1. Our previous written evidence submission suggested that when considering changes to the way in which parliament engages with the public, its integration into the traditional legislative process was key to its success. We would like to follow up on this a little further by defining what we mean by integration and by giving some further specific examples of how this could be achieved. In short, we mean that public engagement should not be seen as an add-on to the normal legislative process but should instead be a constitutive part of this process, bearing in mind that, as our oral evidence emphasised, the type and extent of this public engagement would likely vary considerably from bill to bill, and should only take place where it can genuinely add value to the consideration of legislation.

2. Collecting evidence from the public is of little value if this evidence is not listened to by parliamentarians and if those who have participated cannot find out what Parliament has gone on to do and if/how their evidence has been used. When we talk of integration into the legislative process we mean two things:

   i) That public engagement mechanisms are not run in parallel to the formal process of legislative scrutiny in parliament. They should be embedded within that process, rather than as an add-on to it.

   ii) That it is designed to inform parliamentary debate and scrutiny. Its success should be measured on this basis, rather than on whether or not it has led to a change in the law.

3. We propose 4 ways in which this integration could occur:

4. Spreading awareness of public evidence to MPs/Peers: particularly those who are likely to be heavily involved in scrutiny such as committee members, party spokespersons, committee chairs, chairs of relevant APPGs). This may be awareness of the consultations themselves, of how to read the comments which have been submitted, or of a summary document provided by parliamentary officials alerting them to key messages and concerns.

5. Adapting existing parliamentary processes so that consideration time is specifically allocated to consider views from the public: This would enable public comments to inform specific stages of the legislative process. This could include the use of hashtags for bills, to enable the public to comment on social media, followed up by a short debate specifically on these comments on the floor of the House (at second reading). Written evidence submitted online through parliament’s website could be discussed in a specific slot in a Commons bill committee before line by line scrutiny commences.

6. Translating information and progress of legislation to facilitate public involvement: current information on ongoing legislation is mainly geared to the expert audience. This needs to be transmitted to other audiences also, utilising a more thematic and plain English approach.
7. Ensuring the feedback loop is closed, enabling the public to see that their comments have been considered. This could be done in a number of ways. For example:

   i) If evidence from the public is cited in a parliamentary debate, Hansard could provide a link to the full comment/piece of evidence.

   ii) Identifying the main issues raised by the public and preparing a response on these, explaining what parliament has debated and the decisions which have been taken.

   iii) Distributing this information by email, on parliament’s website or through social media.

8. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to public engagement with legislation. Rather, we recommend that parliament considers a bespoke model in which public engagement is integrated into the legislative process, according to the specific needs of each bill and where they will be of the greatest value to the parliamentary process.