2007, prompted by Sir Michael Lyons' Report on local government, we held two short inquiries covering aspects of local government finance—an inquiry on proposals for a *Supplementary Business Rate* (SBR) and an inquiry on *Council Tax Benefit*. Our Report on a SBR examined deficiencies in the Government's approach to local government revenue-raising powers, and examined the case for introducing a SBR, as called for by Sir Michael Lyons.²⁸ Following our Report the Government published a White Paper, *Business Rate Supplements*, in October 2007. The White Paper contained a firm proposal to introduce a power for local authorities to raise and retain local supplements to the national business rate.²⁹ We welcome the Government's commitment to introducing these powers, though we regret that the Government's proposals place restrictions around their use, which may limit their effectiveness. We will be following up on this inquiry during 2008.

14. Our Report on *Council Tax Benefit* highlighted some deficiencies in the Government's policy approach to Council Tax Benefit and examined the case for structural reform.³⁰ The Government did not agree with us on the need for structural reform of the rules governing Council Tax Benefit and instead stated that its focus was on increasing take up, particularly

²⁶ HM Treasury, *Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration*, July 2007

²⁷ Fifth Report of Session 2006-07, *Refuse Collection*, HC 536-1

²⁸ Seventh Report of Session 2006-07, *Local Government Finance: Supplementary Business Rate*, HC 719-1

²⁹ HM Treasury, *Business rate supplements: a White Paper*, October 2007, Cm 7230

³⁰ Eighth Report of Session 2006-07, *Local Government Finance: Council Tax Benefit*, HC 718

by pensioners.³¹ Following our Report's publication the Local Government Association published its own Report on the need for reform of Council Tax Benefit.³² We hope that continued pressure for change on this issue will lead to Government action in the future.

Examining Government policy proposals

15. We have examined a number of CLG documents as part of our work in scrutinising the Department's output: the Discrimination Law Review,³³ the Planning White Paper,³⁴ and the Housing Green Paper.³⁵ On each paper we took oral evidence from the relevant minister. The evidence session covering the Discrimination Law Review fed into our Report on *Equality*. The evidence session on the Housing Green Paper linked into our continuing inquiry on *The Supply of Rented Housing*, and the session on the Planning Green Paper enabled us to follow up on our earlier Report on a *Planning-gain Supplement*.³⁶

Ongoing work

16. We are committed to following up on our previous inquiries and monitoring the Government's actions on our recommendations. In addition to further action on our *Coastal Towns* inquiry, we are also pursuing issues arising from our inquiries on *Refuse Collection* and *New Towns*.

17. In our inquiry on *Refuse Collection* we examined proposals for the introduction of financial incentive schemes to encourage householders to reduce their waste. We concluded that introducing household rewards of as little as £20 or £30 a year for sorting waste was too low an incentive to ensure the behavioural change required. We also concluded that there could be implementation difficulties and negative consequences, such as increased fly-tipping and non-payment. The debate on proposals for the introduction of financial incentives to encourage recycling and waste reduction remains controversial. The Government's response did not adequately address our concerns on some of the details of implementing such charges. In December 2007 we held an evidence session with the Minister for Local Government, John Healey MP, and the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Joan Ruddock MP, following up on the proposal for introducing financial incentives, as outlined in the Climate Change Bill. We are pleased that the Bill allows local authorities to link waste incentives with council tax if they wish.³⁷ We will continue to watch developments in this area.

³¹ First Special Report 2006-07, *Local Government Finance-Council Tax Benefit: Government's Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2006-07*, HC 1037

³² Local Government Association, *A benefit to eight million households*, September 2007, <http://www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Publication/counciltaxbenefit.pdf>

³³ Department for Communities and Local Government, *Discrimination Law Review, A consultation paper*, June 2007

³⁴ Department for Communities and Local Government, *Planning for a Sustainable Future: a White Paper*, May 2007

³⁵ Department for Communities and Local Government, *Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable-Housing Green Paper*, July 2007

