

**Briefing Note:**

January 2016

## The UK Parliament's current Select Committee Inquiries

Below is an overview of the [most recent committee developments](#) in the Palace of Westminster on the subjects of [sustainable development](#), [energy](#), [environment](#), [transport](#), [business](#), [economic policy](#) and [EU affairs](#). Click on each inquiry heading to be taken to its detailed terms of reference, where you can also see previous and upcoming evidence sessions and the committee reports, if published.

### House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee

*Chair: Huw Irranca-Davies (Lab)*

[Assessment of EU/UK environmental policy](#) Inquiry announced 19 October 2015

An important inquiry ahead of the UK's referendum on EU membership which has already heard from a number of experts. The aim is to assess how successful the EU's environmental policies have been in addressing the UK's environmental challenges but also to look at the broader benefits of determining environmental policy at EU level. CAP is excluded.

[Sustainability and HM Treasury](#) Inquiry announced 18 December 2015

A recently launched inquiry building on the Committee's work looking into the role of large government departments in promoting sustainability. After the recent cuts to renewable energy support mechanisms – this one could be one of the most interesting so far.

[Diesel emissions and air quality](#) Inquiry announced 15 October 2015

Following on from the VW scandal which the European Parliament is looking into at EU level, this inquiry is looking at the potential impacts both on the UK environment and previously gathered air quality statistics. VW's UK CEO, Paul Willis, was the first witness called to give evidence last October. Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in Defra, Rory Stewart, has also given evidence.

[The UK Government's approach to sustainable development](#) Inquiry announced 21 July 2015

This inquiry looks at the impact the new Government's fiscal and legislative agenda will have on sustainable development. It will be looking to establish themes for its work during the Parliament and measures against which the Government's success can be judged. The Committee has already heard from the Cabinet Office (Oliver Letwin) and Defra (Rory Stewart).

[The Airports Commission report: Carbon emissions, air quality and noise](#) Inquiry announced 23 July 2015

Although the Committee has concluded its inquiry and published its report on the controversial issue of airport expansion in the South East and the environmental concerns over a third runway at Heathrow, the debate is still very much alive and the Committee will remain a key player. The Committee has called on the Government (and Heathrow) to demonstrate that its concerns have been met, we are likely to hear more as the debate continues through the London Mayoral elections this May before a final decision next year.

[Future of the Green Investment Bank](#) Inquiry announced 15 October 2015

This inquiry is effectively closed, with the deadline for evidence passed and the report published. The Committee argued that the remit of the GIB must be protected when it is privatized.

### House of Commons Energy and Climate Change Committee

*Chair: Angus MacNeil (SNP)*

[Low carbon network infrastructure](#) Inquiry announced 17 September 2015

This is a wide-ranging inquiry looking at the changes and investments needed to build a flexible grid suitable for intermittent low-carbon electricity generation. The committee has held only one evidence session so far.

[Setting the fifth carbon budget](#) Inquiry announced 02 December 2015

The Committee will be examining the recommendations and challenges laid out by the independent Committee on Climate Change's fifth Carbon Budget for the UK, which sets out in detail the decarbonisation scenarios for the British economy to stay within the legal limits proscribed by the Climate Change Act of 2008. The fifth carbon budget concerns the period 2028-32.

[Outcomes of Paris COP21](#) Inquiry announced 11 December 2015

This was a one-off session following the UNFCCC talks in which the Committee questioned the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, Amber Rudd. You can watch the session [here](#). We await publication of a report.

[ECC priorities for holding Government to account](#) Inquiry announced 16 July 2015

This inquiry is now officially closed although discussions will continue to be ongoing and priorities amended as the parliament proceeds. The Committee invited a number of stakeholders to take part in helping it set its objectives for 2015-20 (including Culmer Raphael) at a roundtable conference held in London. The report can be found [here](#).

[Investor confidence in the UK energy sector](#) Inquiry announced 16 September 2015

This is a recently announced inquiry which has only had one evidence session so far, with the CEOs of Lightsource Renewable Energy and of the Solar Trade Association. As the numerous changes to the renewable energy subsidies have impact, it is likely to rise in profile in the sector.

[Home energy efficiency and demand reduction](#) Inquiry announced 16 September 2015

Again, this inquiry takes place against the backdrop of major changes in government policy: the ending of both the Zero Carbon Homes and the Green Deal initiatives. The Energy Company Obligation (ECO) is also due to come to an end in March 2017.

