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CIVIL SERVICE WORLD 

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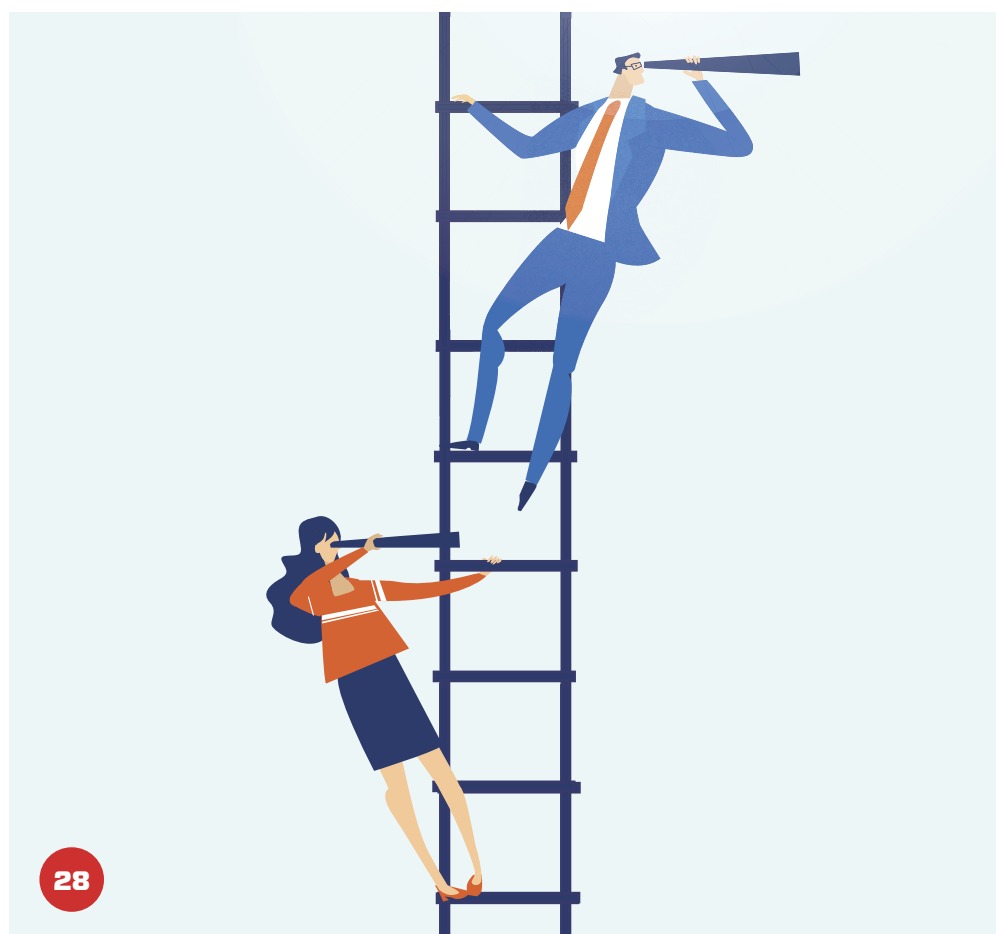
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# FROM THE EDITOR

**C**SW once received a letter from a reader about a lesser-discussed pressure facing civil service leaders during times of austerity: the emotional impact of taking difficult decisions. “We don’t have to nurse dying patients,” the senior official wrote to us, “but the role of a civil servant can involve advising ministers on really difficult and unpleasant decisions, such as which funding line to cut, or which group of citizens will be more disadvantaged”.

This letter came to mind in December, as we put together our annual Perm Secs’ Round-up. A long-held CSW tradition, the round-up gives the heads of departments, devolved governments and high-profile agencies the chance – via a short Q&A – to share their highs and lows of the year, and the challenges they face in the 12 months ahead.

One of the key themes of 2022 was decision making in the face of stretched resources. The word “prioritisation” crops up time and again. Of course, even in the best of times it is – as cabinet secretary Simon Case says in his entry – “the main challenge facing any leader”. But in this

extreme economic environment the choices are starker.

If the Cameron-era mantra was “do more with less”, the unofficial slogan for the Sunak age is surely “do less with less”. And that can take its toll on leaders. Nick Smallwood of the Infrastructure Projects Authority says one of the things he found most difficult in 2022 was having to select which projects the IPA could actively support and “which we simply could not”. For Department for Education perm sec Susan Acland-Hood, it felt extremely hard “choosing how to spend my time when everything we do matters”.

And civil servants didn’t simply keep the country running in 2022 in all the usual rich and varied ways. They also helped house over 100,000 Ukrainian refugees in the UK and deliver a state funeral.

The death of the Queen unsurprisingly features in many of the entries. Indeed, for HMPPS’s Amy Rees it represented a moment of immense pride as well as sadness: “Seeing my staff process as part of the civil service’s contingent at the late Queen’s funeral...I thought my heart would burst out of my chest,” she says.



On p.8-9 we have pulled out the main insights from these senior leaders on how they go about making tough decisions, and how they are preparing to meet the challenges of 2023. Many common themes emerge – the importance of knowing and sticking to your values, for example, or of listening to staff and stakeholders.

However, something that stood out reading this year’s round-up compared to previous ones is how few contributors mention diversity. The chief statistician Sir Ian Diamond does, arguing that “we must continue to look for opportunities to challenge prejudices, champion a diversity of backgrounds and opinions, and to create a working environment that benefits everyone”. But he is in the minority.

And yet the civil service – especially at senior levels – has a way to go before it can claim to be genuinely diverse and inclusive. Addressing this issue is painstaking and, realistically, will take years to achieve. Like any change that needs to happen across the civil service, it requires a relentless focus.

It’s understandable, of course, that it may seem less pressing than any number of the urgent in-tray items leaders face in these “incomparable circumstances” (to borrow a phrase from NICS boss Jayne Brady). But, when they are taking stock of the challenges of the next 12 months, government’s top officials should be wary of allowing the diversity and inclusion agenda to fall off that oh-so-difficult list of priorities. ■



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# INBOX

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## VALUE OF NOTHING

**Readers were sceptical about the PM's assurance that ministers "hugely value public sector workers like nurses" amid a wave of strikes by civil servants, nurses, rail workers and others – made as he prepared to launch legislation to curb strikes.**

"It is morally reprehensible that during a pandemic we clapped NHS staff for their efforts and now despite a cost of living crisis caused in part by the Conservative government, he has the audacity to look to pass legislation limiting the impact of strikes by the very same key personnel he applauded during an international crisis," **David Allen** said.

**Stuart Brown** commented: "It's interesting that the weight of responsibility fell onto public services during Covid and they were lauded for this, and now in a time of rampant inflation the weight of responsibility (ie to not stoke inflation by receiving a suitable increase in salary) again falls on public service. Fool me once."

**Jamie Luck** meanwhile took

issue with Sunak's decision to single out only nurses for praise. "What about the rest of the public sector, us civil servants? We work bloody hard too and haven't had a decent pay rise for a decade," he commented.

And **Tony Hall** summed up how many readers interpreted the PM's comments: "We hugely value public sector workers. Just not in monetary terms."

## REFORM OVER FUNCTION

**After the IfG urged Rishi Sunak to prioritise civil service reform in 2023 (see p.11), CSW readers shared their predictions for the year ahead, and their gripes with the PM's approach.**

"Invest in your staff, competitive pay, suitable training... Oh! I must have been dreaming then!" **Margaret M.** wrote. "More scratching of heads, finger pointing and accusations of civil service staff not attending their offices will continue to rumble on for the rest of 2023!"

Noting the advice to tackle high levels of staff turnover in government, **Jeremy White** commented: "Com-

bating churn' – cutting the real value of pay every year is really helping with that."

But **Ent** took a different approach, saying: "Civil service reform is the latest in a very long line of blaming and messing around with anything and everything in order to ignore objective reality, ie. the current Conservative Party is incredibly poor at governing."

## I REGRET NOTHING

**Recent ONS figures showed many former civil servants and local government staff who took early retirement during the Covid pandemic are thinking about returning to work as the cost of living crisis bites. But not all...**

"Seriously, wild horses couldn't drag me back," **Lyndsey Taylor** wrote.

## COURT OF OPINION

**GLD's people survey results suggested a number of serving civil service lawyers may share that sentiment. Nearly a third of staff polled said they wanted to leave within a year and just 10% were happy with pay and benefits.**

"I've worked with a lot of government lawyers, and it's honestly one of the toughest jobs in government service. I don't shy away from hard work, but I've always been in awe of what my legal colleagues achieved, day in, day

out," **Thomas Foster** said.


## HONOURABLE MENTION

**Freshly-knighted Home Office permanent secretary Sir Matthew Rycroft's decision to dedicate his New Year Honour to the "countless public servants who are doing a brilliant job... with little credit" did not go unnoticed.**


"Thank you to our perm sec for highlighting the work of so many public servants, it is appreciated," **Bianca F.** wrote.

## SMALL MINDED

**The news that the Cabinet Office has drafted in consultants to "turbocharge" the department's transformation programme – to make it "better, smaller and fairer" – did not inspire confidence.**

 **Annoné Butler @bookish-wgc** Why does my heart sink when I read this?

 **julia whyte @JuliaWhyte2** Because we know what it will ultimately lead to?

 **Annoné Butler @bookish-wgc** It's such a tired approach. Work smarter, work leaner... Most civil servants have heard it so often and for so long. What does it even mean? Mostly it seems to mean more work for fewer resources. I expect most public servants would give a hollow laugh.

## WHITEHALL WISDOM

The great and good pass judgement on government

### WHEN THE TREASURY COMES TO CALL

"When the budgets were set each year, very clever Treasury officials would come over the road to the Social Security Department and negotiate with ours. It often felt like the SAS arriving to deal with the Poor Bloody Infantry. But like the tortoise and the hare, the savings the Treasury demanded often proved illusory, and common sense won eventually.

"If you press in on one side of a balloon, the bump invariably appears on the

other side. So it is with social security spending. And the social S=security officials, many with a long and deep experi-

### "The savings the Treasury demanded often proved illusory"

ence of the system, honed over countless spending rounds, were usually right.

"Each year, in the end the Treasury would give up and the balancing fig-

ures would be achieved by 'efficiency savings' or the ingenious 'spend to save' measures, whereby money allocated would be expected to secure many times that amount in subsequent savings over the ensuing year, most of which would never materialise."

**International development minister Andrew Mitchell shares his memory of spending negotiations in the 1980s, in his memoir *Beyond a Fringe: Tales from a reformed Establishment lackey***



# Civil service strikes: How did it come to this?

Departmental staff and other public-sector workers are demonstrating their anger over pay in a way not seen since the 1970s and 1980s. **Tevye Markson** looks back at key events in the new Winter of Discontent

**A**mid soaring double-digit inflation and pay offers of just 2-3% for most civil servants, the PCS union followed through on months of threats and balloted members last autumn on strikes over pay, pensions, job cuts and redundancy terms. On 10 November, it announced that members at more than 120 departments and agencies had met the legal threshold to take industrial action, meaning around 100,000 civil servants could go on strike for up to 12 weeks, joining other public sector workers such as nurses and rail staff. General secretary Mark Serwotka said: “The government must look at the huge vote for strike action across swathes of the civil service and realise it can no longer treat its workers with contempt. Our members have spoken and if the government fails to listen to them, we’ll have no option than to launch a prolonged programme of industrial action reaching into every corner of public life. The stress of working in the civil service, under the pressure of the cost-of-living crisis, job cuts and office closures means they’ve reached the end of their tethers.”

The Cabinet Office pledged to minimise the impact of the action, while PCS – the civil service’s biggest union – said it would maximise disruption but ensure benefits claimants would not be affected.

