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Watmore with feeling

Outgoing first civil service commissioner Ian Watmore reflects on five busy years

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FROM THE EDITOR

■his month, we have been thinking about recruitment through the years, as CSW spoke to outgoing first civil service commissioner Ian Watmore. The Civil Service Commission's formation in 1855 was a central part of the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms that created an impartial civil service. It has been ensuring that recruitment into the civil service is fair, open and meritocratic ever since.

This doesn't mean that its work is unchanged - far from it. It has moved from being the body that carried out recruitment to the one that requlates it. In Watmore's time in the top job, the commission had to ensure the Northcote-Trevelyan principles were not undermined by ever-growing staffing challenges in response to both Brexit and Covid.

History will doubtless find elements of the response to both of these events wanting. But it will not find civil servants, and those on the commission who regulate their work, lacking for either determination to find or commitment to deliver the right solutions to the nation's problems in a timely fashion.

One wonders if the nation will be able to sav the same about its elected politicians. If briefings against officials become an ugly part of the political furniture following the EU exit vote, then we have been left with the inflatable plastic chair and red-lipped sofa even after the flames of passion from the plebiscite itself have died down.

Take the widely-reported remarks of MPs at the Conservative Party conference. From quips about getting off exercise bikes to jibes about "wokeing from home", senior figures in the party of government felt content to deride civil servants for cheap laughs in a way that would be flabbergasting if those delivering the lines were not so profoundly unserious.

Top of the (Peloton) charts was party co-chair and ex-culture secretary Oliver Dowden, who criticised Sarah Healey, his former perm sec, for having the temerity to point out that people might be able to find more time to exercise if they didn't have to travel into the office.

Quite why a senior politician chose to rage against a statement which essentially confirms



how long it takes the earth to rotate on its axis is unclear, but his insistence that "people really want the government to lead by example" by sending civil servants back to offices is not borne out by polling, which consistently shows demand for flexible working. It was, doubtless, borne out by the cheers in the room, which is probably all Dowden - who once told CSW that "I don't recognise this image of civil servants being blockers or frustrators or anything like that" on Brexit - cared about in the moment.

But his comment belies a persistent misconception that people who work at home aren't really working. A passing acquaintance with the work of government in the pandemic (which you would hope a cabinet minister would have) proves that

this is not the case, otherwise the many, many support schemes launched in the last 18 months would not have happened.

More than this, the country is still grappling with what the world will look like postpandemic. The equilibrium may settle on a widespread return to the office, but this seems. And the government will need to recruit for many positions in this new labour market, for which talking down the homeworkers makes little sense.

Watmore calls these hostile briefings "a shot in the foot of the [politicians] that say them", who will work with civil servants if they get into power. After a decidedly policy-lite conference season, ministers look like leaden-footed luddites desperately trying to find another bit of shoe to aim into.



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ON YOUR BIKE

Tory Party chair Oliver Dowden's suggestion that civil servants should get "off their Pelotons and back to their desks" was met with fury.

"Civil service and local government colleagues worked some stupendous and unsociable hours as part of the Covid response which was in no small part enabled by home working. This just feels like a smack in the face from an out of touch politician," Saqib Farooq commented.

The tributes to civil servants' work during the pandemic rolled in. Roy Clare said the ex-culture secretary's comments displayed a "dismaying absence of empathy, understanding, professional insight and moral courage... so much for his understanding of leadership, and what a vivid commentary on his values."

"Personally, having worked with many civil service colleagues in various roles in more than one ministry over more than three decades, I have a very high regard for their individual and collective intellect, capacity, resourcefulness,insight and resilience. Stay true, team." he added.

Joann Robertson said: "To all those thousands of civil servants who have worked above and beyond during Covid, I salute you. To all those thousands of civil servants who gave up their kitchen, lounge, bedrooms, bedsits, to become their home office while juggling home schooling, ageing parents, life, home: I salute you.

"We were never not at work. Don't confuse presenteeism with productivity, doing so will detract from the benefits that hybrid working brings. At the heart of which is good leadership."

Rachel Shuttleworth
agreed: "I actually have no
issue with returning to an office if it's the most productive
way I can work and deliver for
the taxpayer. However, like
others, I have never stopped
working whilst at home, and
quite right too – that's what
we are paid to do, especially
when the country is in crisis."

Karen Barnes noted that the criticism did not seem to chime with the PM's recent call for a "high wage, high skill, high productivity" economy. "I've worked longer hours and more productively than in the office, something which is conveniently forgotten in the rush to condemn home working," she said. "Aren't we moving to a higher productivity culture, and higher wages? Unfortunately civil servants are doing the former but not the latter."

Rebecca Nottingham said: "I find it quite telling of the man that he assumes if you can't be seen, you're not working. I'd suggest his comments might say more about his work ethic than that of the civil service community."

"Foolish and deeply insulting comments from Dowden. Clearly he doesn't understand that work is a thing you do, not a place you go," **David Turner** added.

Other readers were quick to point out the benefits of home working. "Think of all the positives which have come out of WFH. Less traffic, less pollution, the possibility of selling off unused commercial properties, people having a better work/life balance, and an increase in productivity," **Scott Main-Reade** wrote. "I'm unsure why they want to go back to the way things were? Seems totally nonsensical to me."

Jason Yarwood said civil servants should be "leading by example" by working at home when they can. "Reduces travel and emissions etc., makes for a better work life balance (for me) and sends the message that it is ok for other businesses to do it... Oh, and I don't own a Peloton. Expensive nonsense, just get out and run or cycle in the elements."

Adam B. agreed, asking: "Is he aware of how much we get paid and how much Pelotons cost? Hahahaha."

David Woollcombe-Gosson had a different take: "What intrigues me is the implication that the government – a Tory one at that – thinks that the private sector looks to the public sector for its example and best practice. Is this in fact a back-handed compliment?"

SPEEDING TICKED OFF

Several readers agreed with the National Audit Office's assessment that "not all programmes can, or indeed should, be delivered at speed".

"Thank God someone said it. Far too often quality is sacrificed in the aim of speed, when taking the time it legitimately requires would allow a result more than merely [minimum viable product]. MVP should be considered the lowest possible outcome... not the target," Andrew Kelly said.

Chris Turner also agreed with the NAO's findings, adding: "Projects should be done properly. Funding, though and therefore opportunity, has been very short term in the last few years."

Colin Savage commented: "My response to a project manager or sponsor who's demanding a quick delivery, without properly understanding the requirement or scope, has always been 'Do you want it quickly or

do you want it right?' I worked for one client who openly boasted about 'delivering at pace'. The problem was they didn't actually think about what they were delivering, threw resources at it then were surprised when it was a complete failure."

TOUGH GOING

Readers weighed in on civil service COO Alex Chisholm's admission that government is a "very tough" environment for digital projects, partly because of legacy systems and old data.

"Having been involved in three such major legacy migrations over the last 10 years, I completely agree. A more iterative approach is required and a drive to deliver an interim hybrid model is essential for future success. There is so much each department can do to understand their existing land-scapes, reduce operational costs and plan for a more controlled transformation of business services," Martin Sharkey said.

"It is good to see our senior leaders talking openly about the challenges of scale and opportunity that we face in delivering in such complex environments," **Phil Chatterton** added.

But **Tim Manning** said some officials "still don't appear to understand that there is no such thing as a 'digital project'. There are only service design projects, enabled by technology. Until this is understood and acted upon, there will still be an endless stream of failures."

"Digital transformation is another silly term that is everywhere these days," **David Winders** agreed.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

Exclusive interviews with Steven Boyd, head of the Government Property Agency, and leader of the House of Commons Jacob Rees-Mogg

SIR JOHN CHILCOT

Sir John Chilcot, a highly regarded public servant, passed away on 3 October. His 33-year career in the civil service culminated in seven years as Northern Ireland Office permanent secretary, during which time he played a crucial role in bringing the Troubles to a close. In 2009, he was asked chair an inquiry into the circumstances leading up to the Iraq war Below are five tributes to Sir John, written by people who worked with him during his distinguished career



ir John Chilcot's talents were recognised early in his career. His posting as an assistant private secretary to the home secretary in 1966, three years after joining the civil service, was a standard step for an assistant principal. But the succession of major figures to whom he was subsequently appointed private secretary is remarkable – Sir William Armstrong, then successive Labour and Conservative home secretaries Merlyn Rees and William Whitelaw.

He also held increasingly influential posts in the Home Office and the Cabinet Office, and gained further experience of civil service management in the Cabinet Office under Sir Robert Armstrong from 1984 to 1986.

In 1990 he was appointed permanent secretary to the Northern Ireland Office, and it was in that post that I worked most closely with him up to our retirements. The message – purportedly from Martin McGuinness – that "the conflict is over but we need your advice on how to bring it to an end" led, after many bumps in the road, to the Downing Street declaration and the first IRA ceasefire.

Sir John, Quentin Thomas and I spent many hours negotiating the final terms of the declaration with our opposite numbers in the Irish government. Sir John is quoted as saying that helping the transition from war to peace was the thing in his career of which he was most proud. I share his sentiment.

It was during that process that I came to admire Sir John's skill as a wordsmith. Those skills were invaluable in the review which I chaired on intelligence about weapons of mass destruction in the lead up to the Iraq war, as well as in the much larger review into the war as a whole, which he himself chaired and with which his name will always be associated.

Lord Butler, cabinet secretary 1988-1997

By the time I joined the Home Office in 1975, John Chilcot was a rising star. I first met him just before the 1979 election when he interviewed several of us for junior private secretary jobs that were coming up. I found him inscrutable and intimidating – his mind did move extraordinarily quickly – but I must have disguised my thoughts because, soon after the election, I was asked to be the immigration minister's private secretary. From that vantage point I saw the superbly constructive and creative relationship he had with [then-home secretary] Willie Whitelaw.

I had the privilege of working for him again in the Northern Ireland Office from 1992 to 1993. In June 1992, John single-handedly prevented political talks with the Northern Ireland parties from collapsing. The issue was whether we had made enough progress in the first strand of talks to move to strand two, at which point the Irish government would join them. Dr Paisley, looking forward to delivering some home truths directly to Irish ministers for the first time, was inclined to agree. But he faced a major split within his party delegation. In a high-tension plenary session on a Friday evening, we were headed for the rocks until John suddenly produced a form of words which the good doctor accepted. That was John at his finest.

This was also the period of indirect messages to the IRA trying to persuade them to abandon violence. John was at the strategic heart of this fraught, imperfect and contested business. It is hard to believe that the 1994 ceasefire and subsequent shift by the provisional movement to an exclusively peaceful strategy would have happened without the vision, nerve and leadership epitomised by John.

Sir William Fittall, former civil servant who worked in Home Office, Cabinet Office and Northern Ireland Office

Inquiry very deeply. He was only too aware of the failure of previous inquiries to satisfy widespread concerns about the issues surrounding the decision to take military action in 2003 and the subsequent actions of the UK in Iraq. While he was always clear that the role of the inquiry was to examine the government's actions, he also saw the need to listen to those who had been most directly affected by the deployment of British personnel, service and civilian, in Iraq. For that reason, before the inquiry began taking oral evidence, we arranged a

series of meetings with bereaved families around the UK, and with veterans and serving personnel. In those meetings, John's compassion for the individuals he met was clear. Although the inquiry mainly heard formal evidence from ministers and the more senior officials, John also wanted to hear from more junior officials. Some of those who attended commented that it was the first time they had been asked for their views.

