

## Oversight Follow-Up Project

Departments often promise a written response to an oversight question in committee meetings if they do not have the information to hand. Alternatively, time constraints mean a committee meeting has to end before the Department can answer the questions posed by MPs. The Chairperson will request these responses in written format, often with a deadline. This became a growing phenomenon in the Fifth Parliament.

Initially, PMG had tried to retrieve these written responses because our reports of these meetings would have the Department replies missing. These efforts were in vain. PMG formalised a project in July 2017 to measure Department response. We did this by approaching five to seven portfolio committees per quarter to obtain the written response. This exercise showed that the tracking, monitoring, following up of issues raised and commitments made was largely inadequate or non-existent. On average, it would take 4 emails and/or calls for PMG to obtain a definitive result. The results of 37 formal requests over 6 quarterly sessions (18 months) were:

<b>Written Responses Requests: July 2017 – Dec 2018</b>		
Department written response given to Committee - without reminder by committee secretary	10	27%
Department written response given to Committee - with reminder by committee secretary	8	22%
Department did not respond to reminder and/or failed to provide document to Committee	13	35%
Committee staff that did not participate in the project	6	16%
	37	
Department written response eventually provided to PMG	10	27%

Beyond the problematic ethos displayed by departments, this poor outcome goes against the policy objectives Parliament has set for itself. Section 4.1.4 of the [Oversight and Accountability Model](#) states:

“In developing the oversight model, the need was identified for support services relating to the monitoring and tracking of issues between Parliament and the Executive, and on all other related matters within Parliament's broader mandate. An Oversight and Advisory Section ought to be created in response to the need identified. Its main functions will be to provide advice, technical support, co-ordination, and tracking and monitoring mechanisms on issues arising from oversight and accountability activities of members of Parliament and the committees to which they belong. The work of this section should also include the archiving of relevant information to facilitate the retention of institutional memory”.

It is something for the next Parliament and in particular committees to be conscious of.