PCS gave the Cabinet Office a week to respond to its demands. After talks fell flat, the union announced the first strikes would be at the Home Office, the Department for Transport and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. On 29 November, targeted action was confirmed at the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and the Rural Payments Agency. In the following week, the union set strike dates for National Highways, the Department for Work and Pensions and Border Force, with the latter action an eight-day walkout over Christmas at half a dozen airports.

The Cabinet Office said the union’s request for a 10% pay rise was “unaffordable”. A week later, Ministry of Defence permanent secretary David Williams revealed that military personnel providing cover for Border Force, NHS and other strikes would cost departments roughly £4,000 a week per soldier. The PCS strikes began in mid-December.

## ‘Unacceptable and unsustainable’: unions step up plans

As PCS ramped up its strike action, other unions stepped up their own plans to protest over pay, pensions, redundancy terms and job cuts. On 8 December, Prospect announced civil servants had backed industrial action in an indicative poll. The union, which represents professionals in the public sector, called for “meaningful negotiations” against the threat of a formal strike ballot if its demands were not met. General secretary Mike Clancy predicted members would vote for the “most widespread industrial action” in a decade.

Public-sector leaders’ union the FDA kicked off its formal strike ballot of civil servants working in the Fast Stream in mid-December, warning of “completely unacceptable and unsustainable” pay levels. The union said it had “exhausted opportunities” to resolve issues through negotiation.

Cabinet Office minister Jeremy Quin warned unions to “be realistic” about pay, but cabinet secretary Simon Case acknowledged civil servants’ pay anger in a memo to staff addressing the 2022 People Survey results, after the annual survey revealed unhappiness with wages and a drop in morale.

FDA general secretary Dave Penman started 2023 by criticising ministers for

“making no effort” to resolve the strikes. Prime minister Rishi Sunak and business secretary Grant Shapps subsequently said they wanted “reasonable dialogue” with unions in return for the suspension of planned industrial action. But their offer of pay talks that would feed into evidence submitted by departments to independent pay review bodies for 2023-24 awards was derided by Prospect as “hollow” because most departmental staff were effectively excluded. Rank-and-file civil servants do not have an independent pay-review body.

The government went on to unveil a new bill to reduce the impact of strikes by demanding minimum service levels in border security and other public services deemed “critical”, such as fire, ambulance and rail. PCS condemned the legislation proposals as “reprehensible and vindictive” and pledged to fight them. The union went on to turbocharge its strikes, announcing that around 100,000 members from 123 organisations would walk out on 1 February – joining a number of other public service unions taking action on what has been dubbed “protect the right to strike” day by the TUC.

On 12 January, civil service unions met the Cabinet Office minister for talks. Before the meeting, they urged ministers to move out of “listening mode” and put money on the table. But afterwards, PCS called the meeting a “farce” and the FDA and Prospect agreed Quin had “nothing to offer”.

Five days later, the FDA announced its Fast Stream members had voted to go on strike. The same day, Prospect told CSW it would go ahead with a ballot of tens of thousands of its members spanning 40 government organisations.

### Strike while the iron is hot: What's next?

At the time of going to press (Thursday, 19 January), there had been no breakthrough in negotiations between unions and the Cabinet Office.

PCS said it was expecting to announce a fresh wave of industrial action imminently.

Serwotka said: “All this can be stopped tomorrow if the UK government puts money on the table.”

The FDA had not yet announced strike dates for its fast streamers as it said it wanted to give negotiations one more go. It has asked the Cabinet Office for “urgent” talks and said it will announce dates if there is once again no “meaningful offer” on pay.

Prospect said its ballot of members would begin at the end of January but it had not yet finalised the date. ■

### November 2022

**10th:** 100,000 civil servants vote to strike over pay, jobs and pensions; PCS pledges to rebalot HMRC as turnout falls 750 ballots short

**11th:** Cabinet Office pledges to minimise impact of strikes; CSW exclusively reveals FDA’s plan to ballot fast streamers

**15th:** PCS pledges to maximise disruption but protect benefits claimants

**18th:** First strikes will be at Home Office, DfT and Defra, PCS announces

**21st:** Prospect and Unison members back strikes at Environment Agency over “derisory” pay

**23rd:** Justice secretary condemns public sector strikes

**29th:** First PCS strike dates announced: at DVSA and Rural Payments Agency

### December 2022

**2nd:** National Highways strikes announced

**5th:** Department for Work and Pensions strikes announced at four offices

**8th:** Border Force strikes at airports announced; Prospect civil service members back strikes in indicative poll

**9th:** FDA launches Fast Stream strike ballot; Cabinet Office minister says PCS demands are “not affordable”

**12th:** Cabinet secretary Simon Case acknowledges anger over pay in message to civil servants

**16th:** Cost of using armed forces to cover striking civil servants’ work revealed

**22nd:** PCS announces more DWP and National Highways strikes

### January 2023

**3rd:** Ministers “making no effort” to resolve disputes, FDA chief Dave Penman chief says

**5th:** BEIS reveals plans to minimise impact of strikes through minimum service levels for “critical” public sector areas. Unions urged to suspend planned industrial action in return for talks about “fair and affordable” settlements for 2023-24

**6th:** Unions slam talks offer as “hollow” and anti-strike legislation as an “attack on the trade union movement” and a “distraction”

**12th:** PCS sets 1 February as day of mass strike action for 100,000 civil servants

**17th:** FDA fast streamers vote to strike, as Prospect announces formal ballot of members in 40 government organisations



# NAVIGATING CHOPPY WATERS



As we embark on another tough year, how will senior civil servants lead their teams through the storm? Here we offer a digest of CSW's most recent Permanent Secretaries' Round Up and share advice and insight from government's top officials

**F**rom rising inflation and climate change to Covid-driven backlogs and plunging staff morale, the forecast for senior civil servants in 2023 doesn't look easy. In that context it's clear why cabinet secretary Simon Case, writing in CSW's 2023 permanent secretaries' round up, described prioritisation as "the main challenge facing any leader".

Or, as Jayne Brady wrote in her contribution: "Leadership often feels like one difficult decision after another". And as HM Treasury second perm sec Cat Little reminded us, "Some of the hardest decisions are yet to come as finance teams across government support ministers to translate cash budgets into meaningful delivery plans for 2023."

All this in a context where staff have been working ever-harder amid uncertainty and crises for several years. Many will empathise with DCMS perm sec Sarah Healey who noted: "We're getting quite used to saying each year is 'unprecedented' - I'm quite looking forward to a year which is 'precedented!'"

With almost 40 contributions from lead-

ers across different nations, policy areas and organisations, the annual round up provides a fascinating insight into the ways in which top officials are managing the challenge of leading in a tough environment. Below we bring together some key points for anyone in leadership positions to consider as we embark on another unpredictable year.

## KEEP THE SHIP ON COURSE

After naming prioritisation as a key leadership challenge, Case elaborated that this means "trying to strike the right balance between things that are urgent vs. strategic challenges". His colleague, civil service chief operating officer and Cabinet Office perm sec Alex Chisholm, also mentioned the need to balance "proactive and reactive priorities", describing a key challenge for 2023 as ensuring that "the ship is not blown off course by other headwinds", but keeps moving towards the long-term goals of change and reform.

Brady, leading an organisation which is still without ministerial leadership, said she has made the "very conscious decision that [NICS] should remain relentlessly focused on how we can evolve to deliver

an even better service in the future, while also doing the best that we can today to overcome the challenges presented to us and the citizens we serve". While this was not a hard decision, she said, it means "giving persistent attention and resource to the long-term ambition."

## KNOW YOUR ANCHORS

A long-term perspective will only help guide and focus decisions, of course, if you have a clear destination for your long-term journey. James Heath, head of the National Infrastructure Commission, described how his team supported work to decide the scope of the next National Infrastructure Assessment (due to be published in autumn 2023) by focusing on long-term goals. "We have anchored the project around net zero, climate resilience and regional growth - major objectives that will stand the test of time," he wrote.

These anchors could apply to almost any policy area, but there will also be specific ones for each organisation - most senior leaders wrote about particular aims which guide decisions and also help them motivate a workforce which



has given hugely in the last few years.

National Archives chief Jeff James emphasised the importance of focusing on organisational purpose in an age of hybrid working. “We also have to pay even more attention to our organisational culture, cohesion and identity,” he wrote, adding that it would be “vital” to “stay true to our historic mission”.

## HOLD TO YOUR VALUES

Beyond these policy anchors, many leaders discussed the importance of another type of ballast. Home Office boss Matthew Rycroft wrote: “We have to hold to our values – both the civil service ones and our departmental values of collaboration, compassion, courage and respect – particularly as we work our way through the most difficult decisions.”

But holding to values doesn’t just mean organisational ones: HMRC’s second perm sec Angela MacDonald was one of many contributors who reflected on their own personal and leadership values. “How do I lead positively and constructively through the hopes and fears people have right now?” she asked, concluding that she would be focused on providing “careful and compassionate leadership”.

Other contributors also recognised that the people who work with and for them must be their top consideration. As Healey noted, “Last year was a difficult one for the public but also for the civil service. Senior leaders in every department are looking at how they can make their staff feel properly valued and help them to develop and grow.”

Healey is chair of the Civil Service People Board, a

role that she takes “very seriously” and which will see her working with other perm secs to consider how to meet challenges that many mentioned around skills, recruitment, retention and pay.

## WILL IT MAKE THE BOAT GO FASTER?

With values, policy anchors and long-term goals in place, Amy Rees of HMPPS has a useful question for guiding decisions, which also returns us to the nautical metaphor. “I have set a strategic priority for us in

HMPPS to focus all our energies on what we can do to make ‘our boat’ go faster,” she wrote, explaining that inspiration for this approach came from the 2000 Summer Olympics. Great Britain’s multi-medal winning rowing team, led by coach Ben Hunt-Davies, asked themselves continuously during training: “Will it make the boat go faster?” “We need to con-

### 'Anything but routine': Met Office boss Penelope Endersby on a record year

The Met Office chief executive on 12 months of global achievements, soaring temperatures and public protection



"The extreme heat in July was anything but routine". There were fires in during this summer's heatwave. Photo: Akira Suemori/Alamy Stock Photo

### Simon Case: "The thing I found most difficult in 2022? Telling the PM the Queen had died"

In the first entry of CSW's annual permanent secretaries' round-up, the cabinet secretary shares his reflections on an eventful year



Simon Case and Liz Truss attend the Service of Prayer and Reflection at St Paul's Cathedral on 9 September following the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Photo: PA Images/Alamy Stock Photo

stantly ask ourselves the question,” Rees said, “as we should only be doing the things that help us deliver the very best services.

“My personal challenge is getting people actually to stop doing things which either don’t contribute to frontline delivery, obstruct or distract from it, or would be a good thing but can’t be absorbed at the frontline.”

HMPPS is not the only organisation inspired by sporting heroes – Cat Little described a session run by “two of Great Britain’s finest Olympic athletes” (Steve Backley and Roger Black) as a highlight of work the finance function was doing do support personal resilience and wellbeing.

She added that her own resilience “to work through long intensive periods of uncertainty and ambiguity has been tested and stretched in every way” but one way she has protected it has been to take up running alongside a “brilliant Treasury running club who keep me sane every Wednesday lunchtime”.

## MAKING IMPORTANT PROGRESS TOGETHER

The image of Treasury colleagues running

off their stress together is a nice illustration of the team spirit which motivates so many civil servants. JP Marks, who became perm sec of the Scottish Government this year, gave a beautiful description of that sense of collaboration which has motivated and enabled so much hard work. “Despite all the challenges,” he wrote, “the teams have risen to the challenge with integrity, compassion and kindness, and we have made important progress together, true to our values.”

Indeed, the roundup provides plenty of evidence of progress made, with a striking example from Max Hill, head of the Crown Prosecution Service, writing about his proudest moment of 2022. “When [CSW] asked me last year about the most significant challenges we faced in 2021, I said it was how we tackle rape and sexual violence against women and girls,” he said.

