

Foreign Affairs Committee

The appointment of Peter Mandelson as British Ambassador to the United States

First Report of Session 2026–27

HC 504

Foreign Affairs Committee

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Summary

The decision to appoint Peter Mandelson as His Majesty's Ambassador to the United States has been nothing short of disastrous. From his well-documented friendship with the convicted paedophile Jeffrey Epstein to his extensive foreign business dealings, any serious investigation into whether he was suitable for one of our country's most important diplomatic postings would have come to one conclusion.

It is quite clear that Peter Mandelson was not the choice of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), but one that was essentially forced on them by Number 10. There is no evidence of any debate as to why he was deemed to be the most appropriate candidate for the role. His appointment has been highly damaging for the Government, painful and offensive to the victims of Jeffrey Epstein and it has diminished our country in the eyes of the world.

Lessons must be learned. There must be a proper process set out for political appointment, and this must include a scrutiny evidence session before the Foreign Affairs Committee. We are confident that, had the FCDO agreed to one of our many requests for Peter Mandelson to participate in a pre-appointment evidence session, key questions surrounding the extent of his relationship with Jeffrey Epstein, as well as his foreign business dealings, would have been raised. The Government should not make another political appointment to a Head of Mission post without candidates first appearing before the Committee. The Foreign Affairs Committee should have the ability to formally veto an appointment.

While Peter Mandelson may not have answered all our questions honestly, there would have been at the very least a public record of his statements, which we now do not have. Regrettably, this is not the only time the Committee has been kept in the dark. In September 2025, after Peter Mandelson was sacked as ambassador, both in written and spoken evidence, this Committee was not given full answers. It would be too much to say we were told lies, but we were told partial truths.

One of the tasks the Committee set itself was to establish what constituted "due process" when it came to political appointments. We have found that there was no agreement in the understanding by key decision makers as to what this should be. The Committee has been left with every impression

that this process was being made up as it went along. We were especially alarmed to hear suggestions that officials had debated whether Peter Mandelson would even need to go through any security vetting at all.

There remains a number of unanswered questions, even after hours of testimony and the unprecedented release of hundreds of pages of documents through the Humble Address. The Committee is concerned that much of the evidence surrounding the key decisions of Peter Mandelson's appointment has not been found. The record keeping by the FCDO and Number 10 has been so appalling that it is unclear whether these documents do indeed exist, whether they have been lost or whether they are in the possession of the Metropolitan Police.

Most concerning of all, however, has been Sir Olly Robbins' statement to the Committee that there was a "generally dismissive attitude" by Number 10 towards Peter Mandelson's vetting. The timeline seems to support this claim. There was very little time for officials to undertake Developed Vetting before the stated January deadline, and the vetting process only began after Peter Mandelson had been publicly announced as the next ambassador, giving every impression of being an afterthought.

Whether the FCDO picked up on this "generally dismissive attitude" and were themselves dismissive of a recommendation not to proceed with vetting approval has not been established. The Committee has been assured that potential conflict of interests and security concerns were taken seriously but would be managed. However, we have not seen these mitigations and are left to wonder if they were sufficient to safeguard national security. It is possible the Metropolitan Police currently possess this crucial evidence. If these mitigations exist, whether they are made public or shared only with the Intelligence and Security Committee because of their sensitivity, they will need to be considered with care.

1 Post-appointment sequence of events

1. The position of His Majesty’s Ambassador to the United States of America is one of the most important and prestigious posts in His Majesty’s Diplomatic Service. On 20 December 2024, the Government announced that the Prime Minister had confirmed the appointment of Peter Mandelson to be the next British Ambassador to the United States of America.¹ He was sacked by the Prime Minister on 11 September 2025.² Much happened in between and it is important to set out events in order, but first we set out the post-appointment sequence of events which prompted this inquiry.
2. In December 2024, a news story on gov.uk noted that His Majesty the King had approved the appointment on the recommendation of the Prime Minister and the then-Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, and stated Peter Mandelson would take up post early in 2025. He started in Washington DC on 10 February 2025. Around six months later, on 8 September 2025, Peter Mandelson was contacted by Bloomberg regarding emails related to his relationship with convicted paedophile, Jeffrey Epstein.³ Peter Mandelson gave an interview to The Sun on 10 September, which was published the day after.⁴
3. On 10 September, the Prime Minister defended the appointment and said that “full due process was followed during this appointment”.⁵ This advice has been shown to be incomplete and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) officials should have given the Prime Minister more information, both at the time of the appointment and in advance of the House of Commons statements. In future a means of flagging vetting concerns without breaking confidentiality must be found.

1 10 Downing Street, [Appointment of Lord Mandelson as the next British Ambassador to the United States of America](#), gov.uk (accessed 29 June 2026)

2 BBC News, “[Starmer facing fresh questions after Mandelson sacking](#)”, 11 September 2025

3 Bloomberg, “[The story behind the story of Mandelson’s Epstein emails](#)”, 11 September 2025

4 Harry Cole saves the West (@harrycolesavesthewest) and TalkTV (@talktv), [YouTube](#), 10 September 2025 (accessed 29 June 2026)

5 HC Deb, 10 September 2025, [col 859](#)

4. The Prime Minister sacked Peter Mandelson on 11 September 2025. In response to an Urgent Question that day, FCDO Minister Stephen Doughty noted that newly published email exchanges between Peter Mandelson and Jeffrey Epstein had given information about their relationship which the Prime Minister viewed as “materially different from that known at the time of [Peter Mandelson’s] appointment”.⁶ More recently, following further reporting, the Prime Minister has said:

I regret appointing him. If I knew then what I know now, he would never have been anywhere near Government.⁷

5. The Foreign Affairs Committee wrote to the Foreign Secretary, Yvette Cooper, on 12 September 2025, asking several questions about the appointment including whether security concerns were raised by those undertaking Peter Mandelson’s security clearance and whether mitigations were put into place in order to grant his clearance.⁸ A joint response from the Foreign Secretary, and the then-Permanent Under-Secretary (PUS), Sir Olly Robbins, dated 16 September, gave little information, citing the long-established practice of not commenting on National Security Vetting.⁹ The Committee followed up at an evidence session with the PUS and the then-Cabinet Secretary, Sir Chris Wormald, on 3 November 2025; this also revealed very little. The Committee was not given the full story and answers were evasive.
6. On 30 January 2026, the US Department of Justice released a very large number of files relating to Jeffrey Epstein.¹⁰ These included email correspondence with Peter Mandelson, which led to the Metropolitan Police launching an investigation into misconduct in public office.¹¹
7. On 4 February 2026, the House of Commons resolved that the Government be required to provide to the House of Commons all papers relating to Peter Mandelson’s appointment as His Majesty’s Ambassador to the United States of America, using a tool known as the “Humble Address”.¹² The first tranche of these papers was laid on 11 March.

6 HC Deb, 11 September 2025, [col 1041](#)

7 HC Deb, 4 February 2026, [col 258](#)

8 Letter from Chair to the Foreign Secretary regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson, [12 September 2025](#)

9 Letter from Foreign Secretary and Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to the Chair regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson, [16 September 2025](#)

10 US Department of Justice, [Department of Justice Publishes 3.5 Million Responsive Pages in Compliance with the Epstein Files Transparency Act](#) (accessed 29 June 2026)

11 BBC News, [“Met Police confirms investigation launched into alleged misconduct in public office”](#), 3 February 2026

12 Votes and Proceedings, [4 February 2026](#)

8. The Committee learned in later evidence sessions that on 25 March, Cat Little, the Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary and senior official responsible for overseeing the Government response to the Humble Address, saw the UK Security Vetting Agency (UKSV) summary document (the summary of the considerations of the case officer who worked on Peter Mandelson’s vetting file)¹³ including an assessment that Peter Mandelson should not receive Developed Vetting.¹⁴ She sought legal, policy and propriety advice and brought this to the Prime Minister’s attention on 14 April.
9. On 16 April, the Guardian published an article alleging that Peter Mandelson had failed Developed Vetting.¹⁵ It was reported that Sir Olly Robbins had been removed from his post and, on 18 April, the Foreign Secretary wrote to the Committee to say that Nick Dyer had been appointed as Interim PUS.¹⁶
10. On 21 April, the Committee held an evidence sessions with Sir Olly Robbins, at that point the former PUS; on 23 April, Cat Little, the Permanent Secretary at the Cabinet Office appeared before the Committee, and Sir Philip Barton, Sir Olly’s predecessor as PUS, and Morgan McSweeney, former Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister gave evidence on 28 April. A second tranche of papers in response to the Humble Address was published on 1 June. The Committee is very grateful to all witnesses who appeared at short notice.