John and his committee colleagues agreed the inquiry's key task was to establish what had happened; to provide a firm foundation for their conclusions; and then to produce a report which would be lucid and comprehensible to an ordinary person, despite the complexities of the issues. The aim was to publish a "reliable account" which would be widely accepted. That was coupled with a determination to go wherever the evidence led on the issues within the inquiry's wide terms of reference, and to publish as much as possible. The negotiations with the government on disclosure were protracted and required all John's skills and patience. What was crucial to the inquiry's success in arguing that information which would not normally be released should be published was the protocol, agreed at the very start of the inquiry, that the test for the disclosure of official information should be the public interest.

The inquiry's task proved to be very considerable and there was much comment and criticism of the time it was taking. But John was always clear that it would take the time needed to its job fairly and properly, no more and no less.

Margaret Aldred, former senior civil servant and secretary to the Iraq Inquiry

ver the seven years of the inquiry's work, I came to enjoy John's company and respect his judgement. This was just as well, for without such an assured and collegial chair, the pressure of those years might have become unbearable.

Our first challenge came as the panel was formed. Prime minister Gordon Brown had told parliament that the inquiry would conduct its business in secret until it reported. This position was untenable. John handled the matter firmly but

without confrontation. He simply described to the PM how the panel would go about its work, which would include public hearings.

In those hearings, John came over as polite and affable, choosing words with care, inviting witnesses to be forthcoming rather than pressing them in cross-examination. In all this,

he seemed an archetypical civil servant. There were frequent comparisons with Sir Humphrey Appleby from Yes Minister. John certainly knew his way around Whitehall and had an unnerving habit of lapsing into Latin or even Mediaeval French if the mood took him during our internal deliberations.

More serious were the suggestions that his role as member of the establishment was to protect those responsible for the Iraq War. To ensure that there could be no claims of a cover-up, we agreed as a panel early on to include in our final report all the evidence upon which we based our conclusions. We underestimated how long this would take.

As the months passed, demands from the media and the government for us to get a move on intensified. John refused to be panicked or rushed. Despite being doorstepped and followed down streets by journalists, he avoided getting dragged into

public arguments and kept the inquiry on track. He never grumbled or lost his good humour. He was confident that our "reliable account" would do its job and was determined that it would show that our criticisms had been reached fairly.

All John's qualities came together when the report was released in July 2016. John's statement was drafted with immense care, but what made the difference was his delivery. The care with which he had conducted himself throughout the inquiry, his evident integrity and seriousness of purpose, the lack of polemics and grandstanding, and, yes, the establishment credentials, added to the drama of the occasion. The public got the report that they had been waiting for and, in its length, coverage, and detail, some explanation of why it had been necessary to wait.

Lawrence Freedman, emeritus professor of war studies and member of the Iraq Inquiry

s the MoD's director for Chilcot it was my great privilege to get to know Sir John following the publication of the Iraq Inquiry report in July 2016. He was selfless in his support of our work, giving of his time freely and always ready with a word of encouragement. He leaves a profound legacy which continues to imprint itself on the minds of many of today's policymakers.

I recall in particular the help Sir John offered to two conferences our team arranged to promote the learning from the report. He made a keynote address on each occasion, and his star quality brought in a larger and more senior crowd than might otherwise have been the case. His accounts of his own career, and of the good and less good in public policy that he had encountered, were spellbinding, memorable and often wryly funny.

We developed a number of interventions based on the learning from the Iraq Inquiry report, largely in training and development, but also in the form of the short publication, The Good Operation (TGO).

I'm reasonably confident that the lessons that so often bore

"It is hard to believe that the 1994 ceasefire would have happened without John's vision, nerve and leadership"

Sir John's name have become well established across the national security community, and to a certain extent beyond.

And though I'm no longer an integral part of that world, I'm also confident there's a lasting Chilcot legacy, particularly with regard to groupthink and reasonable challenge. Good decision making is often about doing things differently than might otherwise have been the case, or even not at all, and judging success against those criteria is difficult. But suffice to say that the "Chilcot Checklist", which can also be found in TGO, is an essential post-Iraq Inquiry methodology for dividing good policymaking wheat from bad policymaking chaff.

Roger Hutton, former director, Chilcot, Ministry of Defence

You can read these tributes in full, plus more details of Sir John's career at: bit.ly/cswchilcot Roger Hutton's contribution is taken from his blog at: rogerxhutton.com ■

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GILES WILKES NEW MODEL, WITH ARM

IF THE GOVERNMENT IS DELIBERATELY SHIFTING TO A NEW UK ECONOMIC MODEL THEN IT SHOULD ACKNOWLEDGE THE BREXIT-RELATED CAUSES OF OUR CURRENT PROBLEMS

hortages dominate the nation's current economic discussion, and are surely the priority for politicians and officials too. Most of the time, economic events happen far from the direct apprehension of the voter, in a dry world of data releases. But market dysfunction is currently unfolding directly before the eyes of the public, in the form of queues, empty shelves and folding energy companies.

Usually the demands of a transitory crisis are handled separately to the processes that shape settled government policy.

However, the division between tactical firefighting and long-term policy development is not always so neat. Immediate turmoil often reflects historical decisions that need to be revisited, such as the one to allow too thinly-capitalised energy companies to enter the market. Crisis management can have consequences that set back significant political goals. Trying to tough it out, in an effort to encourage companies to prepare better in future, might induce such turmoil that it hits public confidence. Gas shortages might be blamed on too sudden a rush away from fossil fuels, for example,

and embolden a nascent anti-green movement on the right.

Therefore, while it is fighting fires and being urged to "get a grip" - and with the army being deployed to help deliver petrol - the government must also reflect honestly on how crisis events

"The government longer-term policy agenda. must reflect honestly on how crisis events and responses interact with its longer-term policy agenda"

and responses interact with its

There are a few analytical lenses to apply to the current problems while going about this.

First, there is a judgment to make about how much what looks like a series of unfortunate incidents and bottlenecks are just manifestations of a general, passing macroeconomic phenomenon: the UK economy's

recovery bumping up against its capacity to grow fast.

Given changes in the economy during and out of the pandemic - crudely, a shift from in-person services to physical and digital goods, now reversing - some bottlenecks and disruptions were bound to occur. This is a key judgement for the Bank of England to make in regulating the pace of the economy, but it also determines whether and where the government should be intervening to try to make bottlenecks better. It should focus mainly on issues that are deemed likely to last or are sector-specific.

Related to this, the government must think about how much current problems stem from aftershocks of the Covid-19 crisis, such as the sharp apparent reduction in the effective domestic labour force, or changes in how people travel towards more use of cars. Should either of these prove long lasting, the government needs to adapt its policies in response, to encourage older people back into work, say, or to adjust its environmental and infrastructure plans for new travel patterns.

The third lens to apply is the most politically awkward. The government cannot dismiss the question of Brexit and its impact on supply chain problems. While it is reasonable to draw attention to the global nature of the crisis, it is inconceivable that the rupture from the EU has had no effect. Ignoring this may lead the government to underutilising the tools it has at hand.

One of the odd benefits of the drawn-out Brexit process is the considerable experience gained in Whitehall towards the possible

> disruptions following the UK's departure from the EU. The databases and contacts built up when planning Operation Yellowhammer are still embedded in the civil service, and proved valuable during the onset of the Covid pandemic. The current crisis is different from a no-deal Brexit - there are no queues at the border, for example - but shares



features in common with it, such as a loss of access to certain EU workers and impaired logistics.

From my conversations with business representatives, little of this Brexit-handling expertise is being deployed in finding cooperative solutions that might ease the crisis. Instead, there is a growing blame game and a brewing argument about business use of immigrant labour, and the government's refusal to use the Shortage Occupation List to alleviate the problem of insufficient numbers of drivers in the logistics sector.

It has become increasingly common to hear that this refusal stems from a conscious policy to wean the economy off "cheap foreign labour", with the ultimate goal of tighter labour markets and higher wages.

If what we are seeing is a conscious shift in the UK's economic model, there needs to be a proper recognition that such shifts take time, can involve serious short-term disruptions - it takes months to train an HGV driver, over a year to train a butcher - and produce losers as well as winners.

Ultimately, if the disruptions persist, this will undermine support for the kind of economic shift the government claims to want.

Giles Wilkes is a senior fellow at the Institute for Government

DAVE PENMAN PEDALLING FALSEHOODS

OLIVER DOWDEN KNEW HIS
ATTACK ON CIVIL SERVANTS
WORKING FROM HOME WAS
UNTRUE, BUT HE WAS HAPPY TO
UNDERMINE THE MORALE OF
CIVIL SERVANTS FOR A FEW CHEAP
LAUGHS AT PARTY CONFERENCE

s a former minister for the Cabinet Office, Oliver Dowden was someone I had reason to work with. He was approachable, engaging and prepared to listen. He ignored what we said, but he at least looked like he was listening attentively.

In this role, he spoke at the FDA's centenary celebration, made a few self-deprecating jokes and recognised the contribution that the union has made to the civil service over the past century. If you weren't there, it was a good night. I'm not a civil servant and my interaction with ministers is limited, but you get a bit of an impression and he felt like a decent sort of minister, whether I agreed with him politically or not.

He may not be a household name, but he's been a minister in a number of departments, including latterly DCMS. He's seen first hand the contribution civil servants have made before, during and after the peak of the pandemic.

All the more surprising, therefore, that it was Dowden whose comments reached a new low for this government, as one senior civil servant said to me recently. At a fringe event at the Conservative Party conference, he chose to name-check Sarah Healey – his perma-

"He didn't care that such reckless remarks would have an impact beyond the individual and further erode the trust between ministers and civil servants"

nent secretary up till a few weeks ago – then deliberately misconstrue her words to pander to the baser elements of the audience.

He knew his comments about getting off your bike would be lapped up by the party faithful and media alike. He knew that his allusion to civil servants, including Healey, not working when they are at home was not true. He knew her comment about exercising was about being able to balance wellbeing more easily without the need for a commute while working from home.

Of course he knew, but he didn't care. He didn't care that such reckless remarks would have an impact beyond the individual and further erode the trust between ministers and civil servants. He didn't care that she would have no opportunity to answer back and so it was an easy hit for him, brave, brave politician that he is. He didn't care that the civil service has worked miracles during the pandemic, pioneering new working practices, and continues to do so. He didn't care that hybrid working is what the majority of civil servants want, recognising that there are elements of most jobs that are better done

in person. He didn't care that hybrid working is already saving the taxpayer millions with reduced office space requirements or that it's critical to delivering the government's agenda on Places for Growth, moving thousands of senior roles out of London. He didn't care that hybrid working has been embraced across the economy and many industries. Just this month, Lloyds an-

nounced that it expects 80% of its staff will have a hybrid workstyle, saving acres of office space.

He didn't care because it's not the point. The point is that attacking working from home by civil servants plays well with the party base. It fits with the anti-woke narrative that for some reason Dowden feels an obsession with demonstrating his credentials on. He didn't care about the damage he and the other brave, anonymous ministers have done to morale when they continually carp on to the press about home working.

If the civil service wasn't delivering the government's priorities, they'd have a point. But of course, they don't. It's an artificial battle of binary choices conjured up to demonstrate how tough they are, to an audience that knows no better and pundits who couldn't care less.

The absolute obsession that ministers have with this issue is absolutely nothing to do with whether home working is a more or less efficient way to work. It is simply a convenient distraction and another manufactured front in their culture war.

So, whatever comes next - more anonymous briefing, those cringing water cooler anecdotes or even a return to quotas, know this: this is not about serious government, it's about votes. As ministers have demonstrated time and time again, they will happily sacrifice individuals, the morale of the civil service and effective government on that altar. And if they can get a few cheap laughs from the party faithful on the way, all the better.

