Dear Joan,

Thank you for your letter of 24 September in relation to recent evidence your Committee has heard. Thank you also for sending the Official Report. Your letter raised a series of questions which I will address in turn:

You asked about implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol. The UK Government set out its approach to the protocol, in a Command Paper published in May, and this is unchanged. I do not accept that "it is not clear how the protocol will be implemented". The Government has published guidance, available on gov.uk setting out further details. For further details may I refer you to my letter of 7 October to the Chair of the Committee on the Future Relationship with the EU (available at https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2908/documents/28079/default/).

Regarding exports of goods into the EU, we have published extensive details of the processes required in our Border Operating Model. This document was updated in consultation with officials in the devolved administrations, including the Scottish Government, and with industry. It now includes additional information on the Goods Vehicle Movement Service (GVMS), Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) checks, high-priority plants and plant products, and passengers policies. Further guidance for businesses is available on gov.uk/transition

We have been engaging businesses through stakeholder events such as webinars to help them understand the upcoming changes they need to take. We have also contacted thousands of businesses directly through the Field Force business intervention programme. We have been working closely with the Scottish Government to involve them in this programme, which contacts EU-only high value traders based across Great Britain.

Regarding the movement of food and agrifood from Great Britain to Northern Ireland, it has been clear since the publication of the Command Paper that there will be no new customs infrastructure in Northern Ireland (or in Great Britain ports facing Northern Ireland). There will be a proportionate expansion by the Northern Ireland Executive of agri-food facilities at existing Northern Ireland ports, building on what already happens at ports like Belfast and Larne. The Government is committed to exploring further support to agri-food businesses engaging with new SPS processes, with further detail to be set out in due course, to bringing down the level of checks to
a proportionate and pragmatic level that recognises the high standards across the UK, and to minimising electronic documentary requirements. We are in discussions with the Scottish Government regarding facilities at Cairnryan. The matter of goods deemed ‘at risk’ is under discussion in the Withdrawal Agreement Joint Committee. We will publish further information and guidance in due course.

Regarding agrifood movements, as we have set out previously, SPS controls for the import of goods from the EU will be introduced in stages from January 2021 to July 2021, allowing additional time for business to adjust whilst maintaining effective biosecurity controls. Checks for live animals will continue to be carried out at destination until July 2021, and documentary checks on Products of Animal Origin (POAO) will be carried out remotely from April until July 2021. From July 2021 infrastructure will be in place to perform the necessary physical and identity checks at the border. In regards to supporting agrifood producers, the Border Operating Model provides extensive information for agri-food producers to help them prepare for the end of the Transition Period. This includes information on the new Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) checks that will apply to movements of animals and products of animal origin; and high-priority plants and plant products between the UK and EU.

May I also take this opportunity to put on record my thanks to officials and ministers in the Scottish Government for their close working on many aspects of our work to prepare for the end of the transition period. We have convened six meetings of the Joint Ministerial Committee (EN) so far this year, and Scottish Government ministers now regularly attend the XO Cabinet sub-Committee. This supplements the significant and detailed official engagement as I set out in my letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, Europe and External Affairs on 27 October, available at:

I hope you find this response helpful.

With every good wish,

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster
and Minister for the Cabinet Office