13 Oral evidence taken on 23 April 2026, [Q734](#)

14 Oral evidence taken on 23 April 2026, [Q726](#)

15 The Guardian, “[Revealed: Mandelson failed vetting but Foreign Office overruled decision](#)”, 16 April 2026

16 Letter from the Foreign Secretary to the Chair regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson, [18 April 2026](#)

2 Before the appointment was made

Candidate selection

11. Most Ambassadorial appointments are made from the Diplomatic Service, the cadre of permanent staff at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). Civil servants should be selected on merit on the basis of fair and open competition, but the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 provides an exception to the requirement for an appointment to the Diplomatic Service either as Head of Mission or in connection with the person’s appointment (or selection for appointment) as Governor of an Overseas Territory.¹⁷ Use of this exemption is unusual but not unprecedented; political appointments include former Member of Parliament Paul Boateng (now Lord Boateng) as High Commissioner to South Africa in 2005,¹⁸ and former Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, Ed Llewellyn (now Lord Llewellyn of Steep), as Ambassador to France in 2016.¹⁹
12. Discussions about making a political appointment for the Ambassador to the United States of America began some time before the announcement of Peter Mandelson in December 2024. The Committee was told by Morgan McSweeney, former Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, that it was raised as part of the “access talks” where the Opposition is given access to a limited number of senior civil servants ahead of a General Election to prepare for potential government.²⁰ At this time, no individual appointee was suggested, but the then-Cabinet Secretary Simon Case (now Lord Case) was made aware that the now Prime Minister “was minded to make a political appointment”.²¹
13. On 11 November 2024, Simon Case wrote to the Prime Minister to offer two Diplomatic Service options to replace Dame Karen Pierce, the incumbent Ambassador to the United States of America, when her standard fixed term

17 [Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010](#), s10(3)(a)

18 [Public Appointments](#), PQ 105763, 7 December 2006

19 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [Change of Her Majesty’s Ambassador to France: Edward Llewellyn](#) (accessed 29 June 2026)

20 Oral evidence taken on 28 April 2026, [Qq952–953](#)

21 Oral evidence taken on 28 April 2026, [Q953](#)

came to an end.²² He went on to say that a second option was to make a political appointment, but noted, if that were the preference, officials would “develop a plan for them to acquire the necessary security clearances and do due diligence on any potential Conflicts of Interest or other issues of which [the Prime Minister] should be aware before confirming [his] choice”.²³

14. In his evidence on 28 April 2026, Sir Philip Barton, former Permanent Under-Secretary (PUS) at the FCDO and Head of the Diplomatic Service, told the Committee that whilst a Diplomatic Service candidate for ambassador had already been found, he had discussed with Dame Karen whether she would be willing to be flexible about her end date, given the UK General Election and US Presidential Election in the second half of 2024. It was widely acknowledged that Dame Karen was doing an excellent job including building relationships with the team working with then President-elect Trump, ahead of his inauguration in January 2025.
15. It seems that there were several political appointment names in play for the role of Ambassador to the United States of America. In his note to the Prime Minister, Simon Case noted that a second diplomatic service candidate was “also judged above the line” in the original competition. David Lammy, the then-Foreign Secretary, told the Committee that he had suggested David Miliband, Dame Valerie Amos and Dame Cathy Ashton should be included on any short list if there were a Democrat Administration, and George Osborne should be considered for his close links with senior Republican figures.²⁴
16. There is no evidence in the papers published in response to the Humble Address (or in other documents that have been published separately) exactly who was on the “long list” for this post; and there is no evidence about how this was whittled down to a short list. There is evidence to show that the Cabinet Office Propriety and Ethics Team was asked to carry

22 Cabinet Office, [Part of a Return to an Address of the Honourable the House of Commons dated 4 February 2026 relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as HM Ambassador to Washington \[Volume I\]](#), HC (2024–26) 1774-I, 11 March 2026, pp 5–6

23 Cabinet Office, [Part of a Return to an Address of the Honourable the House of Commons dated 4 February 2026 relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as HM Ambassador to Washington \[Volume I\]](#), HC (2024–26) 1774-I, 11 March 2026, pp 5–6

24 Letter from the Chair to the Deputy Prime Minister regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson, [21 May 2026](#); Letter from the Deputy Prime Minister to the Chair regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson, [1 June 2026](#)

out some “due diligence”²⁵ research on Peter Mandelson²⁶ and one other candidate, who Morgan McSweeney confirmed was former Chancellor, George Osborne.²⁷ This research occurred around 4 December 2024 and the results of the due diligence were put to the Prime Minister with a box note from his Principal Private Secretary (PPS) on 11 December.²⁸ It seems, therefore, that there was a short list of two in early December.

17. This form of box note allows space for a response from the Prime Minister. The method for recording ministerial decisions varies throughout government departments but guidance is clear that copies of submissions which have been annotated by a minister (or a very senior civil servant), private secretaries’ e-mails conveying Ministers’ views or decisions on policy areas and private secretaries’ notes of Ministers’ meetings and telephone conversations should form part of the public record and be retained accordingly.²⁹
18. There is no record of the response from the Prime Minister to Simon Case’s note. It is not unreasonable to expect this to have happened, but is impossible to know whether no note of the Prime Minister’s response was taken, or whether a note was taken and it has somehow been lost, or whether a verbal response only was given. Or indeed whether his advice was not considered. There is also no published record of a response to the 11 December 2024 note from the PPS to the Prime Minister, nor is there a record of the meeting when the Prime Minister decided to go ahead with

25 Sir Chris Wormald defined “due diligence” in his letter of 30 October 2025 to the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee: “Due diligence largely collates publicly available information and other departments are not routinely engaged in the process. This is because the purpose of the process is to identify any reputational risks or potential conflicts of interests that may need to be considered and which informs a decision as to whether additional information, conversations or advice may be needed if the appointment is to proceed further (for example, a conversation with the candidate about willingness to divest certain financial interests, or with other relevant departments about particular issues or risks). It is not a formal approval stage through which an appointment must progress, and the Civil Service has no ‘veto’ over the preferred appointee.” See: Letter from the Cabinet Secretary to the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson as UK Ambassador to the US, [30 October 2025](#)

26 Cabinet Office, [Part of a Return to an Address of the Honourable the House of Commons dated 4 February 2026 relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as HM Ambassador to Washington \[Volume I\]](#), HC (2024–26) 1774-I, 11 March 2026, pp 10–20

27 Oral evidence taken on 28 April 2026, [Q984](#)

28 Cabinet Office, [Part of a Return to an Address of the Honourable the House of Commons dated 4 February 2026 relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as HM Ambassador to Washington \[Volume I\]](#), HC (2024–26) 1774-I, 11 March 2026, pp 8–20

29 Cabinet Office, [Guidance for the management of Private Office information and records](#), gov.uk, (accessed 29 June 2026)

the appointment. In her evidence to the Committee, Cat Little, Permanent Secretary to the Cabinet Office agreed that she would have expected to see more information around this.³⁰

19. It is not clear how the decision was made to move from a long list to a short list, or who made the choice to carry out research on two final candidates (George Osborne and Peter Mandelson). There is no written note to explain how Peter Mandelson became the front runner, and the evidence shows that the Trump team had made it clear they wanted Dame Karen Pierce to stay in post, and that Peter Mandelson had a history of losing political jobs because of bad judgement and putting himself in a position of vulnerability to outside influence. There were potential conflicts of interest with Global Counsel, the consultancy founded by Peter Mandelson, and of course his known closeness to Jeffrey Epstein. There is also no record of the final decision to appoint Peter Mandelson.
20. It is, however, clear that the first that Sir Philip Barton heard of this appointment was on 15 December when he was informed by the Prime Minister's PPS.³¹ He was not consulted on the decision.³²

21. **CONCLUSION**

The appointment of Peter Mandelson as Ambassador to the United States of America was disastrous from start to finish. He was not a fit and proper person for such a role, as is now clear from all the papers that have been published. However, the appointment was made at speed, and process was not followed. The usual checks and balances did not halt the appointment because they were not made. It was extraordinary that more time seemed to be spent considering whether he needed security vetting at all (given his position as a Member of the House of Lords and Privy Counsellor) than whether the vetting process would throw up problems that should have been a bar to his very appointment. Lessons must be learned and a new, more robust process for political appointments must be put into place (and followed) in future.