Dave Penman is the general secretary of the FDA union

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COLIN TALBOT REFORM? NO PLAN

THE GOVERNMENT HAS SET OUT SOME PLANS TO CHANGE HOW THE BRITISH STATE WORKS, BUT HAS NOT YET DEVELOPED A PLAN FOR DELIVERING IT. COLIN TALBOT LOOKS AT WHAT IS MISSING

or half a century or so, most incoming British governments have had some sort of policy, plan or idea about how they think the government itself should be changed. Sometimes these were deliberate and spelt out in policy documents and speeches in advance. Sometimes they were more emergent strategies that could be discerned by watching carefully what they did in office. More often they were a mixture of both. But you could usually see more or less what the strategy was.

Not so the Johnson government. It's hard to work out what, if any, strategy for government reform it has.

At first, it seemed the strategy was based on the various signals sent out by Dominic Cummings, Boris Johnson's eccentric chief adviser from July 2019 until December 2020. These seemed to centre around a series of longstanding (but unacknowledged) ideas dating back to the 1960s heyday of corporate planning and the technological revolution.

Indeed, before he was sacked, Cummings had started construction of a NASA-style Mission Control room in 70 Whitehall.

This was not the first – but was probably the most extreme – version of trying to create a centralised "brain" for government, centred on No.10 and the Cabinet Office. The Central Policy Review Staff (1971-1983), and the somewhat less ambitious Centre for Management and Policy Studies (1999-2005) are other examples.

One other key clue to where the Johnson government was heading on government reform came in a speech

given by Michael Gove in June 2020. In his somewhat rambling lecture on the privilege of public service, Gove – then the-chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in charge of the Cabinet Office, who has since been moved to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – does not mention Cummings's "control room" at all, even though it was being constructed as he spoke.

Gove's speech seemed to be heading off in a very different direction to Cummings's NASA-style command centre. There was much talk about better use of data, science and scientists in government – a common Cummings theme – and of distributing government around the UK. By that, he meant dispersing policymaking

hubs out of Whitehall and relocating them in other, far-flung, parts of the UK (including, controversially, in the devolved parts).

By June 2021, all mention of the control centre had disappeared. It would be interesting to know what happened to the actual centre – and how much it cost.

Instead, the prime minister and cabinet secretary published (very quietly) a grandly titled Declaration on Government Reform – agreed by both cabinet and the permanent secretaries.

Many of the themes in the declaration echo sentiments expressed in Gove's speech given a year earlier.

These include more promises to disperse government to the four corners of the UK, and it aims to bring in a more diverse range of skills and knowledge and to (re)create a "new physical campus" for civil service training. For those with short memories, we had one of those at Sunningdale (from 1970 to 2012) until it was closed down by the coalition government.

In the section on performance, it reinvents the system of depart-

mental plans and targets introduced by the first New Labour government. It also promises a new evaluation task force – although without any detail of what it is or will do. (There is already a prime minister's delivery unit – also resurrected from New Labour times.)

The final section on partnerships deals mainly with relations between senior civil servants and ministers, although there is a brief mention to the world outside the Whitehall village.

It is worth asking why all attempts to create a single directing mind at the

centre of government have always eventually failed.

I would suggest two reasons, which are evident in both Gove's public service speech and the declaration.

The first is simple: HM Treasury. There is no "centre" to British government – there are at least two, arguably three. The first and most powerful is obviously No.10 – the prime minister's office. The second, and probably least powerful, is the Cabinet Office, which is separate from No.10, although this is not always obvious. The third, and very powerful, actor is the Treasury.

There is no discussion of how to reform these crucial relationships – and while this "three body problem" remains at the heart of government, there can be no "directing mind", even of just Whitehall.

The second problem is that "government" in the UK is now – more than ever – much more than just the Whitehall village. Ninety percent of public employees are not civil servants. Large parts of "government" are run by other tiers of government (devolved and local) or by a variety of arm's-length bodies.

Maybe, in the post-Cummings and post-Gove era, a serious and clear strategy for reforming government will eventually emerge. But there certainly is not one yet. ■

"There are more promises to disperse government to the four corners of the UK, and it aims to bring in a more diverse range of skills"

Colin Talbot is emeritus professor of government at the University of Manchester and a research associate at the University of Cambridge

ANDREW HUDSON SPENDING REVIEW DOS AND DON'TS

FOLLOWING THE PM'S RESHUFFLE, THE TREASURY HAS A NEW CHIEF SECRETARY IN SIMON CLARKE. FORMER DG ANDREW HUDSON OFFERS HIM A HELPFUL BRIEFING AHEAD OF THE SPENDING REVIEW

ear chief secretary, Congratulations on your appointment. You arrive with about six weeks to go before the announcement of the Spending Review in the 27 October Budget. Because all the figures are now checked by the Office for Budget Responsibility, you actually have less time, though this approach makes for better government.

both ministers

battles become

find that the

the real goal"

The overall position is very tight, but you start from the advantage that the total for public spending has already been released by the chancellor.

You have just had your first party conference on the job. As hurdles go, this was a water jump for the Treasury: if you're not careful, any remaining room for manoeuvre disappears through fresh pledges. It was pressure at the 1987 conference that turned the phased

introduction of the poll tax into an overnight leap, with disastrous consequences.

The room for manoeuvre is very limited already. Of the big programmes, the NHS budget is already set. So is the defence budget, with more big increases baked in. The pressure to spend more on schools was very apparent in the summer. With welfare, you've warded off one risk on the triple lock, but are under

pressure on Universal Credit. The pre-pandemic pressures on courts, prisons, cladding and such haven't gone away, and there are plenty of new ones.

The good news is that you have a strong team in the Treasury to support you. They will be very sharp, and ready to work as hard as it takes over the coming weeks. And contrary to popular opinion, certainly in my day, they got out and about to build up knowledge of the services they work on.

The review can easily take on a life of its own, and both ministers and officials can find that the battles become so absorbing that they lose sight of the real goal of delivering the best public services that the country can afford. So as an ex-insider who's now more concerned with the impact on services for homelessness, health and housing, here's what I think is important.

• Do follow through on the commitment in last year's review to focus hard on outcomes, and on the evidence about how these can be delivered.

- Do get the money out there: the three-year plans need to be passed down to delivery bodies as soon as possible.
- Do leave some latitude for local initiatives: the things that give the most bang for buck on youth work or community development can't be planned centrally.
- Don't acquiesce to something nobody thinks can be delivered: it will cost more in the end and cause a load of grief.
- Don't have too many small pots of money for local organisations to bid for: they take up disproportionate time and effort on both sides. Decide what you can afford, set out the desired outcomes, and trust local people to deliver.
- Don't make assumptions about attitudes of colleagues - spending reviews can turn political friends into adversaries, and the ministers who are most hawkish about spending in the abstract often have a blind spot where their own department is concerned.

Finally, do follow through on the commitment to bet-



ter evaluation. The next review will come round sooner than anyone thinks and knowing what the spending has achieved will make for even better decisions next time.

Good luck! Andrew

Andrew Hudson is a former director general of public services at the Treasury. He now chairs the Centre for Homelessness Impact

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ANDY COWPER LEARNING THE LESSONS FROM COVID-19



AT A TIME OF TAXING POLITICS

- AND POLITICISING TAXES A GOVERNMENT REVIEW OF
NHS MANAGEMENT MUSTN'T
GET IN THE WAY OF LEARNING
FROM THE PANDEMIC

he political party conference season is over for another year. As the Westminster government returns to business as unusual with the loping run-up to the Spending Review, we have seen some of the political battleground mapped.

Civil servants can start planning how to negotiate the various minefields ahead.

Let's start with what we learned from the Conservatives: there is still no meaningful definition of the government's signature policy of "levelling up", despite the attempts of Michael Gove and Neil O'Brien.

At one level, leaving the meaning of 'levelling up' vague allows the government to claim that almost anything it does is levelling up (so raising or cutting taxes could both be branded as "levelling up"). On the down side, if you don't have any actual goals or targets, then proving you've delivered on it becomes harder. Post-hoc rationalisation will only get you so far, as we are starting to see in so many sectors of the economy with 'taking back control' through Brexit.

And the economy? Brand-conscious chancellor Rishi Sunak gave a delightfully incoherent speech to the party faithful, claiming: "I believe that mindless ideology is dangerous. I'm a pragmatist. I care about what works, not about the purity of any dogma.

"I believe in fiscal responsibility. Just borrowing more money and stacking up bills for future generations to pay, is not just economically irresponsible. It's immoral. Because it's not the state's money. It's your money."

Ahem. His second set of points there quite literally *is* ideology. It *is* dogma. It's just traditional economically dry Tory ideology and dogma that Sunak likes, and thinks is sellable.

Tax and social care

It's going to be an interesting Spending Review for sure, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies pointed out in their 'Green Budget'. Well-informed sources indicate that the prime minister has agreed with the chancellor to rein in his spending tendencies for now, with a view to being able to cut taxes before the next election.

This plan may prove over-optimistic. As IFS director Paul

Johnson pointed out, it's likely that the new health and social care levy will be swallowed whole by the need to clear the NHS backlog. So "to fix the crisis in social care once and for all", as the PM promised, will require more or higher taxes.

Towards delivery

Delivery of social care is evidently focusing minds, as a story briefed to *The Guardian* about 'radical plans to merge social care and the NHS' showed. It suggests that a new white paper will propose the creation of "a new national care service under which health and social care would be delivered by the same organisation".

The article inevitably fails to propose the questions to which 'a unified delivery organisation' is the answer. Richard Humphries (formerly of the Kings Fund; one of a few people who understand social care and its interaction with the NHS very well) pointed out that David Cameron "ordered" the integration of health and social care back in 2012, and that went nowhere. So Richard's probably right to be philosophically phlegmatic about this.

Reviewing NHS management (again)

On the eve of health and social care secretary Sajid Javid's speech to party conference, an obligatory briefing to *The Telegraph* revealed that "General Sir Gordon Messenger, a former vice chief of defence staff, will be charged with driving up the quality of management and ensuring "every penny" of taxpayers' money is "well spent"."

The Telegraph story goes on to reveal that "a senior government source added that the review had been launched to ensure that the health service did not squander the major cash injection announced by Mr Johnson last month to overhaul social care and clear NHS backlogs. The government is determined that every pound of investment is well spent so that everyone

gets the care that they deserve".

So what's the Messenger Review about, then? Basic politics: it's anticipatory blame-shifting. This government knows enough to realise that the NHS and social care are about to walk into a very difficult winter indeed. Even if the weather isn't too bad.

This review of NHS and social care management is the classic deflection tactic of getting your excuses in first about the coming crises. It's a political prophylactic. Externally-led reviews (the bigger, the better) are the politician's deflector shield of choice when it's hugely apparent

that things are about to get seriously bad. Event X happens: "Our wide-ranging review will be dealing with the causes of Event X."

reviews are the politician's deflector shield of choice when

"Externally-led

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Learning from Covid-19

The joint report of the Commons select committees on health and social care and science and technology on 'Coronavirus: lessons learned to date' is a bracing read.

It is even-handed, giving credit where it is due, to the vaccines procurement and initial roll-out and the develop-



ment of treatments such as Dexamethasone. But it is damning on various aspects of the response, concluding that:

The delays in establishing an adequate test, trace and isolate system hampered efforts to understand and contain the outbreak, and it failed in its stated purpose to avoid lockdowns;

- The initial decision to delay a comprehensive lockdown reflected a fatalism about the spread of Covid-19 that should have been robustly challenged at the time;
- Social care was not given sufficient priority in the early stages of the pandemic;
- The experience of the Covid-19 pandemic underlines the need for an urgent and long-term strategy to tackle health inequalities; and
- The UK's preparedness for a pandemic had been widely acclaimed in advance, but performed less well than many other countries in practice.

