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*Dear Caspar*

**CONSULTATION DOCUMENT ON ELECTRONIC COMMERCE LEGISLATION:  
DEADLINE FOR RESPONSES**

Thank you for your fax of 5 March to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I have been asked to respond on his behalf.

You complain that the 4 weeks allowed for responses in *Building Confidence in Electronic Commerce - A Consultation Document* is insufficient and contravenes the 8 week minimum specified in Cabinet Office guidelines.

The Government has set the deadline of 2002 for its ambitious goal of developing the UK as the world's best environment for electronic trading. The Government is committed to introducing legislation in this Parliamentary Session. The dictates of the parliamentary timetable mean that the Government needs to be in a position to introduce the legislation not long after Easter. The deadline was set in view of this and to allow enough time for a careful analysis of responses.

I recognise your concern with the Cabinet Office guidelines but, as was stated at the Press Conference on 5 March, which you attended, "guidelines are just guidelines". To explain this point at more length I will quote from the introductory chapter to the guidelines themselves, which makes it clear that Departments have flexibility:

"Following the best practice principles contained in this guide will be the responsibility of individual departments, agencies and other relevant bodies. Where they do not follow the best practice for a particular consultation exercise, they must satisfy themselves that, if asked, they have good reasons for not doing so."

The DTI is satisfied that the consultation period is justified in this case.

The overall thrust of Government policy in this area is relatively well known. While the last formal consultation exercise was launched by the previous administration, there has been

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