22. Sir Philip Barton told the Committee about the steps that were taken between 15 December 2024 (when he was told about the decision) and the announcement of the appointment on 20 December. He said he was informed that the Prime Minister had seen the due diligence and was aware

30 Oral evidence taken on 23 April 2026, [Qq788-792](#)

31 Cabinet Office, [Part of a Return to an Address of the Honourable the House of Commons dated 4 February 2026 relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as HM Ambassador to Washington \[Volume I\]](#), HC (2024-26) 1774-I, 11 March 2026, pp 21-22

32 Oral evidence taken on 28 April 2026, [Qq827-830](#)

of the risks. Sir Philip said he had not personally seen any of the documents concerning the appointment until the release of the first tranche of papers in response to the Humble Address.³³

23. Sir Philip said that the Cabinet Office had asked that whether, as a “fit and proper person” (a Member of the House of Lords), Peter Mandelson needed to go through security vetting before taking up the position; that this question was raised was corroborated by Ian Collard, the then Director of Estates, Security and Network at the FCDO, who also noted that “there were initial discussions involving ... ESND [the Estates, Security and Network Directorate] and GSG [the Government Security Group] in the Cabinet Office”.³⁴ The settled view was reached on 23 December, and Sir Philip agreed in writing that Peter Mandelson should undertake Developed Vetting (DV). The FCDO is described as a “DV-by-Default department”, where “the majority of FCDO civil servant staff are expected to hold Developed Vetting (DV) clearance”³⁵ and this would have been the case for all ambassadors.
24. The messages published in the second tranche of the Humble Address show that the default position of most of those consulted in the Cabinet Office, the UK Security Vetting Agency (UKSV) and FCDO believed for some time that Peter Mandelson would not need vetting because of his status as a member of the House of Lords.³⁶ This was eventually resolved by either (or both) Tom Bramley, Director of Security Policy in the Cabinet Office and Sir Philip Barton. However, it is somewhat extraordinary that this confusion existed amongst a senior group of staff.
25. Peter Mandelson was given access to the FCDO building, had IT equipment, and had classified briefings before his clearance was completed. Sir Philip Barton explained:

[...] you have a publicly announced ambassador-designate to do the single most important ambassador job for the UK. You have a very, very compressed timescale that you are being asked to meet for them to start their role in Washington. You have the exceptional circumstances of an incoming Trump Administration and a very high premium, therefore, on the new ambassador arriving as well briefed as possible in the short time available, recognising that ambassadors

33 Oral evidence taken on 28 April 2026, [Q828](#)

34 Letter from the Interim Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to the Chair regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson, [27 April 2026](#)

35 Letter from the Interim Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to the Chair regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson, [27 April 2026](#)

36 Cabinet Office, [Part of a Return to an Address of the Honourable the House of Commons dated 4 February 2026 relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as HM Ambassador to Washington \[Volume I\]](#), HC (2024–26) 1774-I, 11 March 2026, pp 27–35

normally have several months to prepare for big jobs like this. That required Mandelson to have access to briefings and papers to allow him to be properly prepared.³⁷

26. In evidence, the FCDO noted that Ian Collard had stipulated that Peter Mandelson's Private Secretary should inform everyone Peter Mandelson was meeting that he was not yet DV cleared,³⁸ and this was corroborated by emails published with the second tranche of papers in response to the Humble Address.³⁹
27. When giving evidence to the Committee in November 2025, the then-Cabinet Secretary, Sir Chris Wormald, noted that:

when we are making appointments from outside the civil service, which obviously happens a lot more regularly than it does for ambassadors, the normal thing is for the security clearance to happen after appointment but before the person signs a contract and takes up post. If we are recruiting a permanent secretary or similar from outside the civil service, that is normally what would happen: the security clearance process would happen after the announcement of the appointment but before the person takes up post, and the appointment would be subject to the security clearance being granted.⁴⁰

28. **RECOMMENDATION**

The clear lesson of this experience is that no public appointments should be announced or made without the appropriate security clearance first being granted. If needed, a request can be made for the papers to be moved to the top of the pile, but the process must be completed thoroughly and no one should feel under pressure either to deliver the "right" result or to meet an impossible deadline. (The Committee appreciates that there is an exceptional need after a change of administration at a General Election when the new Government needs to bring special advisers into roles immediately, but the risks to national security should still be managed strictly.)

37 Oral evidence taken on 28 April 2026, [Q842](#)

38 Letter from the Interim Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to the Chair regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson, [27 April 2026](#)

39 Cabinet Office, [Update on the Government response to the Humble Address motion](#), gov.uk (accessed 29 June 2026)

40 Oral evidence taken on 3 November 2025, [Q254](#)

29. When giving evidence in November 2025, Sir Chris Wormald noted that he was appointed as Cabinet Secretary on 16 December 2024,⁴¹ just shortly before Peter Mandelson’s appointment was announced, so he was not involved in much of the process, and his evidence could only cover changes being made to the process for future.
30. Shortly before his appearance, Sir Chris had written to Simon Hoare, Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, to outline changes to the appointments process which had been deemed necessary after reviewing what had happened with the appointment of Peter Mandelson. He told the Committee “what we are trying to do here ... is to replicate for direct ministerial appointments exactly what we do for advertised appointments”.⁴²
31. At his appearance before the Committee on 21 April 2026, after his dismissal, Sir Olly Robbins set out how he understood the status of Peter Mandelson’s appointment when he began as PUS in the FCDO on 20 January 2025. He described a “very, very strong expectation that he [Peter Mandelson] needed to be in post and in America as quickly as humanly possible”.⁴³ Vetting was ongoing and Sir Olly said he felt there was a “generally dismissive attitude” to Peter Mandelson’s vetting clearance.⁴⁴ He evidenced this by setting out, in a letter to the Committee, what had already taken place by the time he arrived in post at the FCDO:

I took over as PUS on 20 January 2025. Developed Vetting (DV) for Mandelson was underway, but already:

- a. Due diligence (which assesses reputational suitability and checks if a candidate is fit to serve) had been completed by the Cabinet Office
- b. Approval of the appointment had been given by HM The King
- c. Mandelson’s appointment had been announced
- d. Agrément had been given from our US partners
- e. Mandelson had access to the FCDO building and basic IT access
- f. Mandelson was being granted access to highly classified briefing on a case-by-case basis

41 Oral evidence taken on 3 November 2025, [Q249](#)

42 Oral evidence taken on 3 November 2025, [Q304](#) [Sir Chris Wormald]

43 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q525](#)

44 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q526](#)

Cumulatively, [the above] resulted in a dismissive approach to DV from Number 10 Downing Street (No. 10) for the remainder of the process. Nonetheless, despite this atmosphere of pressure, the department completed DV to the normal high standard.⁴⁵

32. Sir Olly Robbins was also clear about what he knew (or didn't know) about the decision-making process to appoint Peter Mandelson:

I knew that there had been an appointment process of sorts, and that No. 10 had operated that with the Cabinet Office. But to be honest, I think I first heard the words “due diligence report” after he was withdrawn as ambassador.⁴⁶

33. Sir Philip Barton said that he had been told a due diligence process had been carried out, and confirmed that he did not see the report.⁴⁷ He was not asked for any advice before the appointment but only “on the practical steps required to meet the Prime Minister’s decision”.⁴⁸

34. **RECOMMENDATION**

It is clear that there was no formal process set out for political appointments to ambassadorial roles. These appointments are rare, but a shared understanding would avoid some of the issues seen this time. The Cabinet Office, in consultation with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, should set out a process to use in future, which addresses recommendations made here. The draft should be shared with this Committee in response to this report.