The report is illuminating on NHS capacity issues, noting that then-NHS England chief executive Sir Simon Stevens praised the flexibility of NHS staff, saying "people, under the most difficult circumstances, have all pitched in with incredible esprit de corps while recognising, frankly, that people across the health service are tired, stressed and frustrated".

Likewise, it is damning about the performance of Test And Trace: "The failure of the test and trace system to rise to meet even the most predictable of demands in Autumn 2020, especially given many weeks to prepare, suggests that lessons that were learnable during the pandemic were not applied. An urgent priority for the government must be to satisfy it-

self that there is now a dependable organisation for Covid testing that can both anticipate and meet future demands.

The report notes that in autumn 2020 Test and Trace requested a total of £37bn in operational resources for the year ahead. For "such an unprecedented request," the report says, "a big justification was mounted, most notably that investing at that level would avoid the need for future lockdowns. New outbreaks would in future be rapidly detected and eliminated, so allowing most of the country to resume much of normal life".

Yet we were back in a third lockdown by early January 2021. Not for nothing do the committees recommend that "those responsible for future test and trace programmes should establish a culture and processes to learn rapidly from errors and to act to prevent them being repeated".

The joint report also notes that "the NHS responded quickly and strongly to the demands of the pandemic, but compared to other health systems it 'runs hot'— with little spare capacity built in to cope with sudden and unexpected surges of demand such as in a pandemic".

It recommends that an "explicit, and monitored, surge capacity [should become] part of the long term organisation and funding of the NHS... comprehensive analysis should be carried out to assess the safety of running the NHS with the limited latent capacity that it currently has, particularly in intensive care units, critical care units and high dependency units".

That sounds expensive. Will it happen? We shall see. ■

Andy Cowper is the editor of Health Policy Insight

First Principles

As he steps down as first civil service commissioner, **Ian Watmore** shares what made him proudest – and what still causes him regret – during five tumultuous years

t the end of the second world war, the civil service introduced a new way of selecting the brightest and best to join its ranks. Known colloquially as the House Party, the weekend-long selection process was based on methods the army had begun to use in recruiting officers and was intended to create a fair playing field for men and women who had begun military service straight after university and who might not perform as well in a process based only on entrance exams.

The Civil Service Selection Board – as it was formally known – was developed by first civil service commissioner Sir Percival Waterfield. He had begun working on a new method to assess possible entrants in 1941, keen to ensure that the service would be ready to meet the challenges that would face it when war ended and it resumed permanent recruitment (which had been stopped during the war and replaced with centrally directed temporary recruitment).

Though it attracted a great deal of criticism, the CSSB remained in place for many decades and is a direct predecessor of the Civil Service Assessment process which still forms part of Fast Stream recruitment. In developing it, Waterfield had carried out the central task of the Civil Service Commission – ensuring that the long-held Northcote-Trevelyan principles of fair, open and meritocratic recruitment are upheld – while also helping the service to adapt and modernise.

Six decades later, another first civil service commissioner was managing the same balancing act as the civil service geared up to deliver another complex policy change: Brexit.

Ian Watmore was appointed first civil service commissioner in late 2016, after a career spanning the private and public sectors, including 20 years as a management consultant, and two stints as a permanent secretary – first in the business department and then the Cabinet Office.

When he joined the commission, parliamentary and political fights over Brexit had not yet got into the bitter stalemate of subsequent years, but already Brexiters were raising concerns about establishment attempts to thwart the referendum result. At the same time, departments needed to rapidly bring in new skills and



capabilities as they geared up for EU exit.

"It would have been very easy for [the Civil Service Commission] to be blamed as a blocker to enabling Brexit. There was a lot of deep suspicion that the civil service was a remainer organisation in disguise," Watmore says. "So, we went out on the front foot. We had a lot of difficult conversations with ourselves about how to do this because what we wanted to do was to enable the government outcome without obliterating the Trevelyan rules."

The commission did this by adapting existing exceptions which allow departments to recruit outside the normal rules in certain circumstances, allowing departments to fill senior roles in bulk for up to three years by exception without specific commission approval (though they did need to fill out a business case). It also

re-introduced an exception for specialist skills as these became more in demand. The organisation also took on more commissioners as it anticipated increased recruitment into the service.

In 2020, the new systems were then put to use in another context. "The way we went about that meant that when Covid came along and said to Brexit, 'Hold my beer', the principles had already been established and we were able to scale them up," Watmore says.

"I don't think in modern times, a previous commission has had to face anything like either [Brexit or Covid]. You have to go right back into history, into war times."

His office, he said, was home to "some wonderful books" about the history of the commission – and commissioners such as Waterfield – which did

"When Covid came along and said to Brexit, 'Hold my beer', the principles had already been established and we were able to scale them up"

provide some insights in these discussions, but the scale of the pandemic dwarfed even the challenge of Brexit.

"Brexit was more about just moving the right policy people around and then getting some recruiting in specialist skills," says Watmore. "Covid was a complete unknown and it was like a tsunami happening to you."

Like his predecessors, Wat-

more had an eye on preserving the Northcote-Trevelyan principals.

Reflecting on the changes, Watmore says: "What we tried to do, and only time will tell if we succeeded, is enable resources to be brought in at the right time in the right place, but at the same time not let fair and meritocratic recruitment go by the board. There's plenty of time after the event to get those things sorted out, so what we mustn't do is forget about those [principles]. It's a very live issue for us all."

Supporting the government to deliver Brexit was one of four priorities Watmore set when he took up his role at the commission. The other three were improving key skills within government, increasing diversity, and using government recruitment to support social mobility.

Looking back now at the end of his tenure in the role, Watmore gives himself a mixed review. On diversity, he is pleased with progress made around gender. Though challenges remain, such as pay gaps, "we are edging closer towards a 50-50 type situation in almost all levels of service so it's becoming normal, as opposed to an act of requiring a positive diversity programme," he says. When he joined the commission there were 10 female permanent secretaries. There are now 19, out of around 40 people at that grade in the civil service.

"But when you look at ethnicity,"

Watmore continues, "the challenge is much more stark. There have only ever been, in my knowledge, four non-white permanent secretaries. The last one was Sharon White, who left before I started.

"That can't carry on. It is a real problem because it starts to create a situation where very talented people don't see [the civil service] as an organisation for them if they can't see people like them at the top. That would have been true, probably, for women in the 90s in the civil service. So it's a long journey [to change that]."

While there has been progress at lower grades, he says, it is still hard to identify a pipeline of talent which will see a good number of permanent secretaries from ethnic minorities in the near future. "I think until we get to that point, it will be a defeating position," Watmore says. "It's really important that top quality leaders are found to run government departments who are non-white.

"What mustn't happen," he adds, "is that people be put in those jobs for reasons of ethnicity – they are really tough jobs. But if we can find those top quality people and attract them to the roles then. we can create a pipeline of aspiration."

This, he says, is the part of his role

where he feels he has failed - not through lack of trying. "We've been pushing at it for five years, but haven't seen progress," he says.

The work of which he is proudest is that which provides employment for disadvantaged individuals, through the Going Forward into Employment Scheme (see box). As with the Brexit discussions, this programme also demonstrates how Watmore and his fellow commissioners see themselves as a "modern regulator" – one which enables and supports change rather than simply enforcing rules.

"The commission could be seen by some as 'the computer that says no'," Watmore says. "But we took a view right at the beginning of my time here that while there would be times when we need to say 'no' – and that role is important – more often, nine times out of 10, we wanted to be the organisation that said 'yes, and this is how you can achieve your outcomes'.

"[Going Forward into Employment] is possibly the best example of this," he continues. "It would have been dead easy for somebody to say 'Recruiting ex-offenders? Commission says: 'No, move on'. Whereas we took the baton the other way round. Commission says: 'Yes, and by the way this is a really good thing and here's how to do it'. By doing that, we've achieved really positive change."

On skills, Watmore has recently stressed the importance of tying the work to recruit in-demand skills to the drive to move civil servants out of London

"If we're only fishing in the pool for London-based people, you're up against everybody in the financial services sector or the technology companies with all their big trappings of pay and so on," he says. "If you can

get real meaningful civil service jobs in those areas [outside London] you can you can draw exceptional people in, and you're not competing with Goldman Sachs or whatever it is in London."

Another potential benefit to creating meaningful jobs across the country could be to improve movement across the public sector. In a hearing in 2021, Watmore told the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee that the civil service



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used to be good at attracting talented people from local government and the health service but this had become "less of a well-trodden path" in recent years as pay in central government declined against other parts of the public sector.

He tells *CSW* that changing this trend will be "primarily for departments" but "the commission can influence things if it sets a priority" and it could well be something for his successor to think think about. "As the Treasury locates [in] Darlington they may well find that some of the best people to draw on are from local government, and healthcare workers in that part of north Yorkshire and Durham and so on," Watmore says.

s well as working through seismic policy changes and public health challenges, Watmore has also had the unusual experience of working with three cabinet secretaries during his tenure as first civil service commissioner. The first, Lord Heywood, was diagnosed with cancer in summer 2017. A year later, Heywood told Watmore that it was time to start thinking about how they would recruit his successor.

Watmore was surprised to find that there was no guidance on how cabinet secretaries should be recruited, beyond one sentence in the cabinet manual which says the prime minister will appoint a cab sec "on advice from the outgoing cabinet secretary and the first civil service commissioner". So Watmore created a "framework", as he puts it, "in which that advice can be given in a way that means the prime minister will get the best choice, not just the best individual, but the individual that will have the most wind in their sails to do the job".

"As the Treasury locates [in] Darlington they may well find that some of the best people to draw on are from local government, and healthcare workers"

Speaking to PACAC, Watmore said that in 2018 he sent the advice to then-prime minister Theresa May, who replied: "I really hope I never have to use this, for obvious reasons, but if I do, thank you." Within months, Heywood's health

TAKE A CHANCE ON ME

The Going Forward into Employment programme, run by the Cabinet Office and CSC, allows departments to flex the usual principles of civil service recruitment and appoint people whose "circumstances and previous life chances make it difficult for them to compete for appointments on merit on the basis of fair and open competition, without further work experience and/or training opportunities".

Individuals can be employed on contracts lasting up to two years, at which point they might move full time into the civil service – going through normal recruitment channels – or use the skills they have developed to move into other jobs. Broadly, the GfiE work focuses on three main groups: exoffenders, including those who have left prison within the last two years; veterans; and care leavers. But the principle of helping disadvantaged individuals to flourish while meeting skills gaps in departments can be used for a wide range of groups.

GfIE's senior responsible owner, Andrew Ashworth, tells *CSW* that a large part of his team's work is educating – rather than persuading – departments to work out which skills gaps the scheme could help them fill. Recently, for example, the team has been discussing how the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency could recruit veterans or prison leavers with mechanical experience.

In July the government pledged – as part of its Beating Crime plan – to recruit 1,000 prison leavers into civil service roles by the end of 2023. The GfIE team is working to agree another commitment around recruiting veterans with the Office of Veterans' Affairs. But as the schemes grow, Ashworth says, his team also wants to ensure the programme is still supporting each participant.

"From day one when a person comes in, we stay in touch with that individual right up to the last day when they become a permanent member of staff, or choose a different route," he says. "We make sure we provide support and touch points for them because, as much as it's about getting in through the exception route, for me it's more important that we help them get on, build a career and make the right choices."