A year on, Hill wrote, this remains a pressing issue for the whole justice system, but there has been real progress because of joint work between the CPS and police. And, as a result, “we are seeing real increases in the number of referrals to the CPS and charges we can authorise”.

“Impactful collaborative work [...] takes significant effort and time,” he added, but the progress demonstrates its importance.

## PACE YOURSELF

Finally, our contributors spoke of the need to maintain their own resilience for another tough year. Emily Miles of the Food Standards Agency described how she aims to temper ambition in the face of reality. “There’s so much more the FSA could do,” she said, adding: “We’ve got great people and we do amazing work, but we need to deal with the immediate challenges facing us [...]. I counsel myself regularly to be more patient.”

Susan Acland Hood, who described a difficult decision to leave a family holiday to meet a new minister during a reshuffle, said that her personal challenge for 2023 will be “choosing how to spend my time when everything we do matters – and I want to do my best for the organisation because what it does is so important – now more than ever before.” ■

Read the full round-up, including our contributors' weird and wonderful anecdotes about working-at-Christmas here: [bit.ly/3XcFEB8](https://bit.ly/3XcFEB8)

# DAVE PENMAN FAST AND FURIOUS

**AS FAST STREAMERS ARE SET TO STRIKE FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER, MINISTERS MUST PUT ASIDE OUTDATED RHETORIC AND WAKE UP TO DAMAGE WHICH HAS ALREADY BEEN DONE**

One of the problems when extraordinary events repeatedly happen is that you lose a sense of perspective. We got desensitised to the lack of moral authority under Boris Johnson as prime minister. His downfall was just another scandal and the political turmoil that followed, just another episode in the same psychodrama.

John Oliver, the British comedian who hosts *Last Week Tonight* on HBO used to have a segment with a fanfare, ticker tape and a marching band as he reported the latest scandal around Donald Trump as this latest scandal must surely have led to his resignation. But alas, it didn't. Each time they'd have to stop the celebration half way through because Trump hadn't gone. It was just another of the seemingly endless scandals.

Our current version of the Winter of Discontent is in danger of slipping into this territory. The first strike by the Royal College of Nursing in its 106-year history is just a footnote. The first national rail strike in 25 years, the first ambulance workers' strike since 1989. The list goes on. For all the rhetoric, strikes are relatively rare in the UK. In 2019, the average number of strike days lost per thousand workers per year was just 4.9 in Britain, compared to 22.3 in Europe. In 2017, Britain saw the lowest number of workers involved in strikes in over 120 years.

All of this is against a backdrop of ever

**“Half of fast streamers who were offered a better paid job elsewhere told us in our member survey that they wish they'd taken it”**

more stringent requirements around ballots, particularly in the public sector. Typically a 50% turnout is required and unions have to provide data on who is being balloted by workplace, requiring a huge logistical challenge, especially for a union like the FDA. You can vote online to select the new prime minister for the country with no threshold for the ballot, but if you want to vote to strike or even just elect the president of a union, then it must be by postal ballot.

One of the many mistakes the government is making is trying to relive a Thatcher era-style confrontation with the unions, with rhetoric from the 1980s about “union barons”. The reality is that many unions have had turnouts significantly above 50% and majorities of 80% or 90% in favour of action. These disputes are unions responding to their members, not members responding to calls for strike from union leaders.

So, in another extraordinary turn of events, this week our members in the central Fast Stream have voted for industrial action. A huge majority – 88% – voted for action on a turnout of 60%. Anyone who understands the nature of the Fast Stream will be shocked by that decision. They are the future leaders of the service and some of the most able graduates in the country, yet they have felt they had no choice but to vote for strike action. It is, of course, the first time this has happened in the history of the Fast Stream and ministers should reflect on how badly you really have to mess up to get this group so angry that they're wanting to strike.

This is not a dispute made by foreign wars or a legacy of the pandemic. This dispute was made in Whitehall. For years we've been asking Cabinet Office to address the low pay of the Fast Stream. Instead, they have relied on the fact the Fast Stream is massively oversubscribed. Why address pay if people keep applying? Yes, they do apply, but when they realise that they're paid less than Cabinet Office HEOs, that the stagnant pay arrangements mean it's a struggle to live and work; when they're skipping meals and leaving the Fast Stream early, forgoing the big pay step that comes after three to four years, just to get an immediate pay rise, then they regret that decision. Half of fast streamers who were offered a better paid job elsewhere told us in our member survey that they wish they'd taken it.

This is not a demand for a 19% pay rise; it's about a modest increase to starting pay and progression points to catch up with the pay of equivalent roles in the Cabinet Office. We've been warning the Cabinet Office for years about this and the anger that members have been feeling. Despite promises of reform, we got offers of jam tomorrow. So now this is where we are. Before a single member has taken action, this dispute will already have left a damaging legacy on the Fast Stream and the wider civil service.

By refusing to address the underlying problems that we have been highlighting over the last few years, and making them feel like they have no choice but to take strike action, the Cabinet Office has already damaged the morale and commitment of the next generation of leaders. As with so many of those public servants taking action just now, the message from ministers appears to be: “do your worst”. My fear is that with this Fast Stream cohort, the worst has already been done. ■



*Dave Penman is the general secretary of the FDA union*

# HANNAH WHITE SUNAK'S CHANCE TO DRIVE CHANGE

**MINISTERS AND MPS MAY ALREADY BE ON AN ELECTION FOOTING, BUT CIVIL SERVICE REFORM SHOULD NOT BE BRUSHED ASIDE – IT IS VITAL TO HELPING GOVERNMENT WIN OVER THE BRITISH PUBLIC**

**A**s we begin 2023, the drum beat of the impending general election is heightening the pressure on ministers and civil servants to address the most urgent problems facing the country.

Many of the UK's domestic problems – from the cost of living crisis to strikes and public services under severe pressure – have been aggravated by international events including Russia's invasion of Ukraine, labour and supply-chain problems in the wake of Covid and unresolved aspects of the UK's changed relationship with the EU.

Despite the urgency of these problems, 2023 risks being a wasted year for UK government. The past year – with its rapid succession of prime ministers and ministerial merry-go-round – provided possibly the least propitious circumstances for effective government, distracting ministers and limiting the civil service's ability to make progress as priorities lurched from one objective to another.

The prospect of the next general election, by January 2025, is already shaping Sunak's government.

So far, his approach has been to define a set of goals of limited ambition. But his ability to achieve even these goals will be shaped by the attitude of his backbenchers, many of whom face the prospect of losing their seats if Labour's current poll lead is translated into electoral victory. This has changed the calculation for some, who now seem to be more interested in seeking to please their constituents than in supporting their new leadership or seeking preferment as ministers in a government with an apparently limited life expectancy.

Being put on an election footing so early into their terms in office risks reducing ministers' political appetite for the longer-term planning so necessary to address the nation's current problems. That is not to say it will not happen – the Climate Change Act that set decades-long rules on carbon emissions was passed with cross-party support two years before the 2010 election – but the prospect of such work, vital today for issues such as social care, will require a level of political cooperation not seen in recent years.

The Conservative government's Declaration on Government Reform, published in June 2021, echoed much of the In-

stitute for Government's analysis of the problems impeding good government. In the two years since the declaration was published, however, momentum has stalled and the extent of Sunak's commitment to the reform agenda remains unclear.

This is a serious problem because the need to improve and strengthen the civil service has only grown over the past two years. Civil service morale has been sapped by low-trust relationships with politicians and depleted by public criticism from ministers – to which civil servants have no public right of reply. Ministers' sackings of permanent secretaries have called into question the impartiality and permanence of the civil service, with destabilising consequences. The reputation of the civil service was dealt a severe blow by the implication of officials at the highest levels in the Partygate scandal and a lack of visible leadership in dealing with the consequences.

Budget and pay constraints in the context of rampant inflation and the cost of living crisis have decreased job satisfaction and drastically increased levels of churn among existing civil servants. They have also limited scope for the implementation of some

reforms which means that the civil service continues to lack some of the skills needed to tackle the challenges government faces.

Unprecedented political turmoil and ministerial churn have distracted politicians and required civil servants to focus on inducting and understanding the priorities of a succession of new ministers, rather than progressing civil service reform. A continuous cycle of crises has driven superficial, reactive and short-term policymaking by a generation of officials who have little experience of working differently. And they are now being directed and scrutinised by a generation of politicians of all parties who have never seen government operate in any other mode, having arrived at or after the 2017 election.

The problems the UK faces are severe and pressing, but 2023 need not be a wasted year for government.

If Sunak is to turn around his poll numbers, he needs to focus on demonstrating that he can deliver the wider outcomes the electorate cares about – challenging

**“A continuous cycle of crises has driven superficial, reactive and short-term policy making by a generation of officials who have little experience of working differently”**

the prevalent public narrative that “Britain isn't working”. This means making his government operate as effectively as possible. Laying the groundwork for reforms would prove a valuable legacy whatever the outcome of the next election, but improving the running of government would not be a purely altruistic goal. It would create short term wins too – by equipping government better to spot and resolve problems and handle crises. Government reform will continue to be the focus of the Institute for Government and should be a central goal of any serious party of government. ■

*Dr Hannah White is director of the Institute for Government*



# JOHN KIMMANCE LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

## LOCATION DATA SUPPORTS PUBLIC SERVICES AND HELPS CUT COSTS – BUT WHAT COULD CHANGE IN 2023?

**L**ocation data is a vital tool that underpins public services and allows for the delivery of policy, critical infrastructure, and services across Britain. From supporting local authorities, police forces and fire services, to providing adaptation and mitigation for national incidents such as flooding and the recent pandemic.

Ordnance Survey data is accessible and easier to use than ever before, with our Public Sector Geospatial Agreement (PSGA) offering almost 6,000 public sector bodies and organisations access to our high-quality data and services through the OS Data Hub. Our data and APIs underpin and support the delivery of key government services, with 1.1 billion transactions across all PSGA APIs last year.

It is so important that we continue to increase access to location data to deliver greater efficiencies which could be replicated by other departments, local authorities and councils – especially when budgets across government are under increasing pressure.

### LOCATION DATA'S ROLE IN 2023

Given the current economic challenges, government is focused on stimulating GDP to drive economic growth. Location data can play an important role in enabling this and OS are leveraging our expertise and data capabilities by working across the public sector. We also have a key focus on commercial markets, working through the OS Channel and through our licensed partner programme to improve greater use of geospatial data which helps governments and businesses implement change and improve operational effectiveness saving time and money.

Location data is already being used to make savings and improve services across government. Harrow Council used OS data to save £300,000 every year by using route-optimisation techniques to save fuel and reduce the number of vehicles used; while Teignbridge District Council cut costs by £60,000 by using OS data to automate their local land charges search process. There are plenty more opportunities for greater use in streamlining procedures, helping local authorities deliver services more efficiently and ensuring taxes go further in serving the local community. Research suggests that location data has a potential economic benefit to the UK of up to £11bn per year.

One area of focus which is increasing is sustainability, in particular the challenges created by climate change. Location data can help by not only identifying assets that are being or could be impacted, but also tracking mitigations being carried out on the ground. To support this, OS are constantly improving the quality,

quantity and accessibility of our data, in ways that allow our customers to pick and choose their data as and when they need it.

The war in Ukraine has thrown the fragility of global supply chains into sharp relief and accentuated the availability of scarce resources like energy and water. We need to be driving more efficient energy use, and location analytics can play a critical role in finding solutions now to meet the growing needs of the future, such as the planning of electric vehicle infrastructures.

At OS, we are constantly looking at how to improve our own efficiencies, for example by investing in automatic change detection through artificial intelligence, which quickly identifies where things have changed, and capturing these changes automatically. This enables us to deliver more data and even faster.