35. **RECOMMENDATION**

The due diligence process which was in place at the time did not work. Giving evidence to this Committee in November 2025, the then-Cabinet Secretary reported that this process has now been formalised for political appointments. But this is not enough. The due diligence report must be shared with the hiring department, and the department must be given the opportunity to contribute fully to the due diligence.

45 Letter from Sir Oliver Robbins, former Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to the Chair regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson, [21 April 2026](#)

46 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q662](#)

47 Oral evidence taken on 28 April 2026, [Q846](#)

48 Oral evidence taken on 28 April 2026, [Q836](#)

36.

RECOMMENDATION

The Committee was surprised to hear that neither Sir Philip Barton, the then-Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, nor the then-Foreign Secretary were consulted on the appointment of Peter Mandelson as Ambassador to the United States of America. Even when a Prime Minister wishes to make a specific appointment, they should always build in time to consult the Head of Diplomatic Service and the Foreign Secretary.

37.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the evidence given and papers published that Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office officials understood that nothing would prevent this appointment and they had to make it work. Many actions underlined this, not least receiving agrément from the US Government and agreement from His Majesty The King before vetting was completed. Undoing this process would have been politically embarrassing and damaging to UK-US relations.

38.

CONCLUSION

In the response to the Humble Address, plenty of messages have been published which show the dismissive view held about the need for security clearance for Peter Mandelson to take up this post. It was almost as though officials were looking for reasons not to bother with vetting, viewing it as an inconvenience which was slowing the process, rather than a valuable check on the decision to appoint.

39.

CONCLUSION

Sir Philip Barton was left under no illusion that this process needed to be completed quickly because it was the intention for Peter Mandelson to be in post by the inauguration. The No. 10 Private Secretary who had initial contact with Peter Mandelson did not suggest the appointment was conditional. By the time Sir Olly Robbins arrived at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Peter Mandelson was already on the payroll, although this was not included in Sir Olly's list of events putting pressure to not get in the way of Peter Mandelson's appointment as it was definite. Of the paperwork sent to Peter Mandelson and in communications with No. 10 and the FCDO, as included in the Government response to the Humble Address, only his employment contract which he received shortly after his vetting was approved (and over a month after his appointment was approved) stated that his appointment was subject to vetting. It is therefore unsurprising that the FCDO did everything it could to grant his vetting and mitigate the risks highlighted.

40. CONCLUSION

In taking this decision, it is clear that the then-Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Sir Olly Robbins, believed that he was carrying out the wishes of the Prime Minister and delivering the outcome that was wanted. Given that, it is unsurprising that he did so, having also been told that the recommendation was “borderline” and mitigations could be put in place. Sir Olly Robbins’ subsequent dismissal by the Prime Minister therefore seems to have been taken without full due process and the establishment of the facts.

Pressure

41. It is worth looking specifically at the pressure put on the FCDO to complete all processes and finalise this appointment quickly for Peter Mandelson to be in post before President Trump’s inauguration. This was despite Dame Karen Pierce, the incumbent Ambassador, being viewed as doing an excellent job.⁴⁹ Sir Philip Barton said that “no one working on this in the FCDO can have been in any doubt about the urgency of the issue”.⁵⁰

42. Morgan McSweeney, former Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, explained his view of the ‘pressure’ when he gave evidence to the Committee:

There is pressure in Government every day, and most of that pressure comes from inside you. Every civil servant, Minister and Spad I worked with woke up, every morning, feeling pressure to make the country better—wanting to move faster. The challenges the country faces are great. That is where the pressure comes from, and rightly so.

No. 10’s job, in all of this, is to make sure that the Prime Minister’s decisions are acted on quickly. There is a real difference between asking people to act at pace and asking people to lower standards, and we never did that; we never asked people to skip steps at any part of the process.⁵¹

43. Sir Olly Robbins was asked whether he could quantify this pressure by giving, for example, a number of calls that his or the then-Foreign Secretary, David Lammy’s, private offices were receiving on a daily basis.⁵² Sir Olly said he could not quantify but that there was “an atmosphere of pressure”,⁵³ where “[his] office and the [then-]Foreign Secretary’s office were under

49 Oral evidence taken on 28 April 2026, [Q923](#), [Q986](#)

50 Oral evidence taken on 28 April 2026, [Q852](#)

51 Oral evidence taken on 28 April 2026, [Q1068](#)

52 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q533](#)

53 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q526](#)

constant pressure. There was an atmosphere of constant chasing”.⁵⁴ Both Sir Olly and Ian Collard said that although the department was under time pressure, no one bowed to that pressure, and professional judgements were not influenced by these demands.⁵⁵

44. RECOMMENDATION

Staff at No. 10 (both political and civil service) should be acutely aware of the power they have by nature of their role and the office. They are seen to be speaking for the Head of Government. An inquiring phone call or chasing email from No. 10 may result in the recipient feeling under pressure to push ahead with what seems like a request directly from the Prime Minister. In this case, No. 10’s approach created “an atmosphere of constant chasing”, even if this was not their intention. No. 10 and the Cabinet Office should ensure all staff are regularly reminded to think of their impact on others and not to use the power that comes with their office unless they are confident it would be explicitly supported by their ministers.

Mitigations

- 45.** In his evidence to the Committee in November 2025, Sir Olly Robbins talked about the mitigations that had been put into place to manage Peter Mandelson’s actual or perceived conflicts of interest. When asked why Peter Mandelson was not asked to relinquish his shareholding in Global Counsel, he said:

This was honestly the hardest bit of this bit of the process for both of us. Lord Mandelson was a founder of the company. It is a private company, without traded stock. While he was confident that he could conduct his role as ambassador without giving rise to a conflict, we wanted to make sure we managed and mitigated that possibility in some particular ways. I did put in place some measures to do that with him, which we added to as time went on. As he tried to find ways out of the shareholding, which he was actively trying to do with Global Counsel, we were able to put in place an extra guarantee that he was not in fact going to be benefiting from any upside in those shares as his employment with us continued.⁵⁶

54 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q532](#)

55 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q580](#); Letter from the Interim Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to the Chair regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson, [27 April 2026](#)

56 Oral evidence taken on 3 November 2025, [Q261](#)

He followed up saying that the mitigations included ensuring that he was unaware of particular clients of Global Counsel or work being undertaken—which was managed through Peter Mandelson’s office in Washington and with advice from the FCDO HR department.⁵⁷

46. This was revisited in evidence taken in April 2026, when Sir Olly said:

I had many discussions with Mandelson about his Global Counsel stake and how we manage it—not just the shares but the relationships that he would have built up as chairman of Global Counsel, and founder. We had a mitigation strategy in place for dealing with those.

[...]