Of the 100 people recruited so far through the exception, around 20 have gone on to permanent employment in the civil service.

Not everyone has reported what they did after taking part in a scheme, Ashworth says, but he knows that some of those who joined in early 2018 have gone on to earn multiple civil service promotions and built a new life outside work. He adds: "There have also been some who joined us and left after around 18 months, taking up better external jobs following the experiences they have gained with us – an equally great outcome."

had deteriorated so far that he had to step down. May judged – and on consultation Watmore agreed – that she "really needed to make an appointment then and there to cover the crisis that was around," Watmore told the MPs.

Her choice was Sir Mark Sedwill, whom Watmore told MPs "would probably describe himself as a reluctant cabinet secretary but a man of great duty". When Sedwill stepped down in 2020, Watmore "dusted off my dormant bit of paper, gave the same advice to [Boris Johnson] and he accepted it".

The process Watmore had set out included creating a written job description with clear priorities and inviting serving and former permanent secretaries to apply for the job. Watmore advised inviting only these individuals to apply, he told PACAC, because the role of "cabinet secretary is such a unique job. If you had not been exposed to something very close to it, you would have no idea how it worked". Watmore and Sedwill then assessed each applicant for the job and gave their views to Johnson, who interviewed each of

them and made his choice - Simon Case.

This choice was "probably not expected by most people going in," says Watmore. "But everything we did during that process convinced me [Case would] make a great cabinet secretary, and everything else since validates that judgment, so therefore I think the process will be seen to have produced a good outcome." This in turn means the process is "more likely to be used again, not from the civil service point of view but from a prime ministerial point of view".

Does Watmore ever feel the hand of history on him as he sets about this kind of precedent-setting work, which feeds into the unwritten British constitution much as the cabinet manual did on its publication in 2011?

"When you're doing the job you do what you need to do to get stuff done," he says. "But, whether I've been in business or in government, I've always thought it's good if you can do something that's good for the here and now, but if it can also create a positive precedent for the future then that's better."

Cat Little

The Treasury has a long history, and its reputation as Whitehall's most intimidating department casts a long shadow. But two DGs tell **Richard Johnstone** that perception doesn't match reality

he Darlington sunshine is streaming into the Zoom screen when *CSW* joins a call with Beth Russell, the Treasury's director general of tax and welfare.

"It's been sunny every day pretty much

since I've been here," says the official who is leading the department's work in setting up an economic campus in the town, as part of the government's plan to move civil service jobs out of London. "I'm not sure that's going to continue, but it's given me a very good first impression."

Indeed, the sun is so bright that what we are seeing is a reflection, as the shine would have been too much if she had sat in front of the windows directly, Russell says – "you wouldn't see me because it was so bright."

It is, though, a fitting backdrop to examine how the Treasury is changing. The department is always in the spotlight given its crucial role in Whitehall, and it is now helping drive the government's levelling up agenda, as well as working to demonstrate that the Treasury is no longer a cold-hearted number-crunching monolith – if it ever was.

Russell is speaking alongside Cat Little, the Treasury's director general for public spending, and they offer different perspectives on changes in the department. Little joined the finance ministry in early 2020, having been finance DG in the Ministry of Defence. Russell, on the other hand, has worked in the Treasury since 2000 in a range of policy roles across tax, welfare and public spending, and has been in her current role since 2017.

She joined the department "because quite a lot of people said the Treasury is a great place to work, and you would enjoy it". But she was also aware of a broader perception that "it's an institution with a lot of history that is full of very clever people and a little bit scary".

"I think there's quite a perception from outside that Treasury is perhaps not a very friendly place to work, not necessarily a very supportive place to work, perhaps a competitive place to work," Russell says, but adds: "I think that is just not the case at all.

"I've lost count of the number of people who have come into the Treasury from other departments, or from outside government, who have commented about how the reality is very different to the perception as a place to work."

Each DG came to the department



with their own perceptions, too. Russell acknowledges that she didn't appreciate early in her career the full range of things that the Treasury was involved in across government, and the extent to which it needs different skills.

"I came from a background of working on social policy. I'm not an economist [and] I thought a lot of the jobs were accountancy or economist roles. I actually didn't realise how many of our jobs are in policy, or are project managers or business support."

Little's view of the department was shaped by her time in the MoD. "A lot of my perceptions were based on working with the Treasury on tough Spending Review negotiations," she says. "I

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LIFE IN THE TREASURY < FEATURE

suspect, like many people in Whitehall, perceptions are based on those limited interactions rather than the full scope of what the Treasury does. I certainly felt that the Treasury was humble, kind, hardworking, intellectually curious and tough to negotiate with. And I'm pleased to say that is still the case."

However, she also acknowledges that many departments think that the Treasury – which, despite its historic role, has an age demographic younger than most of Whitehall – can be full of "relatively inexperienced people who may not have had all the battle scars in the frontline departments dealing with very big complex policy issues".

"Quite junior people [in the Treasury] do get huge amounts of responsibility," she says. "There's obviously a lot of balancing that we do to manage that feedback. But from a development perspective it's great, and the Treasury as an institution is very keen to maximise our opportunities to give people as much exposure to big policy issues."

These negative perceptions are ones that Treasury is working hard to correct. The department holds what Little calls "360 events", where it invites partners across Whitehall and beyond to share their view of the august institution. Another recent event brought together four frontline public sector workers – a prison officer, a teacher, a social worker and a police officer – to discuss how they would make spending decisions.

Another widely-held view is that the Treasury is, in Russell's words, "very white, posh and male". She says that although the department does need to do more on diversity, this picture is already out of date.

"I've definitely seen change in the organisation over the last 20 years," she says. "We're now 50-50 in terms of gender, including in the senior civil service. And while we've got a long way to go in other areas, like ethnic diversity, and particularly socio-economic diversity, it is something where the perception doesn't quite meet the reality."

The Treasury's culture, she says, "definitely feels very different to me from 20 years ago", though she notes that it's still underpinned by an "enduring set of objectives" for well-managed and good value public spending.

She highlights the change to an open-plan office around the turn of the century as a marker of the culture change.

"Our move to open plan had a fundamental impact, I think, on our in-

ternal openness and team working.

"When I first arrived, I had my own office, even as quite a junior person in the department, which I think had a real negative influence on the culture."

Other milestones include a greater focus on leadership and management across the department. "There weren't conversations about wellbeing, about mental health, about flexible working, and about diversity in the way that there is now. That has definitely been a massive shift over the period."

Little, with her more recent experience of joining, can testify to these changes.

"I certainly felt that the Treasury was humble, kind, hardworking, intellectually curious and tough to negotiate with. And I'm pleased to say that is still the case" Cat Little



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"The organisation is incredibly able to talk about how it feels," she says. "If I compare and contrast to lots of organisations I've worked in, feelings are not often the first subject that comes up.

"I think that's real credit to a lot of our people. In particular during Covid, team meetings would start with asking, 'How are you all feeling?' and people were really able to respond to that. We've moved from very polite thumbs up in Microsoft Teams to now there's a lot of love hearts."

he most high-profile example of how the department is changing is simply Russell's location. The development of the new Darlington office is a physical manifestation that it is no longer what she calls "probably the most Londoncentric of government departments".

"[We] totally recognise that [London-

centricity] is a problem in terms of us listening, understanding, feeling close to people right across the country, and that's why the Darlington office is going to be a big part of the change."

The location shift is leading to other changes too. The Treasury is tweaking how it recruits to make sure it can reach out to those around the new campus, by thinking about the language that it uses and the places that it advertises to make the most of its new location.

"This is quite a new thing for the Treasury to be recruiting outside London," Russell says. For example, this means creating an accessible set of explanations about what it's like to work there that eschew words like 'policy' which might be easily understood by those looking to work in Whitehall,

but could be a barrier elsewhere.

The Treasury held a jobs fair in early October in Darlington with the other departments that will share the northern economic campus – the Department for International Trade, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the Office for National Statistics, and the Department for Education.

This will also demonstrate one of the key benefits of the Darlington base, Russell says – that there is more than one department for those who join to build a career.

"It's really important that we are going to be able to say to people that you can have a whole civil service career in Darlington, or in the northeast, if you want. There's going to be 750 of us here in the medium term, right up to and including director general level. So between all the departments, you can have a really interesting, varied civil service career if you want to stay here out of London. I think that's really important."

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LIFE IN THE TREASURY < FEATURE

The jobs fair also included a mock spending review exercise "so people can think about what it's like to work in a spending team in the Treasury", says Russell. Treasury minister Lord Agnew took part in the session, which – in a sign of how important the initiative is – took place just 20 days before the announcement of the real Spending Review by chancellor Rishi Sunak.

Reflecting on the mood of the department after the pressures of the last 18 months, Little says there is a real excitement about working on the three-year review.

"This is the first multi-year spending review that we have run since 2015, and it comes at a time where we're dealing with some of the biggest issues that the country has faced. People are genuinely excited about getting stuck into [questions like]: What do we really mean by levelling up? How are we going to make sure that we get the right balance of investment in resilience with the public sector recovery from Covid?"

Indeed, according to Little, the pandemic response has "shifted the dial" in perspectives of the Treasury.

"I joined the Treasury just as we were about to go into lockdown. The conversations [with departments] have probably gone from [discussing] a tough Spending Review settlement in SR2019 to: 'There's a clearly a crisis on the frontline, how do we help?'

"I think that's built a lot of collaboration and common endeavour across Whitehall. I'd like to think that's helped to shape a more holistic view of how the Treasury works."

Ahead of the Spending Review, both Little and Russell worked closely on the landmark health and social care package that provided a £36bn investment in services and set out a plan to cap an individual's lifetime care costs at £86,000.

Little hopes to embed this kind of cross-government working with enhanced the joint bidding processes in the upcoming review.

"The big themes – net zero, levelling up, public service recovery, building back better, global Britain – are all cross-cutting issues and you have to have departments working in a different way with us to coordinate that," she says.

This, insist both Russell and Little.

"It's really important that we are going to be able to say to people that you can have a whole civil service career in Darlington, or in the northeast"

Beth Russell

demonstrates the type of department the Treasury has become – open, collaborative and problem solving. And all these skills

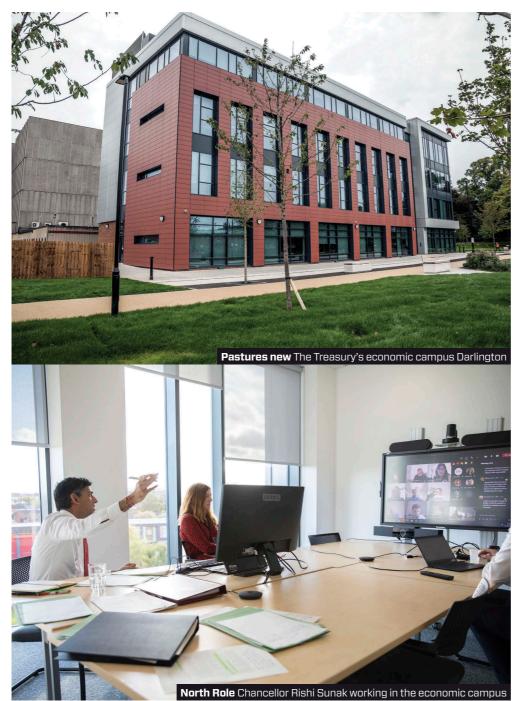
"I had the privilege of being involved in designing and delivering the furlough scheme, and that's something that has genuinely impacted positively on millions of people's lives and businesses," says Russell

have been demonstrated in recent times.

