



**Environment, Food
and Rural Affairs
Committee**

Committee strategy 2024-5

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Introduction

Following the establishment of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (EFRA) in November 2024, committee members decided to develop strategic principles and policy priorities to underpin their work.

In developing this strategy, the Committee has considered the previous findings of the House of Commons [Liaison Committee](#), the [Institute for Government](#), and the [Constitution Unit](#) on select committee effectiveness, and combined these with its own extensive consultation and engagement.

The Committee's consultation and engagement exercise included launching a public survey, organising a series of policy roundtables, and holding one-on-one meetings with key governmental and non-governmental bodies. The survey received over 321 responses, 36 organisations participated in roundtable events, and the Committee Chair held extended one-on-one meetings with over 35 key stakeholders. The results of this consultation can be seen in the accompanying strategic document, Stakeholder policy priorities–Consultation 2024–5.

The Committee considered the findings of its survey and the responses from stakeholders at length at a meeting hosted by the Institute for Government, the Director of which presented to Members on best practice for strategic decision making by committees. The strategy intends to respond to the increased pace of policy scrutiny requirements, build on the strengths of select committee scrutiny, and cement the benefits of innovation and procedural scrutiny developments in previous Parliaments.

In sum, it hopes to make the committee more open, responsive, collaborative, consistent, inclusive and reflective.

This strategy commits committee members to continue its proactive engagement with those affected by the work of Defra throughout this Parliament, and to reflect on its own effectiveness at representing those views and holding the Department to account.

Committee strategy: principles

Strategy development

1. The Committee will determine its strategic approach through:
 - a. regular stakeholder consultation, including an annual survey;
 - b. engagement events, including roundtables in and away from Westminster;
 - c. visits to stakeholders and locations of policy interest;
 - d. the individual priorities of Members; and
 - e. private discussions of the Committee.

2. The Committee's strategy will always include:
 - a. SMART objectives to ensure that its methods of scrutiny are robust, effective and representative; and
 - b. a set of priority policy areas to provide focus to its scrutiny (see pp.4-5).

3. The Committee will fully assess its progress against its strategy annually and determine whether its objectives and principles remain relevant or should be updated. It will hold a shorter in-year review of its progress every six months.¹

1 The first in-year review will take place in June/July 2025, with the next annual assessment taking place in December.

Prioritisation

4. The Committee will prioritise its work by taking account of:
 - a. a policy issue's risk to, or impact on, the public;
 - b. the political immediacy and importance of an issue; and
 - c. the Committee's ability to contribute meaningfully and affect change.

5. The Committee will conduct its scrutiny in line with the Liaison Committee's 'core tasks' for select committees, these include:
 - a. **Implementation:** holding departments and arm's-length bodies to account for implementation of recommendations.
 - b. **Administration:** examining the administration of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and its associated public bodies, including scrutiny of its strategy and its performance and management information.
 - c. **Expenditure:** informing and supporting the House's control of public expenditure by examining the expenditure plans, outturn and performance of Defra and its public bodies (see paragraph 6), and the relationships between spending and delivery of outcomes, including effectiveness and value for money.
 - d. **Matters of public concern:** responding to a need for accountability to the public through Parliament, including the actions of organisations or individuals with significant power over the lives of citizens or with public responsibilities.

6. The Committee will conduct accountability hearings at least once every two years with the following key regulators associated with Defra:
 - a. Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)
 - b. Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI)
 - c. Environment Agency (EA)
 - d. Forestry Commission
 - e. Marine Management Organisation (MMO)

- f.** Natural England
- g.** Ofwat
- h.** Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD)

All other major Defra ALBs will be scrutinised at least once during this Parliament.

Approach to policy scrutiny

- 7.** The Committee will arrange its work agenda around overarching themes (organised as inquiries) to allow a long-term focus on important policy issues while building in flexibility. The Committee will seek to balance its work on each theme to ensure the major themes identified as requiring scrutiny are not neglected.²
- 8.** The Committee will report against the policy areas within its identified priority themes on an ad-hoc and iterative basis, to allow for an agenda driven approach to its work and regular follow up on key recommendations and reports.
- 9.** The Committee will make evidence-led conclusions and recommendations, based on lived and scientific evidence. The Committee will aim to agree these unanimously and find compromise where views differ.
- 10.** The Committee's recommendations will aim to follow SMART principles and the Committee will follow up on recommendations after no longer than 18 months.
- 11.** The Committee will use its convening power to collaborate with relevant partners to make the best recommendations for change, including:
 - a.** other UK Parliament committees and parliamentarians;
 - b.** legislators in the devolved administrations;
 - c.** stakeholders throughout the UK; and
 - d.** the public.

² The agreed thematic areas can be seen pp. 7–9.