³⁶ Fifth Report of Session 2005-06, HC 1024-I

³⁷ Q 51, oral evidence Monday 17 December 2007

18. In May 2007, we requested a memorandum from the Government on New Towns. This followed a number of recommendations made by our predecessor Committee—the Transport, Local Government and Regions Committee—in its Report on *New Towns: Their Problems and Future*.³⁸ In particular, we were keen to pursue our predecessors’ finding that “it [was] very surprising that the New Towns ‘experiment’ [had] never been evaluated”.³⁹ In the current policy context, where the Government is undertaking substantial work both on existing Growth Areas and on proposed new “eco-towns”, our predecessors’ conclusion that “an evaluation is urgently required which identifies both good practice and mistakes before any major new settlements are considered” appeared even more pressing now than when it was made five years ago.⁴⁰ We also wished to find out from the Government what steps it had taken since the Committee’s Report to meet the reinvestment needs of New Towns identified in that Report.

19. The Government’s memorandum is published on our website.⁴¹ Although its overall response appeared encouraging, we were concerned that the Government’s response to the crucial recommendations on research seemed half-hearted. We have therefore subsequently sought further information from the Town and Country Planning Association and from the New Towns Special Interest Group of interested local authorities. We will take a decision in the light of their responses on what further follow-up work might be appropriate.

20. We are also continuing our work on housing. In 2007 we held five evidence sessions as part of our inquiry into *The Supply of Rented Housing*. These sessions covered a broad range of housing issues including the role and significance of the social and private rented sectors, the future for local government and Arms-Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) in housing delivery, and measures to increase the supply of rented housing. In 2007 the Government published a Housing Green Paper. We felt it was important to take the Green Paper into account in our deliberations, and this has delayed publication of our Report. We held an additional evidence session with the Minister for Housing and Planning, Rt Hon. Yvette Cooper MP, to question her on these issues. We now plan to publish our Report during 2008.

Objective B: to examine the expenditure of the Department

21. Issues of public expenditure are covered in many of our inquiries. The annual inquiry into the Department’s Annual Report is the principal focus of our scrutiny of CLG’s expenditure, alongside its focus on the performance and administration of the Department. In our Report on the Department’s Annual Report 2007 we commented on the disappointing quality of information that CLG provided in the previous year in its Winter Supplementary Estimates memorandum. We went on to note the improved memorandum provided in 2007. Our adverse comments on previous Estimates have led to

³⁸ Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee, *New Towns: Their Problems and Future*, Nineteenth Report of Session 2001-02, HC 603-I

³⁹ Nineteenth Report of Session 2001-02, HC 603-I, para 85

⁴⁰ Nineteenth Report of Session 2001-02, HC 603-I, para 85

⁴¹ www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmcomloc/memo/newtown/contents.htm

significant improvement in the Department's provision of information.⁴² Our scrutiny of the 2007 Winter Supplementary Estimates continues, and we will continue to seek further improvement in the clarity and usefulness of the information provided to Parliament in the Department's Estimates memoranda.

Objective C: to examine the administration of the Department

Public Service Agreements

22. Examination of Public Service Agreements (PSAs) provides an important means of monitoring the effectiveness of a department's ability to deliver. In our Report on the Department's Annual Report 2007 we commented that almost all of its PSAs "relied on the actions of someone else if their goals were to be achieved and on data collected elsewhere if they were to be accurately measured and assessed" and examined the effect of this on CLG's ability to deliver.⁴³ We also examined CLG's "slippage" on three PSAs—Decent Homes (PSA 7), Gender Equality (PSA 9) and Race Equality and Community Cohesion (PSA 10).⁴⁴ In our inquiry on *Equality* we considered existing PSA targets that covered different equality strands. We recommended that it would be beneficial for one PSA to cover all equality strands to ensure that the Government tackled discrimination faced by all disadvantaged groups. The Government has now adopted the recommendation.⁴⁵

Scrutiny of executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies

23. In our Report on the Department's Annual Report 2007 we outlined the extent to which CLG is dependent upon a number of executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies to deliver its agenda, and we have examined the work of these bodies in our inquiries.⁴⁶ This has included examining the work of the executive agency Ordnance Survey and the non-departmental public bodies Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), English Partnerships, and the Housing Corporation.