Conflict of interest management ... is an iterative process. You have to actively manage them, so we kept coming back to it. Also, in order to give me greater confidence, with his permission, I briefed his office and his senior team in Washington to help me keep an eye on any perceptions of conflict, as his term as ambassador advanced.⁵⁸

47. Sir Olly also talked about mitigations against the risks highlighted by UKSV with regard to Peter Mandelson’s security clearance. He mentioned mitigations ten times, at various points, and the term was used six times in the letter from the Interim PUS, Nick Dyer, which set out Ian Collard’s recollection of the clearance process.⁵⁹
48. The documents released in the Humble Address second tranche included hardly any references to mitigations with regard to the national security risks flagged as part of Peter Mandelson’s vetting, outside of the email sent by Ian Collard to Corin Robertson, the then-FCDO Director General Finance and Corporate, and Sir Olly Robbins.⁶⁰ In his evidence, Sir Olly said that he was briefed that the “risks identified as of highest concern” could be managed and/or mitigated.⁶¹ He said that there was a record of the decision to grant clearance and also the mitigations,⁶² which was collaborated by Ian Collard’s recollection.⁶³ However, this record has not been published. And

57 Oral evidence taken on 3 November 2025, [Qq262-263](#)

58 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q668](#)

59 Letter from the Interim Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to the Chair regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson, [27 April 2026](#)

60 Cabinet Office, [Part of a Return to an Address of the Honourable the House of Commons dated 4 February 2026 relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as HM Ambassador to Washington \[Volume II\]](#), HC (2024–26) 1774-I, 11 March 2026, p72

61 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q556](#)

62 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q556](#)

63 Letter from the Interim Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to the Chair regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson, [27 April 2026](#)

there are no notes of how agreed mitigations were decided upon, nor are there notes of discussions with Peter Mandelson (or anyone else) to ensure these mitigations would be followed through.

49. Sir Olly emphasised that the FCDO would often seek to manage risks that were flagged through the vetting process, quoting the internal FCDO guidance for those going through the vetting process:

“Where we do find a risk, we always try to manage it through our aftercare programme or risk mitigation.” That is standard process for all applicants and holders of DV. The process I am describing to you was not some special one we invented for Mandelson; it is a completely standard part of the consideration of granting DV.⁶⁴

50. The Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister, Darren Jones, noted that a small number of documents have been withheld at the request of the Metropolitan Police who are conducting an ongoing investigation, “which fall broadly into the following categories: national security vetting material; conflict of interest process material; and relevant internal correspondence”.⁶⁵

51. **CONCLUSION**

The Committee finds it difficult to understand how Peter Mandelson was appointed if he were a perceived risk to national security. It is difficult to judge whether mitigations that we have been told were put into place were sufficient when there is no evidence of what these mitigations were, nor how they were communicated (to Peter Mandelson or anyone else who needed to be involved). If papers have been withheld by the request of the Metropolitan Police, they should be published as soon as possible when the investigation has completed.

52. **CONCLUSION**

The former Permanent Under-Secretary told the Committee that applying risk mitigations is a standard part of consideration of granting Developed Vetting. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office—and other government departments—should review their processes to ensure that in future there is a formal record of any required mitigations, and that the person being vetted must be fully notified of these.

64 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q669](#)

65 HC Deb, 1 June 2026, [col 853](#)

3 Implications for record-keeping, security vetting and political appointments

Record keeping

- 53.** Peter Mandelson was removed from the role of His Majesty’s Ambassador to the United States of America on 11 September 2025. There was much discussion at the time, and this Committee took evidence from the then-Permanent Under-Secretary (PUS) at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and the then-Cabinet Secretary on their understanding of the events of that time.⁶⁶ This report does not revisit those discussions, other than to note we were clearly not given the full picture at that point.
- 54.** It is highly unusual that the public has been able to see so many documents relating to the appointment of Peter Mandelson, due to the requirements of the Humble Address. This Committee has therefore been able to understand and ask more questions in hindsight than might have otherwise been possible. This also means there is a unique opportunity to consider lessons to be learned for future.
- 55.** When the Foreign Affairs Committee took evidence in April 2026 and subsequently when we agreed this report, we had the benefit of having seen many papers. And we could also see what was missing.
- 56.** In her evidence to the Committee, Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary Cat Little agreed that there were no records around the decision-making process which led to Sir Olly Robbins deciding that Peter Mandelson should receive his security clearance.⁶⁷ The Committee had asked Sir Olly about this meeting, and he said:

66 Oral evidence taken on 3 November 2025, [Qq249-349](#) [Sir Oliver Robbins and Sir Chris Wormald]

67 Oral evidence taken on 23 April 2026, [Qq760-761](#)

There is a note of the decision. The meeting itself, of course, involved the team describing to me some of the issues and the way in which they proposed to manage them. It would not have been appropriate to record that in detail. The decision of what we agreed we would do and the ways in which we would manage it is recorded and is available in the Foreign Office.⁶⁸

57. Both Cat Little and Sir Olly Robbins referred to the Civil Service Code when they gave evidence to the Committee. In the section on “integrity”, the Code states that civil servants must “keep accurate official records and handle information as openly as possible within the legal framework”.⁶⁹ In his response to the debate on 3 June 2026, the Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister, Darren Jones, said that the Cabinet Secretary, Dame Antonia Romeo, had written to all heads of department to clarify the rules on record keeping and ensure they are being properly applied across Government,⁷⁰ but it is clear that a step change is required more work must be undertaken to embed a culture of keeping proper records.

58. **CONCLUSION**

It is clear that record keeping throughout this process has been appalling. Despite over 1,500 pages published in response to the Humble Address, there is no audit trail of the decision-making which led to this appointment. With such a large change in the personnel involved in the appointment (two Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Permanent Under-Secretaries, three Cabinet Secretaries and presumably many more junior staff), the records should be able to answer all the questions that the Committee and others have asked. But the records are not there.

68 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q554](#)

69 Cabinet Office, [Civil Service Code](#), gov.uk (accessed 9 June 2026)

70 HC Deb, 3 June 2026, [col 1264](#)

59. CONCLUSION

The Civil Service Code, which applies to both permanent civil servants and special advisers, requires that officials “keep accurate official records”. This has been failed. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and No. 10 need to re-train all their staff, particularly but not exclusively those in private offices, about the requirements for notes that allow inquiries to see how decisions were taken. It is a key responsibility and not an optional extra, and a balance can be struck between security, confidentiality for individuals and the need for records. Private offices should be properly resourced to ensure they have time to do this. There should be a regular audit checks in each of these departments and they should report to their departmental select committees to reassure Parliamentarians that these improvements have been embedded.

National Security Vetting System

- 60.** The Prime Minister announced to the House of Commons on 20 April 2026 that Sir Adrian Fulford would be undertaking a review into Security Vetting which will cover the means by which all decisions are made in relation to National Security Vetting.⁷¹ The then-Security Minister, Dan Jarvis, confirmed in an answer to a Written Parliamentary Question that the review will focus on learning from the Peter Mandelson National Security Vetting case and vetting decision making, whilst a separate review by the Government Security Group (GSG) in the Cabinet Office will consider Peter Mandelson’s conduct while in the role of the Ambassador to the United States of America, seeking to establish whether Mandelson’s actions constituted a national security risk during his tenure.⁷² The terms of reference of the review were published on 1 June.⁷³
- 61.** During the debate on the response to Humble Address, Members raised concerns that civil servants were becoming wary of applying for roles that required security clearance, due to the publicity around this case and concerns about whether in future their vetting files would be shared.⁷⁴ There was the suggestion that this would particularly impact on women and staff from minority groups, who are already under-represented in key roles.
- 62.** The FCDO has been one of the government organisations with the ability to take decisions on granting vetting, known as a “make recommendations” department. But after the issue around Peter Mandelson’s clearance came

71 HC Deb, 20 April 2026, [col 23](#)

72 [Lord Mandelson](#), PQ 128726, 28 April 2026

73 Cabinet Office, [Vetting Review Terms of Reference](#), gov.uk (accessed 29 June 2026)

74 HC Deb, 3 June 2026, [col 1244](#)

to light, the Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister suspended the FCDO's ability to make its own decisions.⁷⁵ Since the Government published its summary of the UK Security and Vetting Agency (UKSV) vetting summary decision template,⁷⁶ we now know that the UKSV has a system to use “traffic light” boxes to make its recommendations.

63. In April 2026 some of the first discussions in public of the boxes and recommendations made by UKSV were held in the Committee. In the evidence given, it became clear that Ian Collard, Sir Olly Robbins and Cat Little hadn't seen these summaries previously. And in this case, two red boxes were ticked, but despite this, Sir Olly was told that the case was borderline.

