

The House of Commons Defence Select Committee published their fifth report of the session 2007/78, their response to the annual Ministry accounts, on 28 January 2008. Their report can be viewed online at:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmdfence/61/61.pdf>

The Ministry of Defence annual report 2006–7, as submitted to the committee in November 2007, can be accessed at:

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/CorporatePublications/AnnualReports/MODAnnualReports0607/ModAnnualReportAndAccounts200607.htm>

The committee's report highlights concerns about many of the problems acknowledged in the Ministry of Defence's report, rehearsing a catalogue of already-known risks and shortcomings. What is more significant is not the shortcomings that the report highlights – which are widely acknowledged – but, rather, the number of areas where the select committee commits to 'monitor progress' or calls for more details on the steps being taken to mitigate problems experienced. They also anticipate cuts in defence spending and in the defence equipment budget through 2008 and warn the Ministry of Defence to be 'realistic' about the scale of equipment procurement that they can undertake in the future. They further call for the Ministry of Defence to announce a revised publication date for the revised Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS2).

In particular, they note:

Recruitment problems and the growth in the number of 'pinch points' in important specialisms and especially in the defence medical services. It cites 52 pinch points across all three services and 'critical shortages' in the Army Medical Service. The failure, once again, to meet harmony guidelines as a result of the high level of operational demands currently made on British troops. Anticipated delays on the type-45 destroyer programme and A400M programme. That demands upon troops are such that many are failing to achieve harmony guidelines and get proper breaks between operational duties. Cost overruns on the Astute-class submarine programme (£1.22 bn so far) and on the type-45 destroyer programme (£0.99 bn so far).