



INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT



PRESS NOTICE: ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2025

The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC) published its Annual Report for 2023 – 2025 today. The Chairman of the Committee, the Rt. Hon. the Lord Beamish, said:

“The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC) is the only body which can scrutinise the work of the UK Intelligence Community, ensuring that they are held to account on behalf of Parliament and on behalf of the British public. It is an essential part of the UK democratic system, providing a vital check and balance over secret organisations and their activities.

This Report summarises the work of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC) for the period from April 2023 to March 2025. It covers a two-year period (and spans two Committees) because the Committee was not able to issue an Annual Report in 2024, due to the dissolution of the previous Committee on 30 May 2024 ahead of the General Election, with the Committee not being reconstituted until 16 December 2024. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Rt Hon. Sir Julian Lewis MP and the previous Members of the Committee for their work.

This Report covers a period in which the impact of long-standing issues in relation to the Committee’s resourcing, governance arrangements and remit became more serious and at times left the Committee unable to perform its statutory functions. However, there have, since, been more encouraging signs in relation to the Government’s approach to the role of the Committee. On 14 July 2025, the Committee met the Prime Minister for the first time in over ten years, marking a very positive reset in the relationship between the Government and the ISC. The Committee welcomed the Prime Minister’s commitment to explore all options to ensure the ISC’s independence in its current and future work, and his commitment to work together to ensure the scope and remit of the Committee enables it to fulfil its vital oversight role. The Committee has also had confirmation that the short-term uplift in headcount for its staff has been granted: recruitment is now underway to address the current acute understaffing of the ISC’s Office.

We welcome these first signs of action to address the long-standing inadequacy of the Committee’s governance arrangements, resourcing and remit. We will continue to report on any further progress made to ensure that the ISC is able to provide the sufficiently robust and independent oversight of the UK Intelligence Community that Parliament and the public expects.”

The Committee's Key Findings

- Between July 2023 and March 2025, the Committee published a Report on China and a Report on International Partnerships. It also published its 2022–23 Annual Report, and progressed Inquiries on Iran (since published - in July 2025) and on Cloud Technologies.
- The ISC was heavily engaged in two pieces of legislation before Parliament: the Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Act 2024 and the National Security Act 2023.
- In relation to the Investigatory Powers (Amendment) Act, improvements to the regime were secured in three key areas as a result of the Committee's work. This included amendments to: tightly constrain changes to the so-called 'triple lock'; enhance monitoring of 'category authorisations' under Part 7A of the legislation; and define and limit the list of public authorities which would be granted powers to compel disclosure of Communications Data from Telecommunications Operators. The Committee's work to establish what was needed and to ensure that it was sufficiently limited illustrates the value of the Committee in providing the authoritative oversight needed to ensure that when national security legislation comes before Parliament it strikes the right balance between privacy and security.
- In relation to the National Security Act, the Committee strongly welcomed this legislation: indeed we had been calling for it for many years. As noted in our previous Annual Report, one issue which the Committee had scrutinised was the suggested amendment to the Serious Crime Act, to create an automatic exemption for the intelligence services in relation to offences overseas where these actions are necessary for the proper exercise of their functions. The Committee instead recommended a more limited 'defence', to provide a better balance between protecting intelligence officers and maintaining accountability: we can now report that this amendment was agreed by both Houses of Parliament, and was strengthened further by a number of critical assurances at Report Stage in the House of Lords.
- However, there are still problems with the National Security Act, about which the Committee is concerned. These include: the general operation of Foreign Influence Registration Scheme; the failure to reform the Official Secrets Act 1989; and the Government's refusal to accept a modest amendment to make foreign donations within the UK's political system more transparent.

The Independence of the ISC

- The Committee has for some years highlighted the lack of sufficient resources for its Office, and the need for its Staff to be independent from the Executive: during the period covered by this Report, the situation became critical.
- The Committee in the last Parliament became very seriously concerned that the vital scrutiny which the ISC provides was being undermined by continued involvement by the Cabinet Office in the Committee's Office. Whilst this may appear to be an administrative matter, it goes to the very heart of Parliament's ability to hold the Government to account for those actions being taken in secret, behind closed doors, funded by the public purse.
- The root of the problem lies in the control exerted over the Committee's staff and resourcing by the Cabinet Office – despite the Committee having oversight over substantial parts of the Cabinet Office. That, self-evidently, should not be the case.
- The Committee is encouraged that Ministers recognise the importance of the Committee's independence, and efforts are being made to find a workable solution.