24. Ordnance Survey—the national mapping agency—is one of the four executive agencies of which CLG has oversight. The others are the Planning Inspectorate, the Fire Service College and the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre. During 2007 we examined Ordnance Survey's role and function. The rationale for this inquiry was to follow up on the recommendations made by our Committee's predecessor in 2002, and to consider the regulatory framework in which it operates, particularly the commercial use of public sector information.⁴⁷ In June 2007 we published 18 memoranda received from various witnesses. We plan to publish a short Report on Ordnance Survey during 2008.

⁴² Second Report of Session 2007-08, *CLG Annual Report 2007*, HC 170, para 43

⁴³ Second Report of Session 2007-08, *CLG Annual Report 2007*, HC 170, para 1

⁴⁴ Second Report of Session 2007-08, *CLG Annual Report 2007*, HC 170, para 8

⁴⁵ Government Equalities Office, *Equality, The Government's response to the Report of the Communities and Local Government Committee*, Cm 7246

⁴⁶ Second Report of Session 2007-08, *CLG Annual Report 2007*, HC 170

⁴⁷ Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Tenth Report of Session 2001-02, *Ordnance Survey*, HC 481

25. Our inquiries on *Regional Government* and *Coastal Towns* considered the role and effectiveness of the executive non-departmental public bodies RDAs. While CLG does not hold departmental policy responsibility for RDAs—which lies with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform—it is responsible for more than half of their funding. In our inquiry on *Regional Government* we concluded that there is a need for greater transparency and accountability of RDAs.⁴⁸ In our inquiry on *Coastal Towns* we drew attention to the critical role of RDAs in securing the regeneration of coastal communities, and we recommended that RDAs share best practice in this area.⁴⁹

26. We examined the process of establishing the non-departmental public body the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in our inquiry on *Equality*. During 2007 CLG held lead departmental responsibility for the Government's equalities policy, which included oversight of this body. In our Report we welcomed the formation of the new Commission but were critical of the Government's handling of its establishment.⁵⁰

27. Through our continuing inquiry into *The Supply of Rented Housing*, we have also examined the role and effectiveness of the public bodies English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation in increasing the supply of social and private rented housing.

Objective D: to assist the House in debate and decision

28. Westminster Hall debates provide an important forum for Parliamentary discussion on select committee reports. Our Report on *Coastal Towns* was debated in Westminster Hall on 7 June 2007.⁵¹ We were pleased that, beyond our Committee's membership, hon. Members across parties, many with seaside town constituencies, expressed their support for our Report. The debate was useful in highlighting the inadequacy of the Government's initial response and in securing a further response. We intend to seek debates on other Reports of the 2006-07 Session as opportunities arise. In addition, two of our Reports and three evidence sessions have been tagged on the Order Paper as relevant to debates in the House.⁵²

⁴⁸ Fourth Report of Session 2006-07, *Is there a future for Regional Government?*, HC 352

⁴⁹ Second Report of Session 2006-07, *Coastal Towns*, HC 351, para 99

⁵⁰ Sixth Report of Session 2006-07, *Equality*, HC 468, para 15

⁵¹ HC Deb, 7 June 2007, cols 141-188WH [Westminster Hall]

⁵² Our Report on *Affordability and the Supply of Housing* and our evidence session on the Housing Green Paper, held on 9 October 2007, were relevant to the second reading of the Housing and Regeneration Bill, 27 November 2007. Our report on *Local Government Finance: Council Tax Benefit* was relevant to the Estimates Day debate on benefits simplification on 5 December 2007. Our evidence session on the Planning White Paper, held on 11 June 2007, was relevant to the second reading of the Planning Bill, 10 December 2007.

4 Working practices

29. It is our standard practice to hold seminars in advance of major inquiries. During the year we held three such seminars, in preparation for our inquiries on *Refuse Collection*, our two inquiries on aspects of local government finance and our new inquiry *Community Cohesion and Migration*. We also held a seminar in March 2007 with Baroness Ford and CLG officials to examine proposals for the establishment of the new Homes and Communities Agency. These seminars are a useful means of informally exploring topics and assist us in identifying issues to pursue through the more formal means of an inquiry.