## **House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee**

*Chair: Neil Parish (Con)*

[Air quality](#) Inquiry announced 22 October 2015

The EFRA Committee is leading on holding the government to account for its overall policy on air pollution and in scrutinizing the UK's progress towards EU targets. It has already taken evidence from Gatwick airport

[Common Agricultural Policy](#) Inquiry announced 10 September 2015

This is an ongoing inquiry that the EFRA Committee has been running for some time, owing to CAP being the biggest single item in Defra's budget. There was an evidence session last September with the CEO of the UK's Rural Payments Agency.

## **House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee**

*Chair: Iain Wright (Lab)*

[Access to finance](#) Inquiry announced 17 December 2015

The Committee is looking into how successful government policies to help small business get access to finance have been

[Productivity Plan](#) Inquiry announced 20 July 2015

The Committee is researching whether the UK Government's Productivity Plan addresses the main causes of low productivity in the UK. The Productivity Plan covers a wide range of areas, including the tax regime for businesses, skills, science and innovation, digital infrastructure, investment and trade. The Committee has already heard from Small Business Minister in BIS, Anna Soubry, and from Nissan and Million+

[Assessing quality in Higher Education](#) Inquiry announced 17 September 2015

The Committee is looking into the proposed changes to quality assessment in universities and the potential impact of introducing a Teaching Excellence Framework

**Digital economy** Inquiry announced 21 September 2015

The Committee is examining how the sector can contribute to improving UK productivity. And how businesses can best utilise digital infrastructure to improve their performance, and what the Government can do to ensure that the UK can play a leading role in taking advantage of digital technologies. The Committee has already heard from BIS minister Baroness Neville-Rolfe

**House of Commons Transport Committee**

*Chair: Louise Ellman (Lab)*

**Volkswagen Group emissions violations** Inquiry announced 07 October 2015

This was a one-off evidence session provides Members with an opportunity to question Volkswagen Group, the SMMT, the VCA and the Secretary of State for Transport on the Volkswagen emissions scandal that broke on 22 September 2015. The Committee is yet to publish its report

**House of Commons International Development Committee**

*Chair: Stephen Twigg (Lab)*

**Sustainable Development Goals** Inquiry announced 14 July 2015

This inquiry was launched before the SDGs were agreed at the UN last year but is ongoing. The Committee will hear from the Secretary of State for International Development, Justine Greening, in January.

**House of Commons Science and Technology Committee**

*Chair: Nicola Blackwood (Con)*

**Digital skills** Inquiry announced 02 December 2015

The inquiry examines the digital skills gap in the UK, ahead of the government's publication of the Digital Transformation Plan. In January, the Committee hears from Lloyds Bank, the LSE and Barclays

**House of Lords EU Energy and Environment Committee**

*Chair: Baroness Scott (Lib Dem)*

**EU energy governance** Inquiry announced 11 September 2015

The inquiry has just concluded and the Lords published their report in December 2015 – it can be read [here](#).

**House of Commons Treasury Committee**

*Chair: Andrew Tyrie (Con)*

**The economic and financial costs and benefits of UK's EU membership** Inquiry announced 12 October 2015

This is a wide-ranging inquiry into the UK's EU membership intended to coincide with the UK referendum. The Committee has already heard from Chancellor George Osborne and senior Treasury Officials, from the CEOs of several small businesses and from Barclays and HSBC banks. This is probably the highest profile parliamentary scrutiny of the UK's membership of the EU.

**House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee**

*Chair: Crispin Blunt (Con)*

**Costs and benefits of EU membership for the UK's role in the world** Inquiry announced 27 July 2015

Complementing the Treasury Committee's inquiry into the economic costs and benefits of the UK's membership of the UK, the Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry is examining the costs and benefits of EU membership in helping the UK "achieve its foreign policy goals and how the UK's role on the global stage might change if it votes to leave the EU". In December, the Committee heard evidence from the former EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs (and the UK's EU Commissioner). You can watch the evidence session [here](#).

## House of Lords EU External Affairs Committee

*Chair: Lord Tugendhat (Con)*

[Strategic review of the EU's foreign and security policy](#) Inquiry announced 23 July 2015

This long running inquiry investigates the effectiveness, strengths and weaknesses of the EU's foreign and security strategy. In November 2015 the Committee heard from the European Minister, David Lidington.

Culmer Raphael, January 2016