OS manages huge amounts of location data, increasingly not all captured by us but by third parties. For the organisations that use it, being able to link real-world data together – be it population, environmental or any other data – for reporting and analytical purposes will be very valuable for public-sector organisations.

Increasingly, we will see machine-to-machine technology becoming more pervasive, influencing methods of access and data formats and stimulating demands for new data. For example, to support our national journey to net zero there will be increased focus on solar panels, driving a requirement to understand building and land potential for solar panels and tracking the growth of these at a local, regional and national scale.

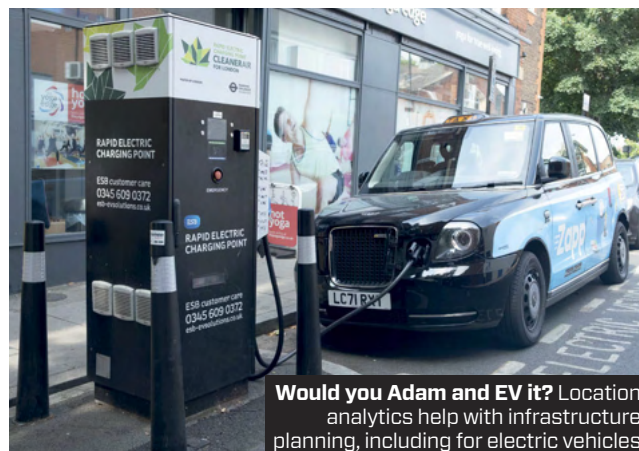
### CHANGE NEEDS SUSTAINED INVESTMENT

Looking ahead, the use of analytics and, in particular, location data will allow businesses and governments to make better decisions that tackle sustainability top down. The volume of data – from satellites to connected technology and devices, including sensors, vehicles, and phones – is increasing exponentially. Accessing and aggregating this data will be increasingly complex, leading organisations and governments to seek trusted location providers such as OS to solve big problems, such as sustainability and net zero.

Through the National Geographic Database, OS are now able to improve the speed at which customers get access to our data. Data captured by one of our surveyors yesterday would be accessible today.

Location data has the power to help achieve our 2030 Climate Target Plan and support efforts to address the net-zero challenge. Despite the short-term challenges of the economic and political environment, we must not take our eye off long-term goals such as sustainability and climate change. Working

with people and organisations across the market will help solve these key global challenges, but complex solutions take time and there needs to be a concerted effort and sustained investment. You can't just turn on funding and turn it off again; you need to be investing in those challenges consistently to succeed. ■



**Would you Adam and EV it?** Location analytics help with infrastructure planning, including for electric vehicles

*John Kimmance is managing director of national mapping services at Ordnance Survey*

# KELLY SATCHELL A QUESTION OF REPUTATION

## AFTER JOHNSON AND TRUSS, WHAT NOW FOR THE PUBLIC STANDING OF THE CIVIL SERVICE?

**T**he premierships of Boris Johnson and Liz Truss tested the boundaries of the UK's constitution. From criticisms of the judiciary and civil service to downright unlawful activity, their governments chipped away at the reputation of some of the UK's most respected institutions. The increasingly fraught relationship between the UK civil service and ministers in recent years culminated in former chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng's assault on "Treasury orthodoxy". The adverse market reaction to the "mini budget" showed that continued attacks on the UK's institutions are not risk free. But can Prime Minister Rishi Sunak sufficiently restore their credibility?

There is always tension in the civil service's dual obligations to deliver the agenda of the government of the day and provide an objective voice "speaking truth to power".

However, the second of these functions – the offering up of evidence and impartial advice – can run counter to ministers' intentions, exposing civil servants to criticism – and worse.

Formally, ministers cannot fire officials but in practice they can, and do, force senior officials out. Phillip Rutnam – a former permanent secretary at the Home Office – was dismissed (and won compensation from the government for unfair dismissal) by former home secretary Priti Patel. Most recently, one of Kwarteng's first actions as chancellor was to fire the Treasury's permanent secretary, Tom Scholar.

It is unclear to what degree the dismissal of Scholar was instrumental in passing the mini-budget or simply symbolic. What is clear is that the interference of ministers in the management of civil service departments threatens robust policymaking, weakens a crucial check and balance of the UK's uncodified constitution and strengthens the power of the executive. As proved retrospectively, removing a permanent secretary with so much experience (including of the 2008 financial crisis and pandemic) was risky given the macro-economic situation. In a tacit acknowledgement of their mistake, Scholar was promptly replaced after the mini budget by another official with significant Treasury experience, James Bowler.

Senior civil servants are not powerless. They can, and do, push back. For instance, if permanent secretaries believe a ministerial decision will breach certain criteria, they can seek a "ministerial direction", forcing ministers to compel them to pursue a policy despite the civil service's reservations. But officials have little recourse in the face of questionable behaviour by ministers. The latter is governed by the ministerial code, which is overseen by the prime min-

ister. A Committee on Public Standards poll in 2021 indicated that 85% of the senior civil service and 90% civil service graduates have no confidence in the regulation of the ministerial code. This damages the civil service's ability to attract and retain the best talent.

While ministerial directions are most commonly requested over value-for-money concerns, since 2018 they have been increasingly used for reasons of propriety, feasibility and because policies are believed to exceed a political mandate.

Weakening the independence of the civil service can also reduce trust in public institutions, which risks repelling businesses and investment and harming the UK's wider reputation. A 2022 OECD report showed that only 35% of the UK population trust the national government, which is lower than the OECD average (41%).

Gordon Brown's constitutional review for Labour indicates

**“Senior civil servants are not powerless - they can, and do, push back”**

that the opposition sees this as a dividing line with the Conservatives, with proposals including a new anti-corruption and anti-cronyism commissioner, a new independent integrity and ethics commission with the power to investigate breaches of a stronger code of conduct, and a new body to ensure

all appointments in public life are made on merit. These are reminiscent of some of the recommendations made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in 2021, including stronger rules and more independent regulation of the ministerial code.

On becoming PM, Sunak contrasted himself to Johnson by promising to govern with "integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level". Since then, he has scrapped the previous target of shrinking the civil service and restored civil service fast stream programmes for graduates, indicating a less hostile approach. This will go some way to restoring relations, but the reputations cannot be repaired overnight. Sunak also recently filled the position of the independent ethics adviser, critical to upholding the ministerial code, which had been vacant since Lord Geidt resigned in June. However, as Sunak decided against strengthening the adviser's role and ministerial code, the prime minister can still over-

ride advice and maintains the exclusive power to instigate investigations. There is consequently the risk that the newly appointed Sir Laurie Magnus could in future become the third consecutive adviser to resign over disagreements with the PM.

Strengthening the independence of the civil service through the appointments system, ensuring dismissal is based on performance rather than politics, and reinforcing accountability through a revised ministerial code are basic necessities. Credibly repairing some of the damage to the UK's governing institutions will mean Sunak must go beyond fine words and deliver reforms to strengthen vital checks and balances. ■

*Kelly Satchell is an ex-civil servant currently working as a senior associate in political due diligence at Global Counsel*



**“We are more clear-eyed about the future challenges we might face. We are absolutely more prepared to confront them”**



# RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES OF DIGITAL POLICYMAKING

In a recent speech, DCMS perm sec **Sarah Healey** said policymakers should be ambitious and act swiftly in the face of huge change. **Suzannah Brecknell** reports

**I**t's hard to predict the future. When American businessman Irving T Bush built a grand international trade centre in central London just after the First World War, he probably didn't expect that within a few decades, another war would force businesses out of what was then the most expensive building in the world. Taking the place of those firms, BBC newsreaders and radio presenters moved into Bush House, creating international connections of a different kind through the World Service.

Now the building belongs to King's College London and houses King's Business School - including a Department of Informatics, which brings together innovators from the worlds of technology and business. Given this rich and varied history, Bush House was a fitting backdrop for Sarah Healey, permanent secretary at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, as she took on the challenge of predicting the future in a recent speech exploring the challenges government might face as it makes digital policy in the years to come.

This was the second in a pair of lectures given by Healey to mark the start of a new partnership between DCMS and the Strand Group, part of King's College London. In the first, she defined digital policymaking as not about "the way govern-

ment uses digital technology to deliver its own services" but "the shorthand we use for policymaking in response to the massive transformation effected by digital technology on the world we live in."

She argued that over the last decade or so, the UK government has built a "coherent, consolidated capability" for digital policymaking. In both speeches, however, Healey cautioned against complacency, pointing out that while we may not know exactly what changes will come with new technologies, we know there will be more change.

"Because it's hard to imagine a different future, our default is to think we have been through the industrial revolution, come out the other side and never again will we see the changes we have so far," Healey said in her second speech. "You can see this assumption built into policy documents on technology throughout history and certainly in relation to the digital economy and society. Knowing this, we should learn the lessons of the last two decades of work on digital policy to ensure we are not caught unawares."

## Known unknowns

Healey set out three types of challenges which government may face in digital policymaking. First, there are those "we know we will face [because] we have



already experienced them to varying extents in these early years of policymaking in the information age”.

Next, there are challenges which “flow from those we have already experienced but will require a further expansion of our thinking, our capabilities and our ambition to exploit new opportunities and manage the totality of risk”.

Finally, there are those resulting from “seismic change” which we are not yet able to predict in any detail.

The challenges government has already faced around digital policymaking flow from the pace and breadth of change – new technologies are not only emerging quickly across all sectors and countries, but have unanticipated and interconnected impacts which policymakers need to understand if they are to respond effectively.

There has always been a lag between the emergence of new technologies and government’s response to the opportunities and harms they create, Healey argued, but the gap is more important when the change is so fast.

To close it, Healey suggested, the civil service needs to build new skills – “we will always lag behind real-world change if we cannot and do not build the knowledge and skills to better predict the potential impact of technology” – but it must also think differently about the tools it uses to speed up the pace of its responses.

On the first point, Healey said government needs more civil servants with a science and technology background who “can better understand the nature of new technology and better assess the impact it may have”.

She praised proposals to reform the Fast Stream to bring in a higher proportion of these individuals to the generalist policy profession but added that in order to retain these skills, the civil service must also create career paths and development offerings which will “recognise and reward their particular expertise”.

These skills must be brought in at all levels, she continued, echoing chief scientific adviser Sir Patrick Vallance’s call for “the same revolution in scientific capability across the civil service that was previously achieved for economic capability”.

Building capability needn’t rely on just bringing in new skills, she suggested, but also in creating ways for civil servants to access expertise externally.

In digital policymaking there has been a tendency to rely on tech companies to understand detail and impact of change, Healey said. “That is important, and close

links with industry must remain. But it is a single and partial view. To fully understand the potential impacts, the benefits and risks of new technologies, we need access to a broader range of opinions, of thinkers, of experts and critics.”

Here she pointed to the work of DCMS’s chief scientific adviser Tom Rodden in building a College of Experts to provide “deep, independent, external expertise to DCMS at all stages of the policymaking process”.

Alongside this expansion in science and technology skills, Healey argued for a wider spread of digital policy capability beyond the team in DCMS. The department will continue to have an important role, she said, particularly to “improve collaboration and coordination across government” but government must invest in capability across departments and consider how best to bring these teams together.

“Going forward, digital change is only going to burrow itself more deeply into the fabric of our society as new digital services emerge and more and more industries adopt a tech-led approach,” Healey said. “To provide a coherent policy

**“Because it’s hard to imagine a different future, our default is to think we have been through the industrial revolution, come out the other side and never again will we see the changes we have so far”**

response we must continue to invest in digital policy expertise across the whole of government and learn how to pull it together. Creating cross-departmental, multi-disciplinary teams to solve complex and long-term digital policy questions should, as the Declaration on Government Reform set out, become routine.”