"We knew a lot was riding on it, but there was great teamwork with HM Revenue and Customs, and really innovative and creative thinking in a situation that we'd never come across before, and just a really great team spirit.

"It's something where you immediately saw the impact in the real world, and it's just been immensely rewarding to have been involved in that."

For Little, this crystallises the role of the Treasury. "To try and find solutions is what gets us out of bed in the morning," she says. "If you're someone who really wants to improve outcomes for citizens, and get involved in some of the biggest changes to do that, then the Treasury is a fantastic place to be."



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Delivering change across the public sector

It's a bit of cliché, but it's still true that most change efforts fail

ood intent, embodied in a new strategy or in the design of a new operating model, will take you only so far. To realise the full benefit, mindsets and behaviours—how people think and act every day—need to change. Buying gym membership doesn't make you fit; the habit of exercise does. In the corporate world only 12% of change initiatives achieve what they set out to accomplish, and 20% fail by a wide margin, capturing <50% of the targeted value. Results in the public sector are no better - an IfG report found 35% of GMPPs are "unfeasible" or "in doubt".1

The disturbing implication: over time, too many organisations unwittingly wind up accepting mediocre performance –

at best. As Whitehall gears up for the next wave of change, getting better at making change happen is critical.

Change is hard, particularly in Government where, in spite of recent improvements, many Senior Civil Servants have limited operational or delivery experience. Even in the private sector leaders often have blind spots that can fatally undermine a programme. The most common? The lack of a consistent, aligned vision across the organisation of what is trying to be achieved; line leadership not prioritising change or resisting cross-cutting change "not invented here"; conflicting initiatives; and different parts of the organisation being asked to make too many changes with insufficient attention given to

specific leadership and frontline behaviours needed to make change stick.

In successful programmes, leaders anticipate and overcome these blind spots. When we talk to senior leaders about how to drive successful change we ask three simple questions: the "what, who and how."

The What

Clear strategy is critical, but change most often fails in the implementation. It is the behavioural dimension that organisations tend to neglect. To motivate large-scale organisational change, leaders should ask, "What is our beach?" and "What will move our needle?"

Our beach? When planning a vacation, you get excited by imagining yourself on the beach, not by reading an itinerary. Yet when embarking on a programme, leaders often take more care in developing and communicating the details of the journey than a compelling vision of the destination. Effective change requires a picture of what we're trying to achieve, leaders who can inspire people, and providing those involved in the change with the internal compass to align their subsequent behaviours, decisions and actions.

But the beach alone isn't enough to change behaviours. Successful programmes remember that organisa-

Change is hard

A survey of 426 large organisations executing major change found...

achieved desired results from change efforts

12%

Most change efforts produce mediocre results

tions don't change, people do. Only very few behaviours produce the lion's share of results. These behaviours must be concrete and cover "moments of truth" relevant to the front line: how an agent handles a customer call, or how a supervisor deals with a politically sensitive incident. Generic statements like "We will be more customer centric" are unactionable. Leaders must work out what exactly frontline employees and management need to do differently in those moments, and how to reinforce these behaviours. Research shows overwhelmingly that reinforcement in the moment is critical for sustaining new behaviours. At HMRC, we helped technology leaders align on five values and behaviours critical to changing the ethos of the organisation. These were communicated in town halls and cascaded by leaders at all levels, then reinforced in moments of truth. A system of measures and feedback was put in place to track and celebrate progress.

The Who

Who makes change happen? Whilst project teams are essential, they can often become disconnected from the front line that makes the actual change. To remedy this, it's essential to identify who on the front line is most affected by the change, and how the organisation can support them. This raises two questions: "Who is our spine?" and "Who is our coach?"

Responsibility for delivering results rests with thousands of line employees and their supervisors, it can be done purely by a programme office, however large. So it's critical to identify the people who will need to work differently. And who has the greatest influence on them? Most commonly their direct supervisor. Change efforts depend on a strong "sponsorship spine": real leaders who can put the change efforts in the context of their teams' day-to-day job. This can make change happen in even the toughest environments. Gold Fields, a South African miner, had to stabilise declining production as its mines neared the end of their lives by instilling higher-quality ways of working. They turned to the sponsorship spine, establishing a monthly rhythm of training that cascaded through the mine hierarchy to inspire 30,000 employees working 3km underground. This matched the pace of change with each mine's capacity to adopt new ideas, and the ideas took hold because they were

promoted by experienced mine operatives who had credibility with their teams.

But even great line leaders may struggle to manage change. This underscores the need for effective coaching. An enhanced programme office—what we call a Results Delivery® office (RDO) can play this role. The RDO serves as the custodian of the overall programme, ensuring it realizes the desired outcomes. It can assess risk, monitor progress against goals and put in place the necessary interventions to ensure success. The RDO should also provide coaching to the spine. Where necessary this can take the form of "tough love" measures, including giving feedback and advice to line leaders or recommending changes to the team where truly necessary.

The How

The pace and scale of a change programme cannot exceed colleagues' capacity to handle it along with their other responsibilities. So ask "How much more can our sponge absorb?"

An organisation's capacity to manage change can easily be overwhelmed. What might seem from the top to be a logical sequence of initiatives can

feel very different to someone on the front line being asked to engage with several initiatives at once while also carrying out business as usual. Like a sponge soaking up water, individuals can absorb only so much; adding new initiatives can exhaust or demoralize employees. The way to prevent this is to identify the people most affected by a change and chronicle what the company has asked them to do outside of their normal work. By mapping these activities, you can anticipate when people will get stretched too thin and then actively stop or delay lower-priority initiatives.

Making change happen

Leaders steeped in change know that basic PMOs don't work. Too often they spend their time "colouring in" – asking programmes about their status is and consolidating the answers. Results Delivery Offices, by contrast, truly understand progress, quizzing and coaching PMs/PDs, re-evaluating whether programmes are on track to deliver objectives, and supporting or intervening when required. An RDO maintains a "red is good" posture, acknowledging individual risks that crop up so that they can be resolved early.

Summary

The "WHAT" of change

"Table stakes" of change

- Analytic case for change
- Right strategy
- Defined operating model changes

The "WHO" of change

- Right people deployed in the right roles
- "Referees" who track and monitor progress

The "HOW" of change

- Top-down programme design aligned with strategy
- Dependencies understood and interlocked
- Effective tracking & programme management

"Beating the odds" to drive results

- "The Beach"
 Leaders aligned with a compelling picture of the future state
- "Moving The Needle"
 Clarity on 2-3 behaviours to change to drive culture and results
- "The Spine"
 Line leaders with the capacity, will and skill to own and drive change
- "The Coach"
 Support for line leaders to drive the change and maintain a healthy spine
- "The Sponge"
 Pace of change matched to capacity of people most impacted.
- "Red is Good"
 Embedded mindset of anticipating, calling out and rapidly addressing blockers and risks



Subash Viroomal is a partner based in Bain & Company's London Office. He is a leader in the firm's Public Sector & Government practice and has extensive experience making change happen across Whitehall.

To find out more about how Bain & Company can support you, visit **www.bain.com/change-power**

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AN OPEN DOOR TO DDAT AND A SURFEIT OF SIGN-INS

At techŪK's recent annual public sector tech conference, government's digital leaders discussed their plans for the months ahead and the challenges they currently face.

Sam Trendall listened in



The leaders of the newly diverged tech agencies at the centre of government – the longstanding Government Digital Service and the recently launched Central Digital and Data Office – both spoke about their plans for the coming months and years. They joined a selection of other speakers from across central and local government, as well as the commercial sector.

convened a number of people whose job

it will be to ensure the country leaps in

the right direction, and lands safely.

Here are five things we learned from the day's presentations and discussions.

There are 44 different ways to sign in to government services

In his opening keynote – deputising at short notice for the recently reshuffled minister Julia Lopez – GDS chief executive Tom Read discussed progress on the One Login project. Which, as the name suggests, is designed to deliver a single, unifying login process through which citizens can access all services throughout government.

Due to be introduced next year, it will, most visibly, replace and supersede the little-loved Verify platform. But, according to Read, the new system will supplant a further 100 separate account sign-up processes currently in use across departments and services, encompassing 44 different means of signing in.

"Our mission in GDS is to work in really close partnership with all the other bits of government to build out a simple, joined-up experience of government for everyone," he said. "Other nations around

"This is a conversation about data - but it is also about intimacy and trust" *Chris Naylor*

the world are already doing this; the private sector has proved similar problems can be solved fairly easily; we do not have to scratch build everything."

Policy and delivery professionals are being encouraged to get into digital

Joanna Davinson, executive director of the Cabinet Office-based Central Digital and Data Office, said that she would like to see more civil servants able to move from policy and delivery-focused positions into the digital, data and technology profession – for which she serves as cross-government lead.

The 17,000-strong DDaT profession covers a wide range of jobs, including many that are not reserved solely for those



with high-end technical skills, she said.

"I would like to see some movement between digital, policy, and operational delivery roles," Davinson added. "We have been working with HR on schemes where we can bring people in to DDaT; not all DDaT roles require an engineering degree."

Data literacy should be sine qua non for perm secs

Conference attendees heard that the Office for National Statistics has created a "data masterclass for permanent secretaries", in which about 20 leaders have so far taken part - including Alison Pritchard, deputy national statistician and director general for data capability.

"It is about mainstreaming data in such a way that it can be used to support decision-making," she said. "But we also need to grow our data science and engineering [profession], so that there is a route for them to become perm secs."

The ONS training has already had an impact on Whitehall's existing array of departmental leaders, Pritchard added: "Instead of sitting round the table in meetings speaking Latin, we are now seeing perm secs using data science terms."

Using citizen data is a matter of trust

While the burgeoning field of data analytics offers clear opportunities to inform and improve policy and service delivery, these potential benefits need to be balanced against the risks inherent in the possibility that the relationship between the state and its citizens could be fundamentally altered forever.

Chris Naylor, chief executive of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, is one of many leaders across local government to have considered the potential of predictive analytics that could enable housing or social services teams to make earlier interventions to avert homelessness, abuse or other issues.

While this could both save citizens from trauma and relieve pressure on stretched local government services, it would inevitably "place stress on the relationship" between councils and their most vulnerable citizens, and require a high level of trust in public authorities to be maintained.

"[We would be] going from people coming to the council and saying 'I have a problem' to the state coming to them and saying 'are you OK'?," Naylor said. "That places a massive burden on trust; this is a conversation about data - but it is also about intimacy and trust."

There is a good business case for IT upgrades

There can be few, if any, civil service tech professionals who underestimate the importance of upgrading the outdated legacy IT still widely in use across government, nor the scale of the challenge in doing so.

The good news, according to according to CDDO chief Davinson, is that colleagues in the government finance function are increasingly cognisant of the issue.

"I have been very encouraged in the last 18 months that the message is getting through - even in the Treasury," she said. "There is a cost, but there is an opportunity: the business case is pretty good."

The Treasury will, no doubt, have taken notice of a report published earlier this year by the Public Accounts Committee, which found that the necessity of "patching up legacy systems" added £53.2m to HM Revenue and Customs' operating costs during the early months of the pandemic.

"Instead of sitting round the table in meetings speaking Latin, we are now seeing perm secs using data science terms" Alison Pritchard

And, with the twice-delayed Comprehensive Spending Review looming, the case for modernising Whitehall's tech infrastructure may be further strengthened by the recent appointment of Steve Barclay as Cabinet Office minister, a role in which he assumes oversight of digital government.