30. We are committed to involving a wide range of organisations and individuals in our inquiries. For instance, our approach to the *Coastal Towns* inquiry was one of close engagement with the stakeholders involved in coastal town regeneration, in addition to attempting to influence Government directly. Our Report was launched in Scarborough at a conference attended by many of the key stakeholders involved in coastal regeneration.⁵³ This approach has had unforeseen benefits in galvanising action on coastal towns beyond central Government, with a number of organisations now pursuing actions to support coastal communities. English Heritage has taken up the issue of seaside regeneration through heritage, with the publication of a Report on the subject.⁵⁴ The South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) is committed to a coastal strategy and action plan to regenerate its coastal communities.⁵⁵

31. We have been successful in securing extensive media coverage on our inquiries. Our Reports on *Coastal Towns* and on *Refuse Collection* generated considerable publicity in both print and broadcast media. The *Coastal Towns* Report was the subject of 30 articles in the national and local press in the days immediately following its publication. The Report's publication was also covered on television and radio, including BBC television news. All national daily newspapers and most major regional dailies covered the publication of our *Refuse Collection* Report. Interviews with Dr Phyllis Starkey MP, Chair of the Committee, featured on, among others, BBC Breakfast News, ITV and Sky News.

32. This year, for the first time, we systematically requested feedback from the 42 organisations who gave oral evidence. We were pleased that all 17 organisations who responded were satisfied with the level of practical guidance given, the quality of the briefing on the likely questions, and the arrangements and facilities for the meeting. We will continue securing witness feedback in the future, and will consider responses received when reviewing our working practices. A summary of witness responses is provided in Annex 2.

Departmental relations

33. We are pleased with the positive response from Ministers and officials in terms of attendance at Committee meetings and the provision of information this year. We are also,

⁵³ British Urban Regeneration Association (BURA), Seaside Network conference, held on 7 March 2007.

⁵⁴ English Heritage, *An Asset and a Challenge; Heritage and Regeneration in Coastal Towns in England*, October 2007

⁵⁵ www.seeda.co.uk/news_&_events/press_releases/2007/20071017b.asp

on the whole, pleased with the timeliness of Government responses to our Reports. We were not, however, satisfied with the Government's delay in responding to our Report on *Equality*. We requested a response by 2 October 2007—allowing the conventional two months for the Government to respond—yet the Government published its response six weeks later, on 13 November 2007.⁵⁶ We also found it necessary specifically to request a response to our conclusions and recommendations on the *Supplementary Business Rate*, following publication of the White Paper. When it arrived, the Government's brief memorandum failed to respond to a number of crucial conclusions on financial devolution to local government. We are continuing to pursue this matter.

34. In our Report on the Department's Annual Report 2007 we commented on the Department's improvement upon previous years in the provision of information to Parliament. During our Annual Report 2006 inquiry we drew attention to concerns on the CLG's handling of parliamentary questions relating to its predecessor, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.⁵⁷ A number of questions seeking information for the period before May 2006 received answers indicating that no information was available prior to the creation of the CLG. We are pleased that new guidance to civil servants on answering such questions, issued as a result of our inquiry, appears to have solved the problem: full answers have since been given to questions relating to the period before May 2006.⁵⁸

5 Conclusion

35. Measuring the effectiveness of our Committee's work is a difficult task. The impact of our work will often be in shaping policy over the long term, making it hard to judge the impact of an inquiry in the short term. None the less, we are proud of our work in 2007, which has resulted in noticeable successes in holding the Government to account and influencing policy for the benefit of the public.