#### **Old tools, new tricks**

Alongside new capabilities, Healey said digital policymakers will need to consider the tools they are using in order to keep pace with, and properly respond to, technological change.

Making policy, enacting legislation and implementing change can be slow processes, she said, with good reasons. Parliament must have “the time it needs to interrogate, amend or decline to pass laws

the government proposes”, and civil servants must properly fulfil legal duties – such as consultation – and develop a “thorough and prudent approach to implementation”, especially in emerging and novel areas.

Civil servants, she argued, should not seek to shorten these processes at the expense of “responsible policymaking”. Instead, they should look at other tools such as secondary legislation and smarter working with regulators and regulation to “mitigate against the risk that the pace of technological change is just too fast for responsible policymaking to keep up.”

Already, she said, regulators can be given responsibility to produce statutory codes “in lieu of prescribed detail in legislation”.

“Such tools allow public bodies to respond to changing technology in months rather than years, provided they stay within the broad principles and requirements of the overarching legal regime,” she said, pointing to the ICO’s Age-Appropriate Design Code as an example.

While tools like this present advantages for speed of response, Healey noted that “the cost for this agility is less parliamentary and government involvement in decisions and so, critics might say, less democratic accountability.” Ministers must therefore be advised on how to manage that risk and offer “safeguards for the use of regulation-making powers”.

Beyond closing the gap between change and response, Healey also suggested tools which would allow digital policymakers to take preventative action. “It has long been best practice for governments to encourage development of technology to design out problems in society as well as to work voluntarily with industry to address potential risks

and harms,” Healey said. “But the unique nature of how [information] technology is developed creates new opportunities.”

Government is increasing work with industry and international partners to shape the digital standards on which new technologies are based, for example through a DCMS-initiated AI Standards Hub, launched in October 2022.

“At its best, this approach will help us get ahead of the curve of tech change and, where we have to respond to events, can ensure we are future-proofing our interventions. It represents a necessary evolution in our policymaking capabilities in a digital age,” Healey said.

#### **Expansionary challenges**

While the first group of challenges Healey discussed revolved around the gap between





change and policy response, the second group stems from the need to look ahead and take decisions which will put the UK on a good footing for future changes.

With a nation's economic and social wellbeing now increasingly dependent on access to, creation of and fair distribution of digital innovation, she explained, digital policymakers must "expand how we think about the enablers of growth and societal wellbeing" and "try to predict what technology ecosystem is needed for the decades ahead".

Some of these enablers are already known and indeed have underpinned previous economic growth, she said. This includes elements like "a suitably skilled workforce or stable regulatory environments".

"But where I expect we are likely to see a difference is in the infrastructure needs of the future digital economy," Healey said. She added that while it will be for politicians to decide how to invest in future infrastructure needs, civil servants must ensure they are able to give the best quality advice to support those decisions.

Doing this will require both improved capabilities and processes in government, she argued. Civil servants must have the skills and the confidence to lean into the challenge of predicting the future infrastructure needs of an "increasingly digital and tech-enabled country," as well as being able to "understand and frame the novel political choices for ministers in designing digital infrastructure and its role in society – the democratic choices at the heart of how technology interacts with citizens".

Alongside this, digital policymak-

ers must "expand on how we develop investment cases so that we can better judge and advise ministers on the case for investing now in these novel enablers for economic growth," and they may need to drastically change the way they apply economics to digital policy.

But all of this good advice also requires the right processes in place to ensure it is being used, she suggested, and that "investment decisions to support long-term economic growth take full account of the likely importance of technology and digital infrastructure to our future economic success".

### World wide work

The global nature of digital change – and the resulting need for a global approach to digital policymaking – was a theme throughout both of Healey's speeches. She described governments as being at the "foothills" of the work needed to build the institutions and systems which can address challenges such as the intra-national impact of digital change and the unequal distribution of benefits from the information age.

"There are challenges in even like-minded states agreeing common positions, given competing domestic values and the concentration of the biggest tech companies within a few countries," she said.

In addition to the growing challenge of tech protectionism, Healey noted the risk that "digital policy issues go beyond the traditional wheelhouse of existing multilateral fora". Each of these organisations will tend to focus on one issue such as trade or security, she explained, and "we know this [approach] does not work for digital policy".

"Regardless of how we do it, I think

there is a need to look at well-established international governance models, like for [...] the facilitation of financial capital flows, and ask what capability might similarly be needed to enable a global response to issues like digital competition, data access and the safe and trusted use of AI and to ensure that response is guided by democratic values," she said.

Underlying this is the risk of a growing digital divide between developed and developing nations, which will "require us to expand the scope of the global conversation on technology change", Healey said. This expansion should ensure that the "digital dividend is experienced globally," to avoid the security and economic risks of growing digital inequality.

### Change beyond our imagination

As she closed the speech, Healey spoke of the seismic changes which are even harder to imagine and therefore respond to. "What if quantum technology leads to such a step change in computational productivity that previously impossible innovation becomes possible?" she asked. And what if AI makes our economy "unrecognisable" by transforming multiple industries, or augmented realities change "the very nature of our society and how we interact as humans?"

Imagining these changes may be hard, she suggested, but the principles of previous digital policymaking will hold good if governments remain ambitious and prompt in their response. Policymakers, both official and political, "should not assume in the face of monumental change that a policy response is impossible," Healey said, adding that "governments can and should shape the impact of transformative new technologies on our citizens".

This will require a "hard-headed" assessment about "the opportunity cost of not acting speedily enough" to ensure "difficult decisions for how we must respond as an institution are not delayed." It will require both unilateral and multilateral action globally, and a continued focus on expanding the technology and horizon-scanning capabilities of the civil service.

Though the future may be uncertain, Healey concluded, she is optimistic about it.

"Technology has brought incredible benefits to our society in these last 20 years. And while we have historically moved slower than we might have liked, we have shown that public administrations can step up to manage the harms that come with those benefits.

"We are more clear-eyed about the future challenges we might face. We are absolutely more prepared to confront them." ■



# RAISING THE BAR

DBS chief executive **Eric Robinson** talks transformation, what the civil service can learn from local government – and learning new recipes

**E**ric Robinson has learned a lot over the last couple of years – not least that his staff were “way more flexible” than he was when the world turned upside down in 2020.

“I’m one of these people who has worked for so long by coming into the office that it was harder for me personally to move to a more remote way of working,” the Disclosure and Barring Service chief exec adds.

The three and a half years since Robinson joined DBS – after a stint leading Wirral Borough Council – have been a time of profound change for the organisation, which carries out criminal-record checks for employers and decides if people must be barred from working in certain areas, such as with children. In that time, it has launched a new strategy, which he says has been implemented so successfully that it is now looking at launching a refreshed strategy next year.

But the “fast track of hybrid/remote working” brought about by the Covid pandemic has been one of the most transformative changes. “Staff had always wanted to work in a hybrid way,” he says. “And the fact that that had a significant positive effect on our performance was a big learning point for us as an organisation.”

The first year of the pandemic brought its challenges – with higher-than-anticipated demand for checks, the adjust-

ment to new working arrangements and high rates of staff absences, DBS fell shy of its turnaround targets for two out of three types of checks in 2020-21.

But overall, Robinson says flexible working arrangements have massively boosted productivity. In 2021-22, the organisation issued 7.1 million DBS certificates – up from 5.96 million in 2019-20, before the pandemic. Active subscribers to its Update Service climbed from 1.77 million to two million in that time, and it issued 81.8% of enhanced DBS certificates within 14 days – surpassing the government’s target of 80% and its own rate of 78.3% two years earlier. With a customer satisfaction index score of 81.4% in 2021, DBS was the highest-rated public sector organisation for customer satisfaction.

“I was struck because I didn’t expect performance to improve through people working from home; I thought, intuitively, it would probably dip. I was impressed by our staff being way more flexible than I was in terms of being able to deal with that,” he admits.

Hybrid working took some time to implement fully – while its 300 barring staff began working from home as soon as the March 2020 lockdown happened, it would be another 11 months before the disclosure service could begin working remotely. As

chair of DBS’s Gold Command, Robinson spent a lot of time alongside them in its Liverpool headquarters at the start of the lockdown to oversee its pandemic response. “It felt, in solidarity with them, I needed to be visibly in the office as well,” he adds.

But like most civil servants, he spent a great deal of the pandemic working from home – and while this was jarring at first, he learned to embrace the change

as, freed from his commute, it enabled him to explore new pursuits.

“I’m now the family cook – and I love it,” he says. “I was cooking

before but I would describe it as ‘samey’ and a bit perfunctory. Now, I’ll get a recipe out and try a few different things, increase my repertoire. It was something that you could spend more time on because if you’re working from home and you’re able to nip out to the shops in the day or whatever – it’s just very different. There’s something relaxing about doing another task.”

The love of cooking has stayed with him, he says. “I’m surprised how much I look forward to spending a couple of hours cooking and making new things. That’s an escape in itself from any pressure of work – certainly at the weekends, being able to spend a bit of time doing that and learning new tricks.”

DBS has now settled into a hybrid model, with different teams spending varied

**“Staff had always wanted to work in a hybrid way”**



**Speech** DBS's 2022 staff conference

amounts of time at home and in the office. Robinson sees it as a win-win for productivity and morale: “For some staff working from home improves performance because that flexibility allows them to work more effectively and at the times that they want.”

And offering flexible working has given DBS access to a nationwide recruitment pool. “So it’s almost as if we’ve done it and now we need to make sure that every aspect of the organisation is fit for that purpose – as opposed to a couple of years ago, when everybody was coming into the office five days a week and everybody worked and lived on Merseyside or around Darlington. Now we’re in a very different place.”

With that “established pattern” in place, DBS leadership is looking at what the rebalanced working arrangements will mean for the organisation long term – for contracts, engaging with staff, and for its infrastructure.

“So for example, we have two large buildings,” he says – referring to DBS’s bases in Liverpool and Darlington. “Do we still need that? Should we look at public sector hubs?”

**R**obinson’s career has been dominated, he says, by two themes: safeguarding and operational improvement. “They’re the things that get me out of bed in the morning in terms of making a difference,” he says.

His approach to leadership has been informed by years working on the frontline as a social worker, before moving into a series of managerial roles in local government and social services. He learned some valuable lessons as a director of social services in Enfield and later in Cambridgeshire, he

says. One was that “the management of the external environment was critical to the success of what you did internally”.

“There was that need to manage the world in which we operate, not just the insular world of the organisation, that struck home to me and has been relevant throughout my leadership experience,” he says. “One of the things we tried to do at the DBS is work with our stakeholders and partners in order to help them do the job they want to do, which in turn helps us do our job better.”

The years he spent in local authorities also taught him to value and leverage the knowledge and experience of the staff working under him. “That sense of how you empower staff to have a voice and then become as a result

a more effective and higher performing organisation was something I learned in my earlier leadership career,” he says.

Over his first nine months leading DBS, he held more than 50 “listen and learn” sessions with small groups of staff. “It wasn’t about me telling staff what we were going to do; it was more about asking them what we needed to do, what could make their ability to do their job easier and better,” he says.

That input, along with 41,000 responses to a consultation exercise that he calls the “big conversation” with stakeholders and staff, have helped to create DBS’s “sense of direction and strategy”, Robinson says.

Published in September 2020, the DBS 2025 Strategy set out five-year plans for the organisation – improving quality

through new “customer journeys”, switching suppliers and using technology more effectively; raising its profile and communicating more widely with the public; developing a diverse workforce and HR improvements; and making workplace improvements such as remote working, office upgrades and cutting environmental waste.

It came alongside a five-year technology roadmap, which aims to modernise services, deliver tech transformation and improve its IT services. Its goals include the creation of a new website and digital

portals; developing relationships with new IT suppliers; and improving infrastructure and remote access to checking systems.