64. RECOMMENDATION

The Government has tasked Sir Adrian Fulford with undertaking a review of National Security Vetting. The Committee supports this and has not taken detailed evidence on vetting more broadly. However, it is clear that there is not a shared understanding of the process, given the number of different descriptions that have emerged about UK Security Vetting's 'recommendations', the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) being a 'make recommendations' department and whether Peter Mandelson had 'failed' vetting or not. Therefore, the Committee recommends that the new FCDO Permanent Under-Secretary—and all permanent secretaries across Whitehall—receive a briefing on their role in the vetting process and the outcomes of the Fulford Review. The Committee was surprised to learn that a decision Peter Mandelson's vetting was taken by the PUS when neither he nor the person briefing him had seen the vetting file or summary document. Sir Adrian should consider whether this practice is sustainable.

65. RECOMMENDATION

It should also be made clear to all permanent secretaries, including the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Permanent Under-Secretary, who is accountable for vetting decisions and what knowledge (if any) ministers should have about vetting. This case has demonstrated the difference of opinion between ministers and the civil service (and within the civil service).

75 HC Deb, 20 April 2026, [col 34](#)

76 Cabinet Office, [Publication regarding events surrounding the granting of Developed Vetting to Peter Mandelson](#), gov.uk (accessed 29 June 2026)

66. RECOMMENDATION
If in future decisions about vetting are again made by departments, the decision maker should have seen all appropriate documents, without breaking the confidentiality of the process. If the Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister’s restriction remains (and therefore all vetting decisions are made by UK Security and Vetting Agency), the decision makers must understand the circumstances in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office that mean it can be appropriate to grant clearance with mitigations.

67. RECOMMENDATION
If the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) retains its powers, we expect Sir Adrian Fulford to make recommendations to tighten the decision-making process within the FCDO and ensure there are better record keeping processes.

68. RECOMMENDATION
Whilst mindful of national security, this Committee should receive a briefing on the outcome of the Fulford Review and the broad implications for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) vetting including political appointments and whether the FCDO returns to its position as a ‘makes recommendations’ department. It goes without saying that members of this Committee would be happy to contribute if Sir Adrian Fulford thinks it might be helpful.

69. RECOMMENDATION
Government departments should monitor the impact of this episode on applications for roles which required higher levels of security clearance, and report to their departmental select committees if there are adverse implications for applications generally, and in particular from women and staff in minority groups.

Leaks

70. The Committee also asked Cat Little, the Permanent Secretary at the Cabinet Office, about the leaks of papers that were being collected for the response to the Humble Address. Cat Little confirmed that there was a leak investigation underway.⁷⁷ Sir Olly Robbins expressed his concerns about the leaks, which he felt could undermine the vetting process.⁷⁸

77 Oral evidence taken on 23 April 2026, [Q822](#)

78 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q659](#)

71. CONCLUSION

There have been a number of leaks around what should have been highly confidential discussions and records. The Committee is aware that the Government does not comment on leak inquiries but notes Sir Olly Robbins' hope that these "are being very rigorously investigated and that prosecutions will result, because this is a grievous breach of national security".

Political appointments

- 72.** In his letter of 18 December 2024 to Sir Clive Alderton, Private Secretary to His Majesty The King, Sir Philip Barton states:

The Prime Minister has indicated his intention to recommend, during this Parliament, small number of political appointments to serve as His Majesty's Ambassadors overseas.⁷⁹

This letter first came to light on 11 March 2026, with the first publication of documents published in response to the Humble Address.

- 73.** The Committee asked whether Sir Philip had knowledge about any other political appointments, but he did not.⁸⁰ Morgan McSweeney, former Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister, also said he was not aware of details, and that his understanding was that this had been part of 'access talks' in January 2024.⁸¹

- 74.** Giving evidence to the Committee in April 2026, Sir Olly Robbins said that he had been asked by No. 10 to consider whether there was an upcoming head of mission post that would be appropriate for Matthew Doyle (now Lord Doyle) who at that time was Downing Street Director of Communications, a special advisor to the Prime Minister. Sir Olly explained his discomfort at this request:

There were several discussions initiated by No. 10 with me about potentially finding a head of mission opportunity for Matthew Doyle, who was then the Prime Minister's director of communications. I was under strict instruction not to discuss that with the then Foreign Secretary, which was uncomfortable.

[...]

79 Cabinet Office, [Part of a Return to an Address of the Honourable the House of Commons dated 4 February 2026 relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as HM Ambassador to Washington \[Volume I\]](#), HC (2024–26) 1774-I, 11 March 2026, pp 23–25

80 Oral evidence taken on 28 April 2026, [Q880](#)

81 Oral evidence taken on 28 April 2026, [Q1076](#)

I was in the process of talking to the top team about quite a profound restructuring involving job losses, and I found it very hard to think how I would explain to the office what the credentials of Matthew were to be in an important head of mission role, when I was in danger of making very senior, very experienced diplomats leave the office.

I did my duty. I looked at the forward look of available jobs. I shared with No. 10 what some of those might be. It was, to be honest, hard to find something that I thought might be suitable, but I also felt quite uncomfortable about it, and I kept giving advice that I thought this would be very hard for the office and was hard for me personally to defend.⁸²

75. CONCLUSION

The Committee was surprised to hear that there had been plans for political appointments to key ambassadorial posts even before the General Election. This appointment may have caused a rethink. However, the Foreign Secretary should write to the Committee setting out her strategy for future political appointments.

76. CONCLUSION

The Committee was also surprised to hear that No. 10 had also asked Sir Olly Robbins about the possibility of a Head of Mission posting for former Downing Street Director of Communications, Matthew Doyle (now Lord Doyle of Great Barford). Sir Olly was told not to inform the Foreign Secretary about this. Fortunately, he was able to input early and this query went no further. This underlines the requirement for a proper process that all can follow.

Pre-appointment scrutiny

- 77.** House of Commons Committees have routinely conducted preappointment hearings for a range of significant public appointments, following their introduction as part of the Governance of Britain reforms.⁸³ As set out in Cabinet Office guidance, such scrutiny provides “an additional safeguard” to ensure that appointment processes adhere to the principles of merit, fairness, and openness established in the Governance Code on Public Appointments.⁸⁴

82 Oral evidence taken on 21 April 2026, [Q604](#)

83 Ministry of Justice, [The governance of Britain](#), 3 July 2007

84 Cabinet Office, [Cabinet Office Guidance: pre-appointment scrutiny by House of Commons select committees](#), 5 May 2026

78. This framework has become a routine and accepted feature of the appointments process, with departments expected to engage constructively with committees at every stage, including consulting on recruitment processes and providing detailed information on preferred candidates.
79. This Committee does not have any appointments included in the list of posts subject to pre-appointment scrutiny agreed between the Liaison Committee and Government.⁸⁵ The International Development Committee is involved in the appointment of the Chief Commissioner of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI). There is a precedent for the Foreign Affairs Committee taking evidence from the previous political appointees to Head of Mission roles, for example such as Lord Llewellyn of Steep who was appointed as HM Ambassador to Paris in November 2016 and appeared before the predecessor Committee in January 2017.⁸⁶ However, despite regularly asking for access to Peter Mandelson to question him either before he left for Washington or early in his tenure as Ambassador—and the agreement of the then-Foreign Secretary, David Lammy—he was not made available. When questioned about this in September 2025, the Foreign Secretary and then-PUS said that “he met the Foreign Affairs Committee on their visit to Washington DC in June 2025”.⁸⁷

80. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Foreign Affairs Committee asked repeatedly and regularly for access to Peter Mandelson to carry out a pre-appointment evidence session or to see him early in his tenure—and a short breakfast meeting with all senior staff should not be confused with a scrutiny evidence session. A pre-appointment session has been a regular part of scrutiny of past political appointments to ambassadorial roles. Despite assurances from Ministers and officials, Peter Mandelson was allowed to avoid appearing before the Committee. This is unacceptable. We would go so far as to point out that had Peter Mandelson appeared, he would have been asked some wide-ranging questions in public, and even if he hadn't answered them all honestly, a record would have been made of the answers. As it is, we are simply told that issues exposed during the due diligence process were put to Peter Mandelson behind closed doors, and frustratingly, his answers are yet to have been published.