Communicating the Committee's approach

- 12.** Every inquiry, evidence session or call for evidence will set out:
 - a.** why a topic was chosen, why it is a priority and how it relates to the strategy's priority policy areas;
 - b.** the main stakeholders affected by a policy area, with a particular focus on hard to reach and often unheard communities;
 - c.** how the Committee will gather evidence to inform its scrutiny, hear from all relevant stakeholders and explain why it has taken this approach;³
 - d.** opportunities for collaboration; and
 - e.** how cross-cutting topics will be incorporated into inquiries.

- 13.** The Committee will determine the most appropriate and effective means of disseminating its findings and recommendations, including:
 - a.** Parliamentary proceedings (e.g. Select Committee Statements, 'tagging');
 - b.** national online and print media;
 - c.** local and trade media;
 - d.** social media;
 - e.** public events;
 - f.** directly with stakeholder and interest groups; and
 - g.** subscriber email distribution.

3 Options include oral evidence sessions, written evidence, visits throughout the UK and abroad to gather evidence, stakeholder engagement activities (such as roundtables, surveys, advisory groups).

Witness diversity

- 14.** The Committee will hear from a wide range of stakeholders, in line with the Liaison Committee's recommendations on diversity and inclusion. All organisations called to give evidence will be encouraged to bear this principle in mind when choosing representatives. Specifically:
- a.** the Committee will encourage organisations to provide witnesses from a diverse range of backgrounds;
 - b.** the Secretariat will encourage the take up of witness diversity surveys to allow the Committee to measure its progress against this aim; and
 - c.** the Committee will consider its success at achieving the above aims during its annual strategy review.

Inclusive scrutiny

- 15.** The Committee will create a positive environment for witnesses and stakeholders. This will be achieved by:
- a.** being polite and courteous to Committee witnesses while also being firm when holding them to account;
 - b.** taking the necessary steps to support vulnerable witnesses and encourage the sharing of lived experiences; and
 - c.** avoiding public disputes and being respectful to each other during meetings.

Committee strategy: policy priorities

In accordance with paragraph 7, the Committee will focus its work on the following themes:

1. The future of farming

Working to improve the Government's flagship Farming and Countryside Programme and seeking to otherwise ensure the future of the farming sector by increasing profitability, improving climate change resilience and supporting innovation and technology. Assessing the Government's strategic direction for agriculture, including decisions to be made on land use, supporting nature friendly farming methods, enabling access to nature alongside food production and bolstering the provision of high-quality agricultural education.

2. Reforming the water sector

Working with Government as it reimagines the water industry and addresses the challenges it faces, including rethinking its regulatory framework, improving water quality, tackling pollution, minimising disruption, improving the response to outages and flooding, building and maintaining water infrastructure, and improving access to water bodies for leisure.

3. Animal and plant health

Scrutinising the effectiveness of the agencies responsible for securing the UK's borders against animal and plant diseases and pests, assessing the science and interventions to tackle such diseases within the United Kingdom, improving disease surveillance and long-term resilience, balancing access to nature with protecting biodiversity, and supporting efforts to improve animal welfare.

4. Fairness in the food supply chain

Ensuring that the food supply chain operates under equitable principles and that all actors within supply chains, from producers to consumers, are treated fairly. Considering how the Government's objective of achieving domestic food security interacts with its wider policy agenda, including on environmental targets, planning and regulation.

5. Fisheries and the marine environment

Working to support businesses in the fishing supply chain and the communities they support. Making representations to Government on fishing quota negotiations and considering how technology and innovation can help fisheries and the environment thrive.

6. Preventing waste and enabling a circular economy

Making the case for policies that prevent the unnecessary use of resources, encourage reuse, repair and recycling and minimise the use of landfill and incineration. Ensuring industry has the resources and skills to apply the waste hierarchy appropriately and invest in waste management infrastructure, promoting initiatives to tackle waste crime and ensuring that waste management services are well regulated.

7. The work of the department and its arm's-length bodies

Holding regular scrutiny sessions with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and their ministerial team. Considering ministerial briefs in the round and in relation to each other. Considering also the role and effectiveness of Defra's arm's-length bodies, and the effectiveness of the regulatory environment as it relates to the Committee's purview. Assessing the utility of the relationships between those regulators, and the monitoring of the environment and enforcement provided through their work. Considering the machinery of national and local government when it comes to cross-government issues such as environmental protection, nature recovery, climate adaptation, rural issues and responses to major incidents.

8. Supporting rural and coastal communities

Addressing the multiple and interconnected issues facing rural and remote communities, including access to services, pollution, economic activity, connectivity, crime, coastal erosion, public access to nature, waste and transport. Considering the cross-departmental issues facing these communities and the holistic approach that should be taken by Government to ensure their resilience, including through ‘rural proofing’ and the effective delivery of targeted and localised funding.

9. Weather and climate resilience

Ensuring the Government has the tools, capacity and knowledge to address the varied environmental challenges facing the UK, including flooding, drought, wildfires, coastal erosion, landslips, extreme heat and other implications of a warming climate. Considering the effectiveness of emergency response and cross-departmental and government collaboration, planning and coordination.

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