Committee Resources

- Since the passage of the Justice and Security Act 2013 , the headcount of the Committee's independent office has been set at 15.1 FTE, with a budget of £1.84 million. However, despite assurances in the years after the Covid-19 pandemic, the final budget for the 2022/23 financial year was reduced to £1.635 million and then, for the financial year 2024/25, the Cabinet Office cut both the ISC's budget and headcount further, to just 9 FTE and £1.425 million.
- In budgetary terms there is now an additional £3 billion being spent each year by the organisations the Committee oversees, compared to in 2014. The Committee is therefore now overseeing something that is of a fundamentally different order than what was originally envisaged - but is being expected to do so with even fewer resources itself.
- Furthermore, since the pandemic, the Committee has faced sharp challenges in recruiting and retaining the staff it requires: external events have elevated what was already a deep-seated problem, such that the Committee's very small office sank to its lowest level of staffing in over 20 years.

- During this period, the Committee therefore requested a short-term uplift in headcount of 15 staff, in addition to the 15.1 headcount previously agreed with Ministers. The then Deputy Prime Minister personally confirmed to the Committee that he had agreed this uplift shortly before the 2024 General Election, but unfortunately this was not acted upon by officials before the dissolution of Parliament. The Committee returned this issue to Ministers in January 2025, and progress was starting to be made during the period covered by this Report.

The ISC's Remit

- For the past four years the Committee has highlighted the erosion of effective Parliamentary oversight of intelligence and security matters, which has resulted from the Government's failure to update the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the ISC and the Prime Minister. This runs counter to the clear undertaking given by Government to Parliament during the passage of the Justice and Security Act that "*the ISC should have oversight of substantively all of central Government's intelligence and security activities to be realised now and in the future*", and to the recognition in the MoU itself that "*only the ISC is in a position to scrutinise effectively the work of the Agencies and of those parts of Departments whose work is directly concerned with intelligence and security matters*".
- The Committee was deeply disappointed that the previous Government did not consider themselves bound by the undertakings to keep the Committee's remit up to date that were given to Parliament in the course of the passage of the Justice and Security Act 2013. There is now a significant - and widening - gap in oversight of national security work because the relevant departmental Select Committees - within whose remits new teams concerned with intelligence and security matters fall - are not equipped to scrutinise their work fully.
- The Committee's position is that its remit is to oversee all intelligence and security activities cross-Government, and that this is not limited to those organisations currently listed in the MoU. We hope that this Government will ensure that the commitments made to Parliament about oversight of secret matters are respected.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (ISC) is a statutory Committee of Parliament.
2. The Committee consists of nine Members drawn from both Houses of Parliament, and appointed by Parliament. The Chair is elected by its Members.
3. The Committee oversees the intelligence and security activities of the UK Intelligence Community. The Committee was originally established by the Intelligence Services Act 1994, and was reformed , and its powers reinforced, by the Justice and Security Act 2013.
4. Its remit includes oversight of the policies, expenditure, administration and operations of MI5, MI6 (the Secret Intelligence Service or SIS) and the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), and the work of the other parts of the Intelligence Community, including the Joint Intelligence Organisation and the National Security Secretariat in the Cabinet Office; Defence Intelligence in Ministry of Defence; and Homeland Security Group in the Home Office.
5. The Members of the Committee are subject to Section I(1)(b) of the Official Secrets Act 1989 and are routinely given access to highly classified material in carrying out their duties. This Report reflects the work of the following Members of Committee:

The Rt Hon. the Lord Beamish PC (Chairman)

The Rt Hon. Sir Jeremy Wright KC MP (Deputy Chairman)

Baroness Brown of Cambridge DBE FREng FRS

Peter Dowd MP

Richard Foord MP

The Rt Hon. Sir John Hayes CBE MP

Jessica Morden MP

Derek Twigg MP

Admiral The Rt Hon. the Lord West of Spithead GCB DSC PC.

6. The Committee sets its own agenda and work programme. It takes evidence from Government Ministers, the Heads of the intelligence and security Agencies, officials from across the UK Intelligence Community, and other witnesses as required. The Committee makes an Annual Report on the discharge of its functions and also produces Reports on specific issues.
7. The Committee's dedicated Press Officer (Alex Hunt) can be reached at:

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