He moved to the central department from his previous post as chief secretary to the Treasury in which, last summer, he promised that "a key focus of the spending

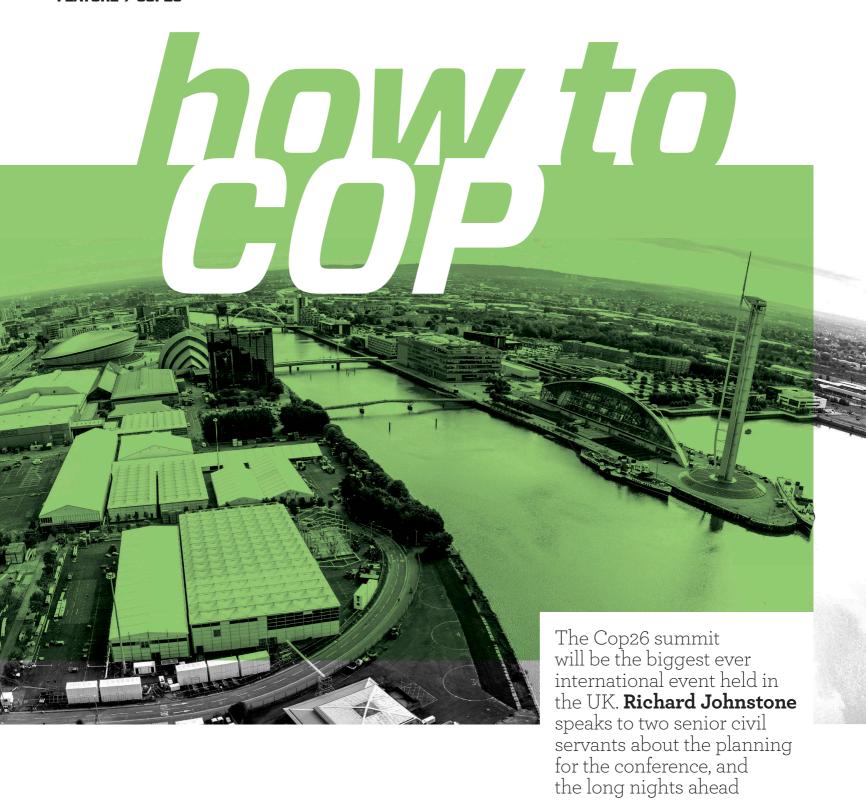
review will be addressing legacy IT".

The GDS definition of legacy tech encompasses any hardware, software or business process which meets one or more of the following criteria: being considered an end-of-life product; being no longer supported by the supplier; being impossible to update; being considered to be "above the acceptable risk threshold"; and being no longer cost effective.

Davinson said that, as well as the financial benefits, implementing newer tech will enable government to get a better handle on the wealth of information at its disposal.

"We have to modernise our infrastructure; we still have a lot of legacy, and we still have a lot of risk in our legacy platforms," she said. "But we have a lot of opportunity as well; do we really understand where our data is?"■





t the end of this month, more than half the world's leaders are expected to descend on Glasgow to take part in the Cop26 climate change conference – two weeks of intense negotiations and public events focused on one stark aim.

The core task for those leaders and their teams, according to the UK official who has been leading preparations for the event, is to "keep the prospect of limiting global warming to 1.5°C alive".

Peter Hill has been chief executive of the UK's conference presidency team since October 2019. In that time, the necessity of limiting global warming to 1.5°C has become starker. The figure was set in the breakthrough 2015 Paris climate change agreement, which committed the world to keeping the figure below 2°C below pre-industrial levels and preferably 1.5°C.

But recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change studies demonstrate a big difference for the planet of a 1.5°C increase versus 2°C. A 2021 IPCC report showed, for example, that 14% of the world's population would face severe heatwaves every five years under 1.5°C of global warming, but if temperatures rise by 2°C then this proportion rises to 37% of the global population. The same report found that global maize crops and marine fisheries could decline by twice as much if temperatures rise by 2°C rather than 1.5°C.

So the stakes are high, and there is little time to lose. "The challenge for us all is: what are we going to do to limit that warming to 1.5°C?" says Hill as the talks

The event, which will run from 31 October to 12 November, will see 130 world leaders arrive in Scotland's biggest city. It will be the culmination of two years of work for Hill, who was previously the prime minister's principal private secretary.

Initially, the conference was due to take place in November 2020, but the coronavirus pandemic led to a 12-month postponement for what represents the most significant global meeting on climate change since those Paris talks.

Alex Chisholm, the civil service's chief operating officer, tells CSW that the talks represent a chance for nations to "reset commitments on the back of everything that we've learned in the intervening years, which have emphasised the importance of limiting increases in global temperatures by reducing carbon emissions".

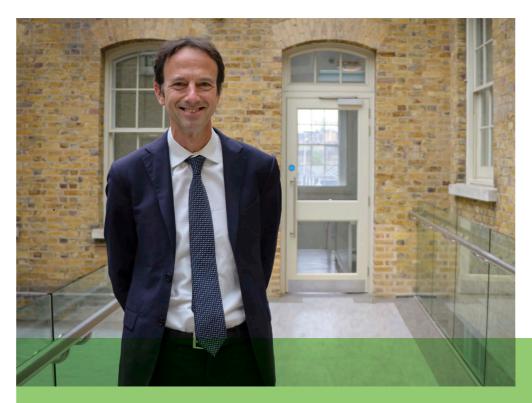
He says that since Paris "we've also learned a lot about how to do that in a way that is really sustainable, that works with economic growth, and that has broad support across very different communities".

The conference will have a key role in developing that support, Chisholm says, with public events included in the schedule. Such support is needed because "it is a marathon not a sprint" to reach net zero by 2050 – a goal which the IPCC has said is essential to keep global warming below the 1.5°C target, and which the UK was among the first major economies to commit to.

"You're probably talking another six or seven administrations between now and then," Chisholm, says. "That's a lot of electoral cycles to get over, and that's just in the UK, when every country in the world needs to play its part. This will only work if it has broad based support, and that requires people to be engaged and enthused and convinced and playing their own part in it."

In total 25,000 people are expected to converge on Glasgow for the event, including representatives from the 197 countries that have signed up to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Hill says the UK has been taking a campaigning role to get countries, regions, cities and businesses to commit to take climate action.

"Much of the work of the Cop is done in the two years running up to the event," he says. "When you see people making pledges – whether on finance or



"This requires us to see through multiple phases... It is a new type of challenge for the civil service" *Alex Chisholm*

climate action – those are generally the result of a lot of influencing, persuading, campaigning. And the vast majority of those will happen in the run up to Cop."

For countries, these pledges take two forms. The first is an overall pledge to reach net zero, and this is an area where the UK's presidency has made progress.

"We now have nearly 80% of the global economy committed to some form of net zero. When we started our presidency that was around 30%. And that number has been going up every few days as countries come forward with new commitments," he says.

The second element is known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs) – short term commitments which set out what nations will do in the next decade or so. It is these which are needed to maintain 1.5°C as a possibility, since without short-term emission reductions we could see warming rise too fast for the net zero by 2050 target to have an impact.

Here too, Hill says the UK's work has yielded commitments. "We have seen progress in those areas where you have to progress in the 2020s – so that is the energy system, the transport system, and on land [use], in particular in forests. And we've seen real progress on the ending of financing for coal, and in the acceleration

of the rollout of zero emission transport.

"These are important in themselves, and they're proof points that these commitments that countries are making are meaningful."

What he describes as "huge movement" on both fronts has been down to putting in the hard diplomatic yards. "We've pressed people very hard, and occasionally not made ourselves popular, but I think generally speaking people recognise this has to happen, and the transition has to be faster," he says.

ver 130 countries have submitted NDCs but, despite this, world leaders will still convene in Glasgow with a large gap between the commitments made and the action needed to limit warming to 1.5°C.

This is where the impact of the talks themselves comes in. Despite the diplomatic legwork, "it's not as if the script is written and we just need to open the envelope" says Hill.

Some G20 countries are among those who have not yet submitted medium-term plans for how they're going to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, so "there are still some big players who, between now and Glasgow or at Glasgow, we're very much hoping will come forward

FEATURE > COP26

with announcements", Hill says.

As the world leaders arrive, negotiations will also be held on two areas of the global climate response – resolving outstanding elements from the Paris deal, and setting the framework for the future shape of international cooperation. Issues left unresolved in the Parisian pact include the rules for carbon markets and transparency regulations for national climate plans. There will also need to be discussions on how to finance the transition to net zero in poorer countries beyond 2025, when existing rules run out.

As the chair of the conference, the UK will act as broker to bring parties together in order to reach an agreement in four areas – mitigation, adaptation, finance and collaboration.

Hill, who brings to this task his experience as the G7 and G20 sherpa for prime ministers Theresa May and Boris Johnson, says that "every time the world comes together to try and reach an agreement on something like this

is different from any previous time".

"We've just got to give ourselves the best shot through our preparation, and then through our handling of the negotiations, to make an agreement possible. In the end this is a process driven by the parties. They have to want to come to an agreement."

The negotiations will begin on the very first day, starting at a technical level before moving to a political stage in the second week. Hill will be working with Cop president Alok Sharma in trying to shepherd the negotiations to a conclusion, as well as advising Johnson when the world leaders are all by the banks of the Clyde at the start of the event.

The logistical challenge of hosting the event in Glasgow has been vast, and Hill quotes the military dictum "amateurs talk strategy, professionals talk logistics" when discussing how preparations have gone. Planning, led by the Cop delivery board that he chairs, has included the Scottish Government, local authorities and the

police to "work through every dimension you could imagine of this problem, and many you probably never thought of".

An unexpected part of this mix, of course, was Covid, the first cases of which were diagnosed in the same month Hill took up his post. This has provided an added layer of complexity, with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office leading a global vaccination programme for those attending the conference, and the development of a standalone test and trace system. "It's been an extraordinary effort to be able to put on an event of this scale in these circumstances," he says. "I think the fact that you've now got the majority of the world's leaders going to come, and registrations for attendance - both at the official negotiations and at the public events - running far ahead of what we expected, tells you that people want to come. They want to be part of it."

Chisholm describes the work of hosting the event as a "fantastic challenge for the civil service" that "exemplifies the



best in the modern civil service - being skilled, innovative and ambitious".

"A lot of skills in a range of different disciplines have been applied to this – you've got climate scientists, logistics experts, security people and public health people involved because of the Covid context, and people who are experts in the environment, and in transport and technology."

The work of Hill's unit is just the tip of the Whitehall iceberg that has been focused on stopping the world warming, says Chisholm, as there has also been policymaking to meet the UK's own net zero target by 2050, and the interim goal of a 78% cut by 2035.

"All the policies that have been necessary against that – whether you're talking about transport decarbonisation, or new waste schemes, or tree planting, or new technologies as they can apply to heating systems – this requires a fantastic cross-government commitment," Chisholm says. "Every department needs to play its part within that."

There will be over 500 civil service volunteers helping at the Cop, with officials "very strongly motivated by a sense of responsibility and public purpose" to help at the historic gathering.

However, Chisholm acknowledges that reaching net zero overall will need some different skills.

"This requires us to see through multiple phases – being able to make this scale of changes, and to keep those in place. It is a new type of challenge for the civil service," he says. "We're trying to make sure that our institutional capacity for sustaining that is greater, including a big focus on skills and knowledge-raising, but also by giving people that chance to get involved directly."

nce the conference itself is under way, the official talks will take place in many rooms, and on many issues, simultaneously. As chair, the UK's job "will be to try and stay on top of all those to understand the dynamics in each room", Hill says.

