



House of Commons

Public Administration and
Constitutional Affairs Committee

**Follow up to
PHSO Report of an
investigation into a
complaint about HS2
Ltd: Government and
HS2 Ltd responses to the
Committee's Sixth Report
of Session 2015–16**

**First Special Report of Session
2016–17**

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Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England, which are laid before this House, and matters in connection therewith; to consider matters relating to the quality and standards of administration provided by civil service departments, and other matters relating to the civil service; and to consider constitutional affairs.

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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. 146. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/pacac and in print by Order of the House.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are: Dr Rebecca Davies (Clerk), Ms Rhiannon Hollis (Clerk), James Harrison (Second Clerk), Dr Adam Evans (Committee Specialist), Dr Henry Midgley (Committee Specialist), Ms Penny McLean (Committee Specialist), Rebecca Usden (Committee Specialist), Ana Ferreira (Senior Committee Assistant), Iwona Hankin (Committee Assistant), and Mr Alex Paterson (Media Officer).

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First Special Report

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee published its Sixth Report of Session 2015–16, *Follow up to PHSO Report of an investigation into a complaint about HS2 Ltd*, as HC 793 on 23 March 2016.

The Government and HS2 Ltd's responses were received on 23 and 27 May 2016 respectively and are appended to this report.

Appendix 1: Government Response

Introduction

The Government welcomes this opportunity to respond to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee recommendations relating to communication by HS2 Ltd. This response concerns the recommendation that was relevant to the Department for Transport. HS2 Ltd will be issuing a separate response which addresses the remaining recommendations.

Recommendation 4:

We welcome the actions taken since the publication of the Residents' Charter in January 2015 and note that HS2 Ltd believes that it has addressed the most pressing concerns. The recruitment of 11 stakeholder communication roles is a positive development. However, we reject the claim that the main focus of the ongoing criticism is about the pace of change alone. The depth and extent of criticism expressed in the vast majority of the evidence that we received highlights the need for a fundamental shift in how HS2 Ltd communicates and engages with the public. We have seen no evidence to suggest that this step change has taken place. The publication of Ian Bynoe's independent review will provide a further opportunity for HS2 Ltd to ask itself some difficult questions and we both hope and expect that the Chief Executive will make good on his commitment to accept its recommendations. **The DfT must take its strategic oversight role seriously, and not uncritically accept HS2 Ltd's proposals.** (Paragraph 33)

The Government takes its strategic oversight role very seriously. HS2 Ltd are preparing their response to the Bynoe report that will set out the action that will be taken to improve how they communicate with residents. The Government has requested that HS2 Ltd present their plans to ministers to ensure that they are sufficiently robust to deal with the issues that the PHSO and Bynoe report identify.

Ministers and officials also hear directly from the HS2 Residents' Commissioner about the concerns that she has as a result of discussions with residents. Furthermore, DfT officials regularly attend public events to hear directly from residents and DfT ministers frequently meet and correspond with MPs with constituencies on all parts of the route. We communicate those issues directly to HS2 Ltd to ensure a joined-up approach to addressing affected residents' concerns.

Engaging with and listening to communities and businesses along the route provides them with an opportunity to shape the way we communicate and the policy debate. This is a mutually beneficial experience. Such effective communication has resulted, for example, in a number of changes to the way in which we administer the property assistance schemes that are designed to support those most directly affected by HS2.

The Development Agreement between the Government and HS2 Ltd already covers the need for community engagement and we are considering how we can strengthen this aspect of the Agreement. We want this to reinforce the importance that effective community engagement has in ensuring that the project is a success.

Appendix 2: Response from HS2 Ltd

Introduction

HS2 Ltd welcomes the report by the Committee and take the recommendations made within it very seriously. A project of the scale, complexity and duration of High Speed Two will inevitably have an impact on local communities. As such, there is a need to engage across a vast range of communities with individuals whose concerns and needs vary. This represents one of the largest ever communications and engagement challenges faced by an infrastructure project in this country, and is absolutely integral to its wider success.

Given the scale, extent and duration of the project we recognise that we need to take our engagement to a different level. We fully accept there is room for improvement in terms of the way we work with local communities along the route and the way in which we deal with complaints when they arise. Whilst, as noted in the Committee's report, HS2 Ltd has already made progress in developing a more customer-focused culture and in ensuring that robust processes and procedures are in place. We know that more needs to be done to address some of the concerns raised by the Committee and our response to these findings is part of that process.

Engagement and communication

We are keenly aware of the need to bring about a step change in our community engagement operations and are taking decisive action to ensure we have a stronger presence on the ground in the local communities affected by HS2. Over the past six months we have increased resources considerably within our engagement teams along the line of the Phase One route. We are recruiting an experienced Director of Community Relations who will report directly to the Chief Executive and will champion community engagement.

We recognise there is currently a void to fill for those who engaged with us through the community forum process and a new approach is being finalised and will be implemented once all nine of our Community Engagement Managers are in place and embedded within their community areas.

The independent review carried out by Ian Bynoe has now concluded and his report was published on Gov.uk in April. Mr Bynoe acknowledged that progress had been made since

the PHSO report was published in November and made 13 recommendations and one suggestion. We have now published a full response to each of these. The report and our response can be accessed via the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ian-bynoe-report-on-hs2-ltds-complaints-handling-and-community-engagement>

Complaints Handling

We have continued to refine our processes for complaints handling and have recently changed our procedure to ensure greater clarity. Training in complaints handling is mandatory for all staff who join HS2 Ltd and we now provide refresher training and workshops for those staff who have been working on the project for some time.

Developing a strong customer focus has been central to our new approach to engaging with the public. We now have a 24-hour helpdesk and we are looking at how our digital communications can be supplemented with additional local digital channels that provide opportunities for more interaction. We will also be carrying out research to understand in more detail the requirements of those affected by plans for HS2.

We take on board the comments about the role of the Residents' Commissioner. This was an area highlighted by Mr Bynoe in his report and we have discussed the recommendations with the Commissioner. She will now have access to reports on all complaints relating to her field of responsibility and will meet with the Department for Transport's Independent Complaints Assessors so they can better understand each other's roles.