Robinson says DBS has hit “every milestone” in the roadmap so far, putting it on track to meet its

goals by the 2025 deadline – despite the challenge of having to “continue to fly the plane whilst we’re building a new plane”.

“Because we have, historically, some quite old technology, the maintenance of that is quite a significant aspect for us keeping our service running and keeping things safe – and at the same time, we’re creating the new infrastructure that will enable us to leave the old ones and move to something else,” he says.

Meanwhile, the operational and performance improvements DBS has made mean it has “basically delivered all the things we said we’d do in the strategy in 2020 – I’m talking about 96% completed within 2.5 years”, Robinson says. It is now working on a refreshed strategy, which is set to launch

**“I learned if you empower staff you become a more effective organisation”**

in April. The chief exec can say little about it so far as it will require ministerial sign-off – though he says the focus will remain on the two key themes of safeguarding the public and being an excellently-run organisation, and that it will be “more ambitious”.

**M**inisterial oversight is one of the biggest contrasts Robinson draws between working in local and national government. “Local authorities have what’s called a ‘general power of competence’, which means that you have a lot more freedom locally to decide what you want to do and what your priorities are,” he says. Introduced by the Localism Act 2011, it gives councils the power to do anything an individual can do, as long as it is not prohibited by other legislation – enabling them to extend services and support into new areas, for example.

“When I was in local government, we could make our own policy and priorities, [although] we still had a legislative framework within which we needed to work,” Robinson explains.

By contrast, central government has “a greater demarcation between policy and the implementation and execution of that policy”. After four years as a local authority chief executive, the change in focus from policy development to implementation and effective delivery of set policy took some adjusting to. “There’s a sense that you’re very limited in terms of what you can change, in terms of what you do – but what you focus on therefore is the improvement of doing what you do,” Robinson says. Even as chief exec, he cannot decide to change the products DBS offers, or how it should meet safeguarding requirements – those must be decided by ministers.

Something else that took him by surprise was the relatively small number of people he came across who had made the same jump he had from local to central government, or vice versa.

“It feels like the sectors are very separate,” he says, despite an abundance of transferable skills and relationships “that could be built up that would improve both sectors” but are “significantly underplayed” at the moment.

For one, he says, the civil service could learn a lot from the innovation and creative thinking that is bred out of necessity at the local level. “You have to think differently in local government – you’re almost on your own and you have to decide how to solve problems,” he notes.

Bringing in talent from local government – as well as the private sector – can only benefit organisations like DBS, he



says. “It’s all linked to the benefits of diversity: those different views and perspectives and experiences which help enrich and improve organisations.”

**O**ne of the greatest challenges facing public services in the coming months will be dealing with the cost-of-living-crisis. Tensions over pay are coming to a head, with a growing number of unions staging strikes; while many public sector organisations are having to look hard at their services as spiralling inflation and energy costs erode their budgets.

DBS is one of 123 civil service organisations facing walkouts after members of the PCS union voted to strike over pay, along with other issues like job security and pensions. While it has not yet faced sustained industrial action, it will be hit by a one-day civil service-wide strike on 1 February, and could face further strikes if disputes are not resolved and the union continues to escalate its action.

“Pay is an issue that – before cost-of-living [increases] and the recent national issues around inflation – has been something that both me and the board has been very conscious of,” Robinson says.

But with pay rises constrained by cross-government pay remit guidance,

he notes the ALB’s influence in this area is “extraordinarily limited”. “We can only tinker at the edges a bit rather than actually answer any of the fundamental things... but this isn’t just DBS or the civil service, it’s everywhere, the issues around inflation and therefore pay and remuneration are significant issues we’ll need to deal with over the coming year.”

“What we’ve done is to make sure that our staff have a good offer, not just in pay but in terms of the benefits of working at the DBS. We’ve done a lot over the past few years to enhance that.” He points again to hybrid working, as well as an academy launched at the end of last year to improve learning and development opportunities.

As for inflationary pressures, DBS has fared better than many other public bodies thanks to the operational improvements, Robinson says – but the organisation is not entirely insulated from external pressures. “The issue for us is that the world out there is much more volatile and therefore that affects the demand for our services, which in turn then affects our income,” Robinson explains. As employers are hit by rising energy costs and financial constraints, they are hiring fewer people who might need DBS certificates. DBS has been seeing a slight reduction in applications each month, Robinson says. “So the volatility of the market caused by cost of living, inflation and more general economic downturn is something that’s much more of a worry to us financially than internal aspects of the cost of living.”

Despite these challenges, DBS is managing to break even – and even run a surplus at times – even after lowering the fees for its checks by up to 31% in some cases. “With the cost-of-living issues and inflation, we’ve been able to subsume those into our operating costs at the moment without any significant pressure on us in terms of our overall finances,” Robinson says. He counts the double-digit reductions in fees as a “significant achievement”, especially amid those trying circumstances.

Asked about his other highlights in the job to date, the chief exec points to a few milestones – a new disclosure approach for youth offenders; a change in suppliers; projects that were completed ahead of schedule.

But more than anything, he says he is proud of the continual, incremental changes he has seen in the organisation. “It’s one thing to focus on something and then it improves for a while and then goes back to where it was,” he says. “But we have consistently and sustainably improved what we’ve done over the past three years and I’m very pleased and proud of that.” ■



# Starting the year with inclusivity

GDS apprentice **Samaira Uddin** shares her thoughts on the importance of bringing one's whole self to work, and how colleagues and managers can be true allies to civil servants with disabilities

**T**wenty two per cent of the UK population report having a disability and 13.6% of civil servants declare themselves as disabled. It is important that we do what we can to better understand, support and celebrate our colleagues with disabilities. As we enter 2023, the value in fostering inclusivity and creating an environment where everyone feels comfortable bringing their whole selves to work should be a target for all of us.

**Understanding disability awareness**

Disability awareness is not limited to the workplace: having knowledge about disability advocacy is useful both professionally and personally. Whether you yourself are disabled, you manage someone who is disabled, you are a carer or even just know of someone with a disability, it is important to understand the challenges they face on a day to day basis.

Learning and applying the Social Model of Disability can be the first step to identifying the obstacles many disabled people face. Many forms of allyship that relate to disability are done from the basis of charity and saviour mentality. It is important to understand and reflect on if you are advocating because you accept that the systems in place are not inclusive of disabled people. By recognising this, we can move towards true progress. A great example of amending systems to be more accessible are the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines which are an internationally recognised set of recommendations for improving web accessibility. They explain how to make digital services, websites and apps accessible to everyone – including users with disabilities.

**Non-visible disabilities**

Not all disabilities are visible. Non-visible disabilities range from mental health conditions to cognitive impairments to physical health conditions such as chronic pain. Creating a space where people feel comfortable talking about their disability is a fundamental part of ensuring everyone at work feels like they can do their day job with ease and comfort. Developing an environment for open conversations around disability and preferred ways of working is critical in fostering inclusivity, the way one disabled person prefers to work cannot be generalised for all disabled people.

**Ensuring accessibility in the workplace**

Familiarising yourself with small, everyday actions that can make a big difference in maintaining inclusivity and accessibility is a responsibility for everyone. Including alternative (‘alt’) text on images in your work helps colleagues who use screen readers to access and understand visual content such as images and graphs. Alt text ensures a similar experience for all. Another way to ensure inclusivity in the workplace is to check the accessibility of collaboration tools before using them. This ensures everyone can take part in activities.

Accessibility is a key part of the set-up of meetings, events and workshops. For example, avoiding standing up (gathered around a screen, wall or whiteboard) or having alternative seating options available. It is often hard for people to stand still for a long time due to specific visible and non-visible disabilities and long-term health conditions. Sharing powerpoints, agendas and reading materials prior to meetings help colleagues prepare, plan and set expectations as taking in information on the spot can be difficult.

Exploring more accessible ways of working should be a priority for all. Simply researching and understanding more about different ways of working can help to make everyone feel welcome and included.

Disability History Month (November-December) and International Day of People with Disabilities (3 December) are landmark dates highlighting the importance of why we need to think more about inclusivity. Learning about the significance of these events provides background on the history and struggle disabled people have faced.

**Use of language**

Language is a fundamental part of the Social Model of Disability because language reflects the cultural assumptions and thinking of society as we know it. The

**LEARNING CURVE**

“Be open to learning, you are not expected to know everything. Being an ally is a journey. Don’t be afraid to make mistakes: an imperfect ally is better than no ally. Attend awareness training, disability meetings or workshops to understand the issues facing those with access needs. Take those examples back to any project you are working on, challenge assumptions, challenge the status quo, just because ‘we have always done it like that’ doesn’t mean it’s the right/accessible way to do it.”

*Leona Atkins, Severely Visually Impaired (registered as blind), Software Developer*

**“Familiarising yourself with small actions that can make a big difference is a responsibility for everyone”**

power of language indicates the value put on different identities and the way in which we see each other. The evolution of language means that our vocabulary has developed in the same way society has. Language referring to disabled people in the past was often derogatory and used negatively. It is important that language is inclusive when written and spoken. Examples of how language has developed is the use of the term “able-bodied”. This term suggests

that every person with a disability does not have an “able body” – instead the term “non-disabled” should be used.

**Become a disability ally**

Ensuring everyone feels that they can bring their whole selves to work should be a priority for all. There are many things you can do to become a disability ally, for example creating a safe and welcoming environment to have open and honest conversations about disabilities will help to foster an inclusive workplace culture. Talk to your colleagues and find out if your department has a Disability Network or join the Civil Service Disability Network. Attending workshops and completing Civil Service Learning on becoming disability confident provides a solid foundation to learn more about how to support disabled people. Research accessibility, think about disabled colleagues when working and learn about the impact of language. Start 2023 thinking about inclusivity. ■

*Samaira Uddin is a PR and communications apprentice in the Government Digital Service’s internal communications team*

**FREE TO BE ME**

“Most of my experience of depression and anxiety as it relates to work comes down to being misunderstood and forced to work in ways that do not work for me. When we have to hide who we are we can’t do our best work and can burn out very easily”

*Nick Colley, Neurodivergent, Accessibility Specialist*

# SURVEYING THE LANDSCAPE



Amid a rapidly changing regulatory landscape, watchdogs can never be complacent. In a recent CSW and PA Consulting webinar, experts and regulators shared how they are adapting to new challenges

**M**uch has changed in the UK regulatory landscape over the past few years, with the decision to leave the European Union creating opportunities to do things differently and the Grenfell Tower disaster exposing a building-safety regime unfit for purpose.

However, developments faced by regulators are broader still, taking in elements of the public sector's response to the Covid pandemic and the growing use of artificial intelligence. CSW brought together sector experts to discuss the state of regulation in the UK for a recent webinar, in partnership with PA Consulting.

Research by the professional-services

firm gives the UK regulatory sector much to be reassured about. A recent survey found 70% of regulated businesses felt watchdogs were effective in meeting their remit – based on a sample group of 500 leaders. Meanwhile, more than three-quarters of general-public respondents to the survey said they believed the UK has regulation that is up to the job.

Natalie Prosser is chief executive of newly-created regulator the Office for Environmental Protection, which was set up under the Environment Act 2021 to hold government and public bodies to account for environmental protection, the quality of law related to the environment and its enforcement.

She said her experience of creating the organisation over the past year has been that while UK business may not have

much appetite for more regulation, there is a hunger for “really good” regulation.

“In our sector, where we’re dealing with really severe environmental challenges, the best of industry want to invest and they want to innovate,” Prosser said.

“But in order to create the safety to do that, they want certainty in terms of regulatory futures: what the laws are going to be and, crucially, how they will be implemented.

“The feedback is that good businesses do not want non-compliance to create a competitive advantage. They want a level playing field. And that is really positive in our sector, not just for growth but for green growth as well.”