"When problems arise, as they inevitably will, and disagreement stalls progress [our role] is to bring people together to try and unlock them. It will be an ever-increasing pace, and complexity of diplomacy to nudge, cajole and push the world towards an agreement on the Friday of the second week."

With that deadline in mind, how is Hill preparing his team for the long nights that are likely as the talks progress?



"It will be an ever-increasing pace, and complexity, of diplomacy to nudge, cajole and push the world towards an agreement" *Peter Hill*

"I would be very surprised if this didn't result in several all-night sessions, and towards the end going up to the wire," he says. He is preparing to "grab a small amount of sleep when you can to be able to keep going in the final mile".

The fact that the conference will be dealing with issues unresolved in the six years since Paris illustrates "that they're not easy to resolve, and the scale of the challenge, and what has to be done in order to safeguard the planet, is enormous", Hill says.

"It would be entirely unsurprising if this is going to get quite intense, quite fraught, and go to the wire. And I think all our team are prepared for a good few days of surviving on caffeine and chocolate and whatever else it is gets them through the night."

He adds that "occasionally, you need a bit of drama" at these events.

"I think one shouldn't be afraid of things getting difficult because these are big issues. That was the way it was at Paris, there were plenty of tempers frayed and difficult moments, and I don't think we should be surprised if we see that again. We're not searching for it, but I think we were prepared for it."

Hill expects the political leaders at Cop to "have to take stock and say to each other: 'OK. this is where we think we are, do we think we've done enough?" And, if they conclude they have not done enough, what will the response be?

"Part of that will be instructing their negotiators to reach agreement on the issues that to date, they've not managed to reach agreement on so that we can finish Glasgow with a strong signal that the international community is united in accelerating action. Because recent Cops have struggled to finish with that very clear message," Hill says.

Once the conference itself ends, the UK's work as Cop president will only just have begun. The UK only formally takes on the presidency from Chile in Glasgow, so it will have a year of convening United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change meetings in 2022 and supporting its successor as president.

"It's not that Glasgow happens, then we can all pat ourselves on the back and go home for Christmas and go off to something else," Hill says. "There's a work programme that has to be taken forward, and I'm absolutely sure that the government will want us to continue making the arguments for climate action, because we're not going to solve every problem in Glasgow."

But if they can keep that target of 1.5°C alive, that will go a long way to making sure those problems can still be solved in the future.

CAN WHITEHALL PAVE THE WAY TO NET/LERO?

The government is due to set out new targets to make the civil service carbon neutral.

Mark Rowe takes a look at what progress has been made so far, and what still needs to be done



op26, the widely promoted as a landmark climate change conference, is nearly upon us. The meeting, which begins in Glasgow this month, is expected to galvanise efforts to cut greenhouse gas emissions. The focus will be on national and global emissions but the UK government is also required to do its bit internally. After all, the civil service, with more than 400,000 staff across the UK and producing almost 2m tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO2) a year, is the equivalent of a small city. NHS emissions alone are equivalent to 4% of England's total carbon footprint. Clearly, hosting Cop26 makes it even more imperative that the government demonstrates that it is keeping its own estate in order.

Individual government departments have been monitored since 2014 under an initiative known as Greening Government Commitments. Energy and carbon reduction targets apply to 22 central government departments and non-ministerial government departments and their arm'slength bodies: they cover the entire civil estate, comprising offices, warehouses, job centres, test centres, courts and operational uses such as prisons. Everything from the departmental number of flights and water consumption to plastic cutlery, paperless operations and retrofitting beautiful Grade I listed but energy-hungry buildings has come under the spotlight.

This is, to put mildly, something of a challenge: it's estimated that the built environment contributes around 40% of annual global greenhouse gas emissions and that around 80% of existing buildings will remain in use by 2050: the ratio for UK government department buildings is similar.

Operational targets are reported quarterly; procurement and transparency commitments on an annual basis. Permanent secretaries and chief executives are accountable for their delivery and for compliance with performance management and reporting requirements. The aim of net zero carbon emissions by 2050 has been incorporated into obligations too. Just to keep everyone on their toes, departmental performance league tables are published annually. Or at least they were.

The last publication came in 2019, with the 2018-2019 report. It's understandable that the 2019-2020 report was delayed as the pandemic unfolded, yet 20 months after the first lockdown, the government has failed to publish not only the 2019-2020 report but the 2020-2021 report.

Despite repeated enquiries by CSW since May, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has failed to either provide a date when they might be published nor offer any explanation for their delay. Jill Rutter of the Institute for Government has some sympathy for departments tasked with providing data as Covid swept through the country. "On the one hand part of this is just about reading off monitoring targets but doing the reports and putting things in context is quite labour intensive so you could say it's fair enough that it was not the absolute priority over the past year," she says.

Yet it still seems surprising. Not only is the UK hosting Cop26 but the 2021 Spending Review and further, long-range greening ambitions are expected to be announced before or at the Glasgow meeting, including a detailed plan for how the UK will reach net zero emissions by 2050. In addition, NGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund for Nature have called on the Treasury to take on powers to make green spending decisions, which encourage in-house and UK-wide spending policies to be determined by what is best for the environment and for achieving net zero rather than on crude price.

Despite the absence of multi-departmental GGCs and of any explanation for their delay, the Cabinet Office has published a State of the Estate report for 2019-2020 and Defra has also published its own GGCs for 2020-2021.

The Defra report shows that for the





four quarters (up to April 2021), compared to 2009-10, paper use had been reduced by 97% against a target of 50%; domestic flights (for obvious reasons) had been

reduced by 98% against a target of 30%; greenhouse gas emissions had dropped by 59% against a target of 44%; 16% of waste went to landfill against a target of less than 10%; and water use reduced by 10% against a target of 23%.

Yet progress appears uneven when compared to the last dataset produced before lockdown (Q1 from 2020). The

latest pre-covid figure for CO2 emissions from buildings was 10,310 tonnes but this rose to 14,657 tonnes in Q4 2021. Waste has also risen from 863 tonnes to 997 tonnes, and the landfill ratio has increased from 13% to 19%. More positively, water use from all buildings has dropped from 148,767 m3 to 96,668 m3.

Defra also says it has installed an unspecified number of self-generating installations onto its sites, such as wind turbines, photovoltaic panels, solar water heaters and ground source heat pumps.

A statement added that the department is also committed to rolling out the use of biomass boilers, though again it has been unable to provide numbers. The Defra group has also achieved the government's consumer single use plastic commitment to remove single use plastic.

Campaign groups such as WRAP, however, point out that the European single use plastic directive was not transposed into UK law before the end of the Brexit transitional period so the UK is not required to implement its requirements. While Defra has bans in place for stirrers and cotton buds, these do not automatically cover cutlery, plates and polystyrene food containers.

Meanwhile, the State of the Estate 2019-2020 report summarises the latest progress on improving the efficiency and sustainability of the government estate in accordance with the 2008 Climate Change Act. The estate was required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 43% from a 2009-10 baseline by 2020. Overall, this has been exceeded - the actual reduction over this timeframe is 50%. The report estimates that 31% of the reduction in emissions was due to the improved management of the estate and a further 19% was due to the decarbonisation of the National Grid. Fourteen departments have made reductions in emissions of 50% or more compared to the 2009-10 baseline (though the report does not say which have failed to do so, or by how much). The NHS has achieved an estimated a 62% reduction in

"Does it really matter if a small department achieves net zero? No, not at a global level but it's about the message" Jill Rutter

> emissions since 1990, which significantly exceeds the 37% requirement for 2020 outlined in the Climate Change Act.

> Specifically, in 1990 the NHS was estimated to produce 16.2m tonnes of CO2 equivalent; by 2019 this has been reduced to 6.1m tonnes, with a similar figure estimated for 2020. In January 2020, the campaign for a greener NHS was launched to mobilise 1.3 million staff and set an evidence-based route map and date for the NHS to reach net zero.

The State of the Estate report found



that reductions in energy consumption saved the government an estimated £148m in 2019-20. The proportion of waste which is recycled was 64%, a slight decrease compared to last year's 65%, though it still saved the government an estimated £24.9m in costs.

Government as a whole reduced its paper consumption by 63% in 2019-20 compared to the baseline – exceeding

the 50% 2020 target and improving on last year's 59% reduction; 15 departments exceeded the 50% target. Of these, eight recorded reductions of over 70% (again, the stragglers have not been identified). All but four departments reported a reduction in water consumption compared to the baseline.

An estimated £9.5m savings were achieved through reduced water consumption.

Along with greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), the other key metric by which departments must cut energy is the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) which sets out the potential energy efficiency rating of a property. Since 2008, properties that are sold or let generally require an EPC, which is valid for 10 years. When it comes to energy efficiency of buildings (many of them listed), the challenges become apparent. The report found that just four buildings achieved an Energy Performance Certificate rating of A+, 12 achieved A and 85 a B; 299 were rated C; 401 were rated D; 15 were rated the lowest category G.

New-build properties which are constructed to more demanding energy ef-

ficiency standards will, over time, improve this picture. The report points to 7 & 8 Wellington Place, which is the foundation for the Government Hub for Leeds and will house over 6,000 civil servants from HM Revenue & Customs, NHS Digital and the Cabinet Office. The building has been designed to meet the "Excellent" BREEAM rating, using BIM Level 2 (Building Information Modelling) and co-ordination

"Fourteen departments have made reductions in emissions of 50% or more compared to the 2009-10 baseline"

before on-site assembly, reducing errors and raising quality. The piling and underslab formation is 100% recycled aggregates and 98% of the construction waste has been diverted away from landfill.

In addition, the Ministry of Justice has reviewed its part in meeting the government's net-zero commitment (it holds the second largest estate after the Ministry of Defence, with 177 prisons and accounts for more than 20% of central government's total GHG emissions). Two new prisons under construction conform to BREEAM Excellent ratings and will provide electric vehicle charging points for 20% of staff and visitors. The MoJ aims to be fully net zero in operation for prisons built in the next five years.

Rutter reiterates the importance of departmental in-house greening. "Does it real-

ly matter if a small department achieves net zero? No, not at a global level but it's about the message.

"A lot of businesses that say they are addressing net zero are not really doing net zero, and those that are say it is really hard – so the government needs to be seen to be doing this to persuade other players in the economy to do it. If the government tells everyone to do one thing but does another it's terrible for moral, compliance and leadership," she says.

The concept of net zero has also changed departmental attitudes,

suggests Rutter. "When the target was an 80% reduction in emissions, some departments would assume they'd be in the other 20% and every department thought they'd have some sort of exemption. That would soon have seen the 20% expand to 80%," she says. "Departments could have argued they had to wait for the energy sector to come up with solutions and then implement them – but net zero makes departments look to implement energy efficiency measures now. With net zero, everyone has to come up with solutions rather than problems. There's no hiding place."

Rutter points to examples within the prison service, where recyclable mattresses feature in procurement processes; and in housing, where officials might previously have said their priority was affordable housing – but now have to incorporate net zero into achieving their goals. "Net zero is hard and if government feels things biting in-house as it tries to achieve net zero then will have a better appreciation of what other sectors of the economy will experience."

A statement issued by Defra said: "The new Greening Government Commitments framework for 2021-25 will further ensure we reduce our environmental footprint, align with commitments in the 25 Year Environment Plan and help us towards achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

"It is vital that new facilities are built to modern, net zero standards, take account of whole life costs, and apply best practice construction standards to deliver longer term value for money and carbon reduction. We aim to transform the government estate into a sustainable, net zero platform for the delivery of future public services."



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