



INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT



PRESS NOTICE - 15 May 2026

The Rt Hon. the Lord Beamish PC, Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC), has provided the following statement on behalf of the Committee:

“Further to the Committee’s press notice of 28 April, the Committee has now completed its consideration of all material which Government referred to it under the terms of the Humble Address, including those documents provided at a late stage in the process. The Committee has reached a decision on all the redactions requested by Government in the 337 documents referred to it and has notified Government accordingly. The Committee’s decision on these matters is final.

It is important to report that under the terms of the Humble Address there are documents which have not been referred to the Committee, including those which the Government considers do not fall within scope, which the Government considers do not prejudice UK national security or international relations, or which are subject to ongoing investigation by the Metropolitan Police.

*It is now for Government to lay those documents which the Committee has reviewed before Parliament as soon as possible and within 28 sitting days. In so doing, Government must indicate any redactions which the Committee has agreed to on grounds of prejudice to UK national security or international relations by asterisks in the text (***). Redactions made by Government on any other grounds must be indicated in a different manner.*

During its review process, the Committee has noted a number of concerns with how the Government is responding to the Humble Address:

- *Additional redaction grounds*

In the Government’s initial Return to the House of Commons (HC 1774-I) on 11 March, the Government stated that it was itself making redactions to documents on the following additional grounds:

- *Individuals’ email addresses and phone numbers;*
- *The identities of junior civil servants;*
- *Personal data of third parties where this is not in scope of the motion;*
- *Legal professional privilege;*

and that it may also be necessary to “make further redactions in future publications based on other public interest principles, including commercially sensitive information”.

Redactions on these additional grounds have not been reviewed by this Committee, being outwith the remit given to it by Parliament. The Committee has however made clear to Government and to Parliament that in its view the Humble Address does not provide scope for any redactions other than on grounds of prejudice to UK national security and international relations, and therefore Government should return to Parliament to seek permission to make redactions on any other grounds.

- *Criteria applied too broadly*

In addition, having seen how Government is applying redactions on those grounds, the Committee has made clear that, in its view, they are being applied far too broadly - particularly in the case of personal information. We note that no body has been commissioned to review those redactions and assure Parliament that they are within the spirit of the Humble Address.

- *Documents being withheld*

The Committee has been told that certain documents are being withheld from the process. The prime example is a vetting file held by UK Security Vetting. The Committee has made clear that it does not consider that the terms of the Humble Address allow for any documents to be withheld from Parliament: while Government may believe that there is good reason to withhold certain documents, it does not currently have the authority to so do. The Committee has therefore advised Government that we believe it must return to Parliament to seek Parliament’s agreement to withhold any documents.

The Committee has also noted a number of overarching matters, which gravely concerned the Committee and which it considers it must therefore bring to Parliament’s attention:

- *Use of unofficial communication systems*

The Committee found it extraordinary to see how much Government business appears to be being conducted over unofficial systems. Lengthy Whatsapp conversations between senior officials and ministers appear now to be the format by which Government policy is formulated. Government systems exist for a reason and should be the proper forum for the conduct of Government business. The Committee has raised this issue before - with the last Government - and it is disappointing to see not only that it continues, but the extent to which it has spread.

- *Lack of proper records on discussions and decisions*

Perhaps as a result, the lack of an audit trail - in terms of agendas, minutes and records of conversations, in the FCDO in particular - do not appear to be kept as a matter of practice. This is unacceptable in Government.

- Use of lower level IT systems

Many exchanges have clearly been conducted on lower level Government IT systems when they should more properly have been held on the more secure IT systems that exist. This failure to adhere to professional practices is appalling and puts the UK's national security at risk.

- Failure to adhere to security advice

Even when proper security processes have been followed, there appears to be nothing to say that the conclusions should be acted on. This is something we have noted, and raised previously with the last Government, in relation to other matters. Where advice is sought and obtained by those organisations whose job it is to ensure security, for that advice to be overruled to suit some other objective is not acceptable. Proper security concerns cannot be dismissed simply because they are inconvenient.

The Committee has taken its responsibilities under the Humble Address seriously. It has prioritised reviewing all documents referred to it above all other business, since the Humble Address on 4 February. With our final decisions taken and therefore our part of the process concluded, we trust that Government will now move to publish all documents in line with the Humble Address.

The Committee also wishes to note its appreciation for the exceptional efforts of the Committee's Staff, who have worked diligently to ensure the Committee was able to expedite our obligations to Parliament in respect of the Humble Address."

ENDS.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC) is a statutory Committee of Parliament. It is not a Select Committee.
2. The Committee consists of nine Members drawn from both Houses of Parliament, and appointed by Parliament. The Chair is elected by its Members.
3. The Committee oversees the intelligence and security activities of the UK Intelligence Community. The Committee was originally established by the Intelligence Services Act 1994, and was reformed , and its powers reinforced, by the Justice and Security Act 2013.
4. Its remit includes oversight of the policies, expenditure, administration and operations of MI5, MI6 (the Secret Intelligence Service or SIS) and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), and the work of the other parts of the Intelligence Community, including the Joint Intelligence Organisation and the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office; Defence Intelligence in Ministry of Defence; and Homeland Security Group in the Home Office.
5. The Members of the Committee are subject to Section I(1)(b) of the Official Secrets Act 1989 and are routinely given access to highly classified material in carrying out their duties.
6. The current Members of the Committee are:
 - The Rt Hon. the Lord Beamish PC (Chairman)
 - The Rt Hon. Sir Jeremy Wright KC MP (Deputy Chairman)
 - Baroness Brown of Cambridge DBE FREng FRS
 - Peter Dowd MP
 - Richard Foord MP
 - The Rt Hon. Sir John Hayes CBE MP
 - Jessica Morden MP
 - Derek Twigg MP
 - Admiral The Rt Hon. the Lord West of Spithead GCB DSC PC.
7. The Committee sets its own agenda and work programme. It takes evidence from Government Ministers, the Heads of the intelligence and security Agencies, officials from across the UK Intelligence Community, and other witnesses as required. The Committee makes an Annual Report on the discharge of its functions and also produces Reports on specific issues.
8. The Committee's dedicated Press Officer (Alex Hunt) can be reached at:

Alexander.Hunt1@cabinetoffice.gov.uk or 07873 702652.