Prosser said the idea that regulation is largely about using enforcement is a frequent misunderstanding by the public –



as well as by some officials and ministers.

“Good regulation is far more than enforcement,” she said. “Enforcement is part of the toolkit, and it’s an important part in some contexts. But it’s really only part of the picture.”

She added: “I’ve seen that simplistic understanding in government as well: but good regulators know that effective regulation is about enabling those who want to do well, removing barriers, and getting out of the way of responsible business and focusing your attention hard on areas either where it’s ‘can’t do’ or ‘won’t do.’”

Prosser said the real skill of regulation is “truly understanding the dynamic of the situation in front of you so you can best tailor your response” in order to reduce

**“Good businesses do not want non-compliance to create a competitive advantage. They want a level playing field”**  
**Natalie Prosser, OEP**

public harms and promote public benefits.

Michael Hanton, deputy chief regulator at Ofqual, said he hoped one positive outcome from the coronavirus pandemic would be a growing appreciation of the important role regulators play in protecting society’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

He said the exams and qualifications watchdog seeks to put real focus on the people it exists to protect: students and apprentices – and particularly the most disadvantaged among them.

Hanton, who is also a director at fledgling professional body the Institute of Regulation, said that in common with other regulators, Ofqual is keen to enable growth and innovation in its sector, with the main issue being how to do that safely.

“Regulation is such a powerful tool in enabling innovation and growth,” he said. “At Ofqual, of course we want innovation that’s in the interests of students. Of course we want innovation that is going to improve how young people are assessed and that is going to make assessments fairer.”

“What we’re trying to do is enable markets to function well in the interests of those that use them.”

Hanton said Ofqual is particularly keen to know if any of its rules are obstacles to good innovation.

“Often, it’s not the presence of rules that is the question. I think it’s about where those that are regulated feel that there is

# 70%

of business think regulators are effective



by 22 percentage points (pp) since 2018

# 78%

fully understand the purpose and role of regulators



by 32 pp

# 76%

respect regulators



by 22 pp

# 76%

of citizens understand regulators’ role



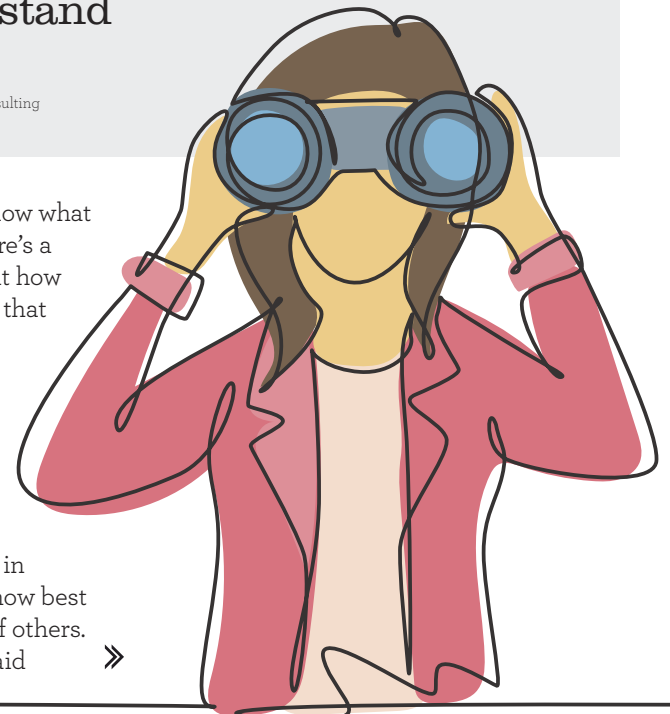
by 13 pp

Statistics taken from research carried out by PA Consulting and published in “Rethinking Regulators 2023”

ambiguity,” he said. “They don’t know what we as a regulator would think. There’s a question for regulators to ask about how we can reduce ambiguity for those that are regulated when they’re looking at innovative approaches.”

Conrad Thompson, regulation and innovation lead at PA Consulting, said the firm’s work suggested regulators need to “really rethink” their remit and priorities; try their utmost to “walk in stakeholders’ shoes”; and explore how best to get leverage through the work of others.

On the last point, Thompson said >>



a “platform thinking” approach is required that will involve exploring the benefits of common technology and more “componentised” ways of working, including collaboration with other industry bodies to maximise impact.

“Some of the work that we’ve done with building-safety regulations is a really great example of how they are going about addressing the Grenfell challenges by setting up a platform that allows everyone to share safety data far more easily as the real enabler to address risks in the future,” he said.

OEP’s Prosser said the environmental regulator is very fortunate to have a broad and active stakeholder community, which it has “really lent on” for support.

“We are a product of EU exit and some of the positive feedback we’ve had is that because we’re so much better connected with all of our stakeholders – whether it’s government, those we oversee, NGOs and the public – we’re able to act in a much more nuanced

way,” she said. “We can move at a greater pace than the EU Commission was able to. And that’s been a real benefit.”

Prosser said the OEP’s strategy of focusing on stakeholder feedback, being transparent and building confidence in the organisation is bearing fruit.

She added that the OEP’s purpose has been embedded among staff “from the get-go”. “If you ask anyone at the OEP, I can guarantee they can quote to you in a heartbeat exactly what our purpose is, and

again” at its remit from parliament and reflected on why it had been set up, to ensure there was “real clarity”.

He said the move was accompanied by a listening tour in which he, Saxton and other colleagues travelled the country and met more than 100 school leaders and countless learners to better understand their priorities and concerns about qualifications.

“It directly helped us make good policy decisions,” he said. “In particular, it really helped us to think about how we communicate. So one of our objectives is to promote public confidence in how qualifications operate. It’s at the heart of why parliament created us.”

The use of artificial intelligence is an area in which PA Consulting’s Thompson suggested regulators need to be on the front foot.

“Regulators have a really important role to play, at the very least in just bringing to light what is going on in the market today,” he said. “I suspect citizens get more fearful than really they should be about how AI is being used; equally, it is legitimate that they should be worried about how it might be being used in the future.”

Ofqual’s Hanton agreed, citing “huge challenges” in terms of fairness and bias. Nevertheless, he suggested traditional evaluation practices – for students, at least – will prove hard to abandon.

“We need to have skills, but we also need to understand where society is at, what it’s ready for, and what it’s right for us to consider being addressed through AI and what is simply not appropriate,” he said.

He added that it is hard to see a point in the future where the quality of children’s handwriting is not part of assessment. “Human markers are really important,” he said.

Thompson wound up the event by citing a cherished slice of regulator pro-activity: Civil Aviation Authority chief executive Andrew Haines’s 2017 decision to “call out” Ryanair on *Sky News* over the budget airline’s compensation practices for passengers affected by delays and cancellations.

“I’m sure they thought about it a lot. I’m sure they had their lawyers going over the implications, and obviously had the backing of the DfT,” he said. “But I thought it was a brilliant example of regulators stepping up and doing what us as citizens would want them to do.”

Ryanair changed its rules within a week, Thompson said. ■

**“We need to understand where society is at, what it’s ready for, and what it’s right for us to consider being addressed through AI and what is simply not appropriate” Michael Hanton, Ofqual**

that importance of contributing to environmental protection through holding other parts of government to account,” she said.

Ofqual’s Hanton said that when Jo Saxton became chief regulator in 2021, the organisation had “looked



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# A NEW PERSPECTIVE

**Jonathan Black**, Heywood Fellow, tells CSW about his plans to take a fresh look at a major policy challenge

**I**t can be hard to describe the last few years without falling back on cliché or that dreaded word – unprecedented. But Jonathan Black, formerly the UK government’s sherpa for G7 and G20 and now the second holder of the Heywood Fellowship, has a nice phrase to capture what it has been like.

“When you step back and look at the last few years, compared to the years before,” he says, “the number of momentous events has been much more concentrated.”

Over those momentous years, a common challenge has been recurring in the policy areas which Black has been working on – the increasingly complex relationship between national security and economic prosperity.

“This intersection between national security and economic prosperity is probably the underlying systemic policy challenge that countries like ours face,” Black says, and in his most recent role working with the G7 and G20 countries, he sat right at the intersection. Working with colleagues from across the world, he says: “We did a lot that was good, some really innovative policy.

“But I also found myself thinking: there are some really big questions about the way we go about making policy that we need to think about, [questions] that are going to become more important as time

goes on – it would be great just to have time to think about those a bit more.”

Black is speaking to CSW from the Blavatnik School of Government in Oxford, where he is about to do just that through his Heywood Fellowship – a research posting created in memory of late cabinet secretary Lord Jeremy Heywood.

The fellowship is supported by the Heywood Foundation, and the idea for it grew from Lord Heywood’s own experience of taking time out for study and reflection part-way through his career.

Lady Heywood, chair of the foundation, tells CSW that after working in then-chancellor Norman Lamont’s private office and helping to manage the fallout from Black Wednesday, Jeremy was “pretty burnt out, as you can imagine”.

The Treasury’s then-permanent secretary Terry Burns arranged for Heywood to take part in a short management development programme at Harvard. This gave him an opportunity to “step away from Whitehall and learn all about restructuring organisations,” and the weeks spent in a different environment were very valuable to him.

The fellowship, Lady Heywood says, aims to give senior civil servants a similar opportunity. “We aim to find somebody who wants to take some time

between roles and look at a meaningful piece of policy which is not necessarily top of the agenda," she says.

There is a public element to the posting – fellows are expected to give a speech exploring some of their work – but they also produce a report which can remain confidential.

The first Heywood fellow was former chief Brexit negotiator and Department for Exiting the European Union

Next, he says, the team will be talking to others grappling with this challenge to understand how it impacts different parts of government and business. Although the team is small, Black is keen to "use the space that the fellowship's giving me and those of us working on it to be able to curate a really open engagement and dialogue."

"This challenge is very relevant to policymaking and some of the big questions that government faces," Black

cymaking process to better address challenges identified, and produce a report to share with government.

"We're not going to claim that we are going to completely solve this challenge in the next few months," says Black, "but I hope by looking at some interesting areas and making some recommendations based on who we speak to, our research and also our own experience, we can make some practical and pragmatic conclusions that are useful



**"This intersection between national security and economic prosperity is probably the underlying systemic policy challenge that countries like ours face"**

perm sec Sir Olly Robbins, who took up the fellowship in 2019 and considered the role of cabinet secretary.

Black himself also worked on EU negotiations with Robbins – in fact, as he puts it, he has often been in "the right place at the right time to work on some of the most complicated and challenging issues" government has faced in the last decade and more.

This included working on fiscal policy and the budget in the Treasury after the financial crisis, then on European issues both before and after Brexit in the Cabinet Office. After a period working on the Covid response in the Cabinet Office, he took up position as sherpa to the G7 and G20 at a time when UK held the presidency of both G7 and Cop26. He describes working on these major topics as an immense privilege, but is also excited by the change to step back from momentous events for a few months.

The fellowship is also supported by the Blavatnik School of Government, Hertford College, Oxford the Economic and Social Research Council and by the civil service itself.

As such, Black will be working with a small team including another civil servant and researcher funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, as well as colleagues at Blavatnik. The team has set out three stages for its work, Black says.

In the first, it will look at academic analysis and other research to test his proposition that "the intersection between national security and economic prosperity is more complicated, or at least much more intertwined, than it has been in the past."

says. "But it's also very relevant to business and some of the big questions they face – commercial questions about their investments and things like that.

"So one of the things that we will look at is how that relationship needs to evolve in a world where geopolitics is a much more dominant feature of the global economy, and when there is necessarily a different relationship between government and business than the one we've perhaps had over the last few decades."

Finally, the team will test propositions about how to adapt the poli-

for us to pick up back in government."

This ambition – to think deeply but remain practical and pragmatic – echoes much of what Heywood himself was renowned for.

