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Dear Peter

27 JAN 2003

Thank you for your letter of 26 June to Alan Milburn. Your letter has been passed to me to respond to as the Minister responsible. I apologise for the delay in replying.

The Department is of course aware of the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultations and at its launch in January 2001 was one of the first Whitehall departments to set up a section of its web-site dedicated to consultations. We remain committed to seeking the widest possible selection of views in an area of government of paramount importance. You have identified a number of issues with regard to the way the Department of Health deals with consultations and these clearly need to be addressed.

I am able to tell you that one of our senior staff, Peter Allanson, has been asked to become Consultations Co-ordinator on a temporary basis whilst we review our arrangements more fundamentally. The role of the co-ordinator is to ensure that the department's consultation guidelines are complied with, that consultations are "joined up" where possible, and that the department contributes to and learns from the Cabinet Office central register of consultations and the good practice website. We plan to ask the person who takes on the role substantively to become pro active in promoting the new methodologies becoming available for consultations including use of web enabled technology and broadening the scope and range of our consultations. As you may know the Office of the e-Envoy is leading the Whitehall work on all of this and we are keen to play our part. In the meantime, we have reminded all senior members of the Department that they must follow the Code of Practice and making Peter Allanson's role in all of this clear.

We will make sure that documents are available through more than one media. I believe that paper documents are generally available on request though it is true to say that the Code of Practice particularly encourages departments to use electronic means of distribution.

I am most grateful to you for writing to us about this subject.

Yours ever
Philip

PHILIP HUNT