⁵⁶ Government Equalities Office, *Equality, The Government's response to the Report of the Communities and Local Government Committee*, Cm 7246

⁵⁷ Third Report of Session 2006-07, *DCLG Annual Report 2006*, HC 106, paras 10-13

⁵⁸ Second Report of Session 2007-08, *CLG Annual Report 2007*, HC 170, para 42

Annex 1: The work of our Committee in relation to core tasks

	1. Government policy proposals	2. Examination of deficiencies	3. Draft legislation	4. Department actions	5. Expenditure	6. Public Service Agreements	7. Associated public bodies	8. Major appointments	9. Implementation of legislation	10. Debate in the House or committee
Inquiries for which Reports were published										
Coastal Towns	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓
DCLG Annual Report 2006		✓		✓	✓	✓				
Is there a future for Regional Government?	✓	✓		✓			✓			
Refuse Collection	✓			✓						
Equality	✓	✓		✓			✓			
Local Government Finance: Supplementary Business Rate		✓		✓						
Local Government Finance: Council Tax Benefit		✓		✓						✓
Inquiries in which evidence was taken and no Report published during 2007										
The Supply of Rented Housing ⁵⁹	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			
Introductory hearing with the Secretary of the State	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓				
Leasehold and Major Works		✓		✓						
Planning White Paper	✓	✓								✓
Housing Green Paper	✓	✓								✓
Ordnance Survey ⁶⁰							✓			
Existing Housing Stock and Climate Change ⁶¹	✓	✓		✓						

⁵⁹ This inquiry is continuing

⁶⁰ This inquiry is continuing

⁶¹ This inquiry is continuing

Annex 2: Summary of witness responses

Response rate: 17 out of 42 organisations who provided oral evidence to the Committee gave feedback (41%)			
QUESTION	ANSWER %	COMMENTS	ACTIONS
1. Practical advice and guidance	Yes: 100%	"The Clerks were professional and helpful, always taking time to answer our queries fully"	The suggestion of advising witnesses to wait outside the Committee Room has been considered by Committee staff in reviewing the information given to witnesses in advance of evidence sessions.
	No: 0%	"Pre-meeting—Could add 'Wait outside Committee Room'—as the witness went directly in. Meeting—the witness felt the meeting was very well chaired with clear lines of inquiry"	
2. Guidance on nature of questions	Yes: 100 %	No comments given.	No action required.
	No: 0%		
3. Physical facilities and assistance	Yes: 100%	No comments given.	No action required.
	No: 0%		
4. Opportunity to convey views	Yes: 94%	The witness "found the inquiry most interesting and could have said lots more. It was also good to meet Jessica Mulley. The meeting was well chaired and timed, good in that it made you focus your mind. Ideally it would have been good to have more opportunity to speak and input to the other panels debate."	No action required.
	No: 6%		
5. Other: No comments given.			

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 8 January 2008

Members present:

Dr Phyllis Starkey, in the Chair

Mr Clive Betts
Jim Dobbin
Andrew George

Mr Bill Olnier
Dr John Pugh

The Work of the Committee in 2007

Draft Report (*The Work of the Committee in 2007*), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 35 read and agreed to.

Annexes 1 and 2 agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman make the Report to the House.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 14 January at 4.20 pm]

Reports from the Committee during the current and previous Sessions

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2007–08

First Report	Coastal Towns: the Government's Second Response	HC 70
Second Report	DCLG Annual Report 2007	HC 170
Third Report	Local Government Finance—Supplementary Business Rate: the Government's Response	HC 210
Fourth Report	The Work of the Committee in 2007	HC 211

Session 2006–07

First Report	The Work of the Committee 2005-06	HC 198
Second Report	Coastal Towns	HC 351 (<i>Cm 7126</i>)
Third Report	DCLG Annual Report 2006	HC 106 (<i>Cm 7125</i>)
Fourth Report	Is there a Future for Regional Government?	HC 352-I (<i>Cm 7119</i>)
Fifth Report	Refuse Collection	HC 536-I
Sixth Report	Equality	HC 468 (<i>Cm 7246</i>)
Seventh Report	Local Government Finance—Supplementary Business Rate	HC 719
Eighth Report	Local Government Finance—Council Tax Benefit	HC 718
First Special Report	Local Government Finance—Council Tax Benefit: Government's Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2006-07	HC 1037
Second Special Report	Refuse Collection: Government's Response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2006-07	HC 1095