85 Cabinet Office, [Guidance: pre-appointment scrutiny by House of Commons select committees](#), gov.uk (accessed 29 June 2026)

86 Oral evidence taken on 10 January 2017, [Qq1–46](#)

87 Letter from the Foreign Secretary and Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to the Chair regarding the appointment of Lord Mandelson, [16 September 2025](#)

81.

RECOMMENDATION

This Committee should always have the opportunity to carry out scrutiny of political appointees and, given the failure of this appointment, this scrutiny should be put on the same footing as other pre-appointment sessions, giving the Foreign Affairs Committee a veto if the appointee is not felt to meet the standard required. This would only apply to political appointees and not the Heads of Mission recruited from within the civil service.

Conclusions and recommendations

Before the appointment was made

1. The appointment of Peter Mandelson as Ambassador to the United States of America was disastrous from start to finish. He was not a fit and proper person for such a role, as is now clear from all the papers that have been published. However, the appointment was made at speed, and process was not followed. The usual checks and balances did not halt the appointment because they were not made. It was extraordinary that more time seemed to be spent considering whether he needed security vetting at all (given his position as a Member of the House of Lords and Privy Counsellor) than whether the vetting process would throw up problems that should have been a bar to his very appointment. Lessons must be learned and a new, more robust process for political appointments must be put into place (and followed) in future. (Conclusion, Paragraph 21)
2. The clear lesson of this experience is that no public appointments should be announced or made without the appropriate security clearance first being granted. If needed, a request can be made for the papers to be moved to the top of the pile, but the process must be completed thoroughly and no one should feel under pressure either to deliver the “right” result or to meet an impossible deadline. (The Committee appreciates that there is an exceptional need after a change of administration at a General Election when the new Government needs to bring special advisers into roles immediately, but the risks to national security should still be managed strictly.) (Recommendation, Paragraph 28)
3. It is clear that there was no formal process set out for political appointments to ambassadorial roles. These appointments are rare, but a shared understanding would avoid some of the issues seen this time. The Cabinet Office, in consultation with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, should set out a process to use in future, which addresses recommendations made here. The draft should be shared with this Committee in response to this report. (Recommendation, Paragraph 34)

4. The due diligence process which was in place at the time did not work. Giving evidence to this Committee in November 2025, the then-Cabinet Secretary reported that this process has now been formalised for political appointments. But this is not enough. The due diligence report must be shared with the hiring department, and the department must be given the opportunity to contribute fully to the due diligence. (Recommendation, Paragraph 35)
5. The Committee was surprised to hear that neither Sir Philip Barton, the then-Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, nor the then-Foreign Secretary were consulted on the appointment of Peter Mandelson as Ambassador to the United States of America. Even when a Prime Minister wishes to make a specific appointment, they should always build in time to consult the Head of Diplomatic Service and the Foreign Secretary. (Recommendation, Paragraph 36)
6. It is clear from the evidence given and papers published that Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office officials understood that nothing would prevent this appointment and they had to make it work. Many actions underlined this, not least receiving agrément from the US Government and agreement from His Majesty The King before vetting was completed. Undoing this process would have been politically embarrassing and damaging to UK-US relations. (Conclusion, Paragraph 37)
7. In the response to the Humble Address, plenty of messages have been published which show the dismissive view held about the need for security clearance for Peter Mandelson to take up this post. It was almost as though officials were looking for reasons not to bother with vetting, viewing it as an inconvenience which was slowing the process, rather than a valuable check on the decision to appoint. (Conclusion, Paragraph 38)
8. Sir Philip Barton was left under no illusion that this process needed to be completed quickly because it was the intention for Peter Mandelson to be in post by the inauguration. The No. 10 Private Secretary who had initial contact with Peter Mandelson did not suggest the appointment was conditional. By the time Sir Olly Robbins arrived at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Peter Mandelson was already on the payroll, although this was not included in Sir Olly's list of events putting pressure to not get in the way of Peter Mandelson's appointment as it was definite. Of the paperwork sent to Peter Mandelson and in communications with No. 10 and the FCDO, as included in the Government response to the Humble Address, only his employment contract which he received shortly after his vetting was approved (and over a month after his appointment was approved) stated that his appointment

was subject to vetting. It is therefore unsurprising that the FCDO did everything it could to grant his vetting and mitigate the risks highlighted. (Conclusion, Paragraph 39)

9. In taking this decision, it is clear that the then-Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Sir Olly Robbins, believed that he was carrying out the wishes of the Prime Minister and delivering the outcome that was wanted. Given that, it is unsurprising that he did so, having also been told that the recommendation was “borderline” and mitigations could be put in place. Sir Olly Robbins’ subsequent dismissal by the Prime Minister therefore seems to have been taken without full due process and the establishment of the facts. (Conclusion, Paragraph 40)
10. Staff at No. 10 (both political and civil service) should be acutely aware of the power they have by nature of their role and the office. They are seen to be speaking for the Head of Government. An inquiring phone call or chasing email from No. 10 may result in the recipient feeling under pressure to push ahead with what seems like a request directly from the Prime Minister. In this case, No. 10’s approach created “an atmosphere of constant chasing”, even if this was not their intention. No. 10 and the Cabinet Office should ensure all staff are regularly reminded to think of their impact on others and not to use the power that comes with their office unless they are confident it would be explicitly supported by their ministers. (Recommendation, Paragraph 44)
11. The Committee finds it difficult to understand how Peter Mandelson was appointed if he were a perceived risk to national security. It is difficult to judge whether mitigations that we have been told were put into place were sufficient when there is no evidence of what these mitigations were, nor how they were communicated (to Peter Mandelson or anyone else who needed to be involved). If papers have been withheld by the request of the Metropolitan Police, they should be published as soon as possible when the investigation has completed. (Conclusion, Paragraph 51)
12. The former Permanent Under-Secretary told the Committee that applying risk mitigations is a standard part of consideration of granting Developed Vetting. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office—and other government departments—should review their processes to ensure that in future there is a formal record of any required mitigations, and that the person being vetted must be fully notified of these. (Conclusion, Paragraph 52)

Implications for record-keeping, security vetting and political appointments

- 13.** It is clear that record keeping throughout this process has been appalling. Despite over 1,500 pages published in response to the Humble Address, there is no audit trail of the decision-making which led to this appointment. With such a large change in the personnel involved in the appointment (two Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Permanent Under-Secretaries, three Cabinet Secretaries and presumably many more junior staff), the records should be able to answer all the questions that the Committee and others have asked. But the records are not there. (Conclusion, Paragraph 58)
- 14.** The Civil Service Code, which applies to both permanent civil servants and special advisers, requires that officials “keep accurate official records”. This has been failed. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and No. 10 need to re-train all their staff, particularly but not exclusively those in private offices, about the requirements for notes that allow inquiries to see how decisions were taken. It is a key responsibility and not an optional extra, and a balance can be struck between security, confidentiality for individuals and the need for records. Private offices should be properly resourced to ensure they have time to do this. There should be a regular audit checks in each of these departments and they should report to their departmental select committees to reassure Parliamentarians that these improvements have been embedded. (Conclusion, Paragraph 59)
- 15.** The Government has tasked Sir Adrian Fulford with undertaking a review of National Security Vetting. The Committee supports this and has not taken detailed evidence on vetting more broadly. However, it is clear that there is not a shared understanding of the process, given the number of different descriptions that have emerged about UK Security Vetting’s ‘recommendations’, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) being a ‘make recommendations’ department and whether Peter Mandelson had ‘failed’ vetting or not. Therefore, the Committee recommends that the new FCDO Permanent Under-Secretary—and all permanent secretaries across Whitehall—receive a briefing on their role in the vetting process and the outcomes of the Fulford Review. The Committee was surprised to learn that a decision Peter Mandelson’s vetting was taken by the PUS when neither he nor the person briefing him had seen the vetting file or summary document. Sir Adrian should consider whether this practice is sustainable. (Recommendation, Paragraph 64)
- 16.** It should also be made clear to all permanent secretaries, including the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Permanent Under-Secretary, who is accountable for vetting decisions and what knowledge (if

any) ministers should have about vetting. This case has demonstrated the difference of opinion between ministers and the civil service (and within the civil service). (Recommendation, Paragraph 65)

17. If in future decisions about vetting are again made by departments, the decision maker should have seen all appropriate documents, without breaking the confidentiality of the process. If the Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister's restriction remains (and therefore all vetting decisions are made by UK Security and Vetting Agency), the decision makers must understand the circumstances in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office that mean it can be appropriate to grant clearance with mitigations. (Recommendation, Paragraph 66)
18. If the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) retains its powers, we expect Sir Adrian Fulford to make recommendations to tighten the decision-making process within the FCDO and ensure there are better record keeping processes. (Recommendation, Paragraph 67)
19. Whilst mindful of national security, this Committee should receive a briefing on the outcome of the Fulford Review and the broad implications for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) vetting including political appointments and whether the FCDO returns to its position as a 'makes recommendations' department. It goes without saying that members of this Committee would be happy to contribute if Sir Adrian Fulford thinks it might be helpful. (Recommendation, Paragraph 68)
20. Government departments should monitor the impact of this episode on applications for roles which required higher levels of security clearance, and report to their departmental select committees if there are adverse implications for applications generally, and in particular from women and staff in minority groups. (Recommendation, Paragraph 69)
21. There have been a number of leaks around what should have been highly confidential discussions and records. The Committee is aware that the Government does not comment on leak inquiries but notes Sir Olly Robbins' hope that these "are being very rigorously investigated and that prosecutions will result, because this is a grievous breach of national security". (Conclusion, Paragraph 71)
22. The Committee was surprised to hear that there had been plans for political appointments to key ambassadorial posts even before the General Election. This appointment may have caused a rethink. However, the Foreign Secretary should write to the Committee setting out her strategy for future political appointments. (Conclusion, Paragraph 75)

- 23.** The Committee was also surprised to hear that No. 10 had also asked Sir Olly Robbins about the possibility of a Head of Mission posting for former Downing Street Director of Communications, Matthew Doyle (now Lord Doyle of Great Barford). Sir Olly was told not to inform the Foreign Secretary about this. Fortunately, he was able to input early and this query went no further. This underlines the requirement for a proper process that all can follow. (Conclusion, Paragraph 76)
- 24.** The Foreign Affairs Committee asked repeatedly and regularly for access to Peter Mandelson to carry out a pre-appointment evidence session or to see him early in his tenure—and a short breakfast meeting with all senior staff should not be confused with a scrutiny evidence session. A pre-appointment session has been a regular part of scrutiny of past political appointments to ambassadorial roles. Despite assurances from Ministers and officials, Peter Mandelson was allowed to avoid appearing before the Committee. This is unacceptable. We would go so far as to point out that had Peter Mandelson appeared, he would have been asked some wide-ranging questions in public, and even if he hadn't answered them all honestly, a record would have been made of the answers. As it is, we are simply told that issues exposed during the due diligence process were put to Peter Mandelson behind closed doors, and frustratingly, his answers are yet to have been published. (Recommendation, Paragraph 80)
- 25.** This Committee should always have the opportunity to carry out scrutiny of political appointees and, given the failure of this appointment, this scrutiny should be put on the same footing as other pre-appointment sessions, giving the Foreign Affairs Committee a veto if the appointee is not felt to meet the standard required. This would only apply to political appointees and not the Heads of Mission recruited from within the civil service. (Recommendation, Paragraph 81)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 30 June 2026

Members present

Dame Emily Thornberry (Chair)

Fleur Anderson

Aphra Brandreth

Richard Foord

Uma Kumaran

Abtisaam Mohamed

Edward Morello

Sir John Whittingdale

The appointment of Peter Mandelson as British Ambassador to the United States

Draft Report (*The appointment of Peter Mandelson as British Ambassador to the United States*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 39 read and agreed to.

Paragraph—(*Sir John Whittingdale*)—brought up and read, as follows:

In taking this decision, it is clear that the then-Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, Sir Olly Robbins, believed that he was carrying out the wishes of the Prime Minister and delivering the outcome that was wanted. Given that, it is unsurprising that he did so, having also been told that the recommendation was “borderline”

and mitigations could be put in place. Sir Olly Robbins' subsequent dismissal by the Prime Minister therefore seems to have been taken without full due process and the establishment of the facts.

Question put, That the paragraph be read a second time.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 6	Noes, 1
Aphra Brandreth	Fleur Anderson
Richard Foord	
Uma Kumaran	
Abtisam Mohamed	
Edward Morello	
Sir John Whittingdale	

Question accordingly agreed to.

Paragraph agreed to.

Paragraph (now paragraph 40) inserted.

Paragraphs 41 to 81 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

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

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

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 7 July at 1.30pm.

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Monday 3 November 2025

Sir Chris Wormald KCB, Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service, Cabinet Office; **Sir Oliver Robbins KCMG CB**, Permanent Under-Secretary, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) [Q249–349](#)

Tuesday 21 April 2026

Sir Oliver Robbins KCMG CB, Former Permanent Under-Secretary, Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office [Q525–687](#)

Thursday 23 April 2026

Catherine Little CB, Chief Operating Officer, Civil Service, Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Office [Q688–822](#)

Tuesday 28 April 2026

Sir Philip Barton GCMG OBE, Former Permanent Under-Secretary, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office [Q823–949](#)

Morgan McSweeney, Former Downing Street Chief of Staff [Q950–1132](#)

Published correspondence

The following correspondence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

- 1 12 September 2025 – [Letter to the Foreign Secretary relating to the appointment of HM Ambassador to Washington](#)
- 2 16 September 2025 – [Correspondence from the Foreign Secretary and the Permanent Under-Secretary relating to the appointment of the former HM Ambassador to Washington](#)
- 3 30 October 2025 – [Correspondence from the Permanent Under-Secretary relating to Direct Ministerial Appointments to Heads of Mission roles in the Diplomatic Service](#)
- 4 11 November 2025 – [Correspondence from the Cabinet Secretary following up on the oral evidence session on 3 November 2025](#)
- 5 11 November 2025 – [Correspondence from the Permanent Under-Secretary following up on the oral evidence session on 3 November 2025](#)
- 6 17 April 2026 – [Letter to Sir Oliver Robbins KCMG CB relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as Ambassador to the United States](#)
- 7 18 April 2026 – [Correspondence from the Foreign Secretary relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as Ambassador to the United States](#)
- 8 21 April 2026 – [Correspondence from Sir Oliver Robbins KCMG CB relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as Ambassador to the United States](#)
- 9 24 April 2026 – [Letter to the Foreign Secretary relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as Ambassador to the United States](#)
- 10 24 April 2026 – [Response from the Cabinet Office following up on the oral evidence session with Catherine Little CB on 23 April 2026](#)
- 11 25 April 2026 – [Letter to the Interim Permanent Under-Secretary relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as Ambassador to the United States](#)

- 12 [27 April 2026 – Correspondence from the Interim Permanent Under-Secretary relating to the appointment of Lord Mandelson as Ambassador to the United States](#)
- 13 [2 June 2026 – Response from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office following the oral evidence session with Catherine Little CB on 23 April 2026](#)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2026–27

Number	Title	Reference
2nd Special	Disinformation diplomacy: How malign actors are seeking to undermine democracy: Government Response	HC 269
1st Special	From a Common Understanding to Common Ground: Building a UK-EU Strategic Partnership fit for the future: Government Response	HC 108

Session 2024–26

Number	Title	Reference
4th	Disinformation diplomacy: How malign actors are seeking to undermine democracy	HC 703
3rd	From a Common Understanding to Common Ground: Building a UK-EU Strategic Partnership fit for the future	HC 857
2nd	The write to protect: Britain's pen on the world stage	HC 930
1st	Israel-Palestine conflict	HC 488
2nd Special	The write to protect: Britain's pen on the world stage: Government Response	HC 1530
1st Special	Israel-Palestine conflict: Government Response	HC 1374