"Jeremy fostered a sense of policy problem solving being a sort of force for good," Black recalls. "His desire to challenge and question spread throughout the civil service, as well as his desire to be innovative."

"For any civil servant of my generation, Jeremy was the defining figure," he adds, "and it's genuinely a huge privilege to do to do this fellowship in his name." ■

## EYES ON THE PRIZE

Alongside the fellowship, the Heywood Foundation runs an annual prize seeking policy ideas to improve life in the UK.

The Heywood Prize offers winners up to £25,000 and the chance of their idea being implemented by government. It is open to submissions until 28 February.

The winning idea from 2020-21 – the creation of the NHS Reserve Force – has been applied by the health service.

In 2022, the foundation put extra focus on encouraging entries from younger generations with the addition of a youth prize.

The foundation's top pick will receive £25,000, with runner-up awards of between £1,000 and £10,000 also up for grabs.

This year's round includes a separate youth prize for under-21s, worth between

£500 and £5,000. Young entrants will also be eligible for the £25,000 prize.

"Building on the success of the inaugural Heywood Prize in 2021, in 2022 we also want to tap into the often unseen and unheard insights and creativity of our younger generations," said Suzanne Heywood, chair of the Heywood Foundation and widow of Jeremy Heywood.

"Never has the need to bring their bold, new ways of thinking to the attention of policymakers been more important than it is today," she added.

The winner's suggestion will also be passed on to government policymakers, with the foundation's full backing for fast-tracking.

To find out more visit:  
[www.heywoodfoundation.com/contest/](http://www.heywoodfoundation.com/contest/)

HAVE I GOT

# SCHMOOZE

FOR YOU

The Junior Leaders Networking Events Team won the Developing and Supporting People Award at the 2022 Civil Service Awards. Here, JLNE's **Funke Oham** offers some networking tips for those hoping to get on in their careers and leave a lasting impression on colleagues

**I**n the Junior Leaders Networking Events Team, we are passionate about learning, skills development and strengthening capability. One way we do this is through our networking opportunities.

Whatever your career stage, as you kick off the new year, now is a good time to reflect on why, where, when and how you plan to network. Here are our top four tips on making the most from your networking opportunities in 2023.

## Why

One analogy suggested individuals can use their money as follows: spend some, save some and invest some. This can apply to networking too. Networking can be approached from either of these angles or a combination: networking based on one's current needs, future needs or on the needs of others in our circle. Being aware of the benefits it can have on your personal and professional development can keep you motivated

when networking seems arduous.

Networking is your chance to shine. American businesswoman Christine Comaford describes it as marketing – marketing yourself, your uniqueness and what you stand for.

If you ever feel like backing away from a chance to network, here is a reminder: you are worth seeing. Network today, network tomorrow and network in the future.

## Where

It is important to consider traditional and non-traditional networking opportunities. New to networking? Some ideas include career events, Civil Service Live, professional associations, departmental events, public-speaking events, staff networks, alumni events, volunteering, social events and continuous professional development events. This can be done in person and virtually. Social outlets including LinkedIn and Twitter are also great places to network.

Are you an avid networker? Ask

**“Having a networking plan of action will ensure you are intentional and work towards achieving your goals”**

yourself, where else can I network this year? Who can introduce me to new networking channels? What cross-disciplinary networks can I tap into? Where do the people I would like to meet hang out? Once you have identified suitable opportunities, note them down.

## When

Networking is based on forming and building relationships. It takes time, commitment and consistency. Having a networking plan of action will ensure you are intentional and work towards achieving your goals. Equally, seize and maximise impromptu networking opportunities.

Networking before you need it will



## HOW WE GOT HERE

In 2016, eight civil servants on the Civil Service Local Future Leaders Academy recognised that the civil service had talented staff at junior grades, spotting the benefits of networking and learning opportunities. Drawing on the “Brilliant Civil Service” vision, their project created the Junior Leaders Networking Events (JLNE). The programme offered career development guidance to help the civil service identify, develop and retain a diverse cadre of talented staff at junior grades (AO-EO). Over a 12-month period, participants had the opportunity to build their peer networks, access support from senior leaders and develop strategies to enhance their career development.

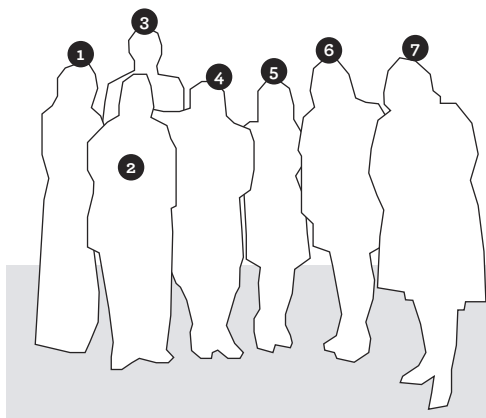
Over the years, JLNE continued to evolve and, following the Covid-19 pandemic, the team had to respond in an agile fashion to ensure JLNE activities could continue. In addition to their day jobs, the team adapted its offer from four face-to-face events (with 300 registrations) within the east, southeast and London region to a national offer for an online audience with 4,000+ registration across 21 virtual bite-sized sessions. Pivoting online meant JLNE could be accessible to a more regionally diverse cadre of colleagues.

Evaluations show 80% of attendees had done something differently based on their participation. Ten percent also reported promotions, increased confidence, clearer goals and professional growth.

JLNE has impacted colleagues across 14 departments and several agencies, thus ensuring our junior talent in the civil service is retained, and that junior staff have access to developmental opportunities and feel valued.

Feedback from the JLNE community demonstrates this. As one JLNE member put it: “The biggest impact this group had on me, and others, is its commitment to supporting and lifting the aspirations of junior leaders across the civil service. It promotes camaraderie, knowledge-sharing and openness in a relaxed and trusted environment. With the knowledge and confidence I gained, I looked for promotion options and in February 2021 gained my HEO.”

Senior civil servants also see the value. According to Bernadette Thomson OBE, a former deputy director at the Department for Levelling up, Housing and Communities: “This is an invaluable forum giving the opportunity for senior leaders to inspire the pipeline and pay forward.”



- 1 Nafesa Salah-ud-Din, *Cabinet Office*
- 2 Jane Fowler, *HMRC*
- 3 Paul Kett, *Director general, skills group, Department for Education*
- 4 Sandra Hutchinson, *HMRC*
- 5 Funke Oham, *Home Office*
- 6 Maria Lawson, *partner, Baringa*
- 7 Tricia Hayes, *second permanent secretary, Home Office*

stand you in good stead when you do need it. Utilise your plan of action to determine when you should network and the frequency. Then, just do it!

It is important to give back as much as you receive in networking relationships. Remember, networking isn't a once and done affair! It is important to make and keep new contacts and never burn your bridges (unless there is a good reason to).

### How

Leadership expert Michael Hyatt said when you know your *why*, you'll know your way. Knowing why you are networking will help you clarify the best way to approach it. Networking is like a marmite experience – people either love it or hate it.

Feeling awkward or nervous is a common ordeal for many people. Is this you? Be rest assured you are not alone. A good starting point is finding someone you can strike a conversation with; through a smile, paying them a genuine compliment, finding common

ground, ask an interesting question or for help. Then listen. Don't forget to keep in touch and do thank them.

Consider practicing your elevator pitch – a brief speech on who you are, what you do and plan to do. It is usually succinct, and you should aim to deliver this in sixty seconds. Love networking? Do remember to look out for anyone looking uneasy and step in; share your knowledge, invite them to join your conversation or introduce them to your network.

Good luck! ■

***JLNE has come this far based on the support of our dedicated volunteers, senior leaders and cross-government staff networks. We are looking to grow our award-winning team and expand our offer. Can you commit a few hours a month, help with one-off events, or join our steering group? If so, email us at [Funke.Oham@homeoffice.gov.uk](mailto:Funke.Oham@homeoffice.gov.uk) with your name, department, what you can offer JLNE and what you hope to gain.***

# Special Delivery



With big savings and a better citizen experience up for grabs, the NAO's **Alec Steel** offers practical advice on using information to improve service delivery



I recently renewed my passport. Within six days I had my freshly inked passport and was ready to travel. Contrast with headlines from 2022 when the media warned of delays and backlogs. It got me thinking. Perhaps demand for passports had dropped? Maybe the Passport Office's performance information told it what problems to fix? Did it radically change the service? Maybe I just got lucky?

What it does tell me is that managing and improving government services is a complicated, tricky task. Whether it be people applying for a passport, benefits, business grants or people using A&E departments in hospitals, each service has its own challenges. But the service provided is where policy intent becomes reality. It is what people experience and how they get the help they need. So getting the service right, and improving it, makes a real difference to people.

But it is not easy. For a start, government cannot just provide services for those with the simplest and easiest needs to meet. A one-size-fits-all approach which works for the majority can impact vulnerable people the most. On top of this, government organisations are feeling the pressure on public finances. That pressure is not going away and there is a huge financial prize. Government expects to spend around £400bn in each of the next three years on providing services, grants and administration. Even small changes have the potential for significant financial savings and service impact.

It can be tempting to look at service improvement and efficiency purely through your own organisation's lens. Having fewer people, stopping services or doing what seems right in your organisation's eyes. But what happens after you make that one-off saving and start having to deal with unintended knock-on effects with problems, added demands and extra costs from elsewhere? How do you make sure you don't push problems in other areas or delay dealing with them to another time? How do you improve services and reduce costs in a sustainable way?

Government can achieve that if it improves the quality of services by changing how it provides them. That helps reduce cost and improve efficiency. You spend less time fixing problems or doing workarounds. Or, worse still, continuing with sticking plaster measures for so long that they become the norm.

In my role at the NAO I have worked across government seeing how services work and the challenges that people are dealing with. Our current series of good

practice guides on improving services is our way of sharing that insight with government.

There are three basics that government struggles with: understanding demand, using information to improve performance and systematic improvement. Get these fundamentals right and you will know what work is coming, spot when things are going right or wrong, and make changes that help you meet service challenges. Doing that well has to be part of how organisations work all the time, so you can manage the service in an informed way. It is not just for when there are backlogs or financial pressures.

Take using information to improve performance. That is about understanding how the service is performing and deciding what to change, why and how. You need the right information, in all parts of the service, to know if performance is going in the right direction. Without that insight you can make changes, but that is not the same as improving. So what does using information to improve look like in practice?

First, start measuring what matters to the people that use your service. That seems obvious and simple. But you need to accept that what matters to you can be quite different from what matters to the people using your service. What people think of your service and what they experience is often unseen. To demonstrate, in 2020

## **“You need to accept that what matters to you can be quite different from what matters to the people using your service”**

HMRC was dealing with unprecedented levels of customer complaints about PAYE. It discovered customers felt uneasy because of a lack of visibility on what was happening with their complaint. HMRC then introduced SMS messaging to update customers on progress, which reduced the number calls chasing progress by 18% and improved customer satisfaction by 7%.

Second, understand the reasons for service performance. Knowing you have not provided a service on time is one thing, but you need to know why, otherwise any changes you make are guess work. The Department for Education created a way to predict expected timeliness of responses to Parliamentary Questions. It identified from its case management system what it needed to do by when to answer a Parliamentary Question in time. This predictive measure of expected timeliness allows them to offer support when it is needed and train teams on how to improve the speed of their responses.

Third, give people providing services

the skills to use performance information. That needs capability in analysing data, such as how to spot signals from noise in performance data, and a working environment that encourages curiosity and learning. Trying new ideas and learning from that should be the norm. You might not have all the information you would like, but simple insight can help you decide how to change. For example, how often do people provide everything you need to complete a process step? Team conversations about performance information also need to be future focused. What questions do people ask about performance? Are they about output and what has happened or, more helpfully, about the why behind performance, quality of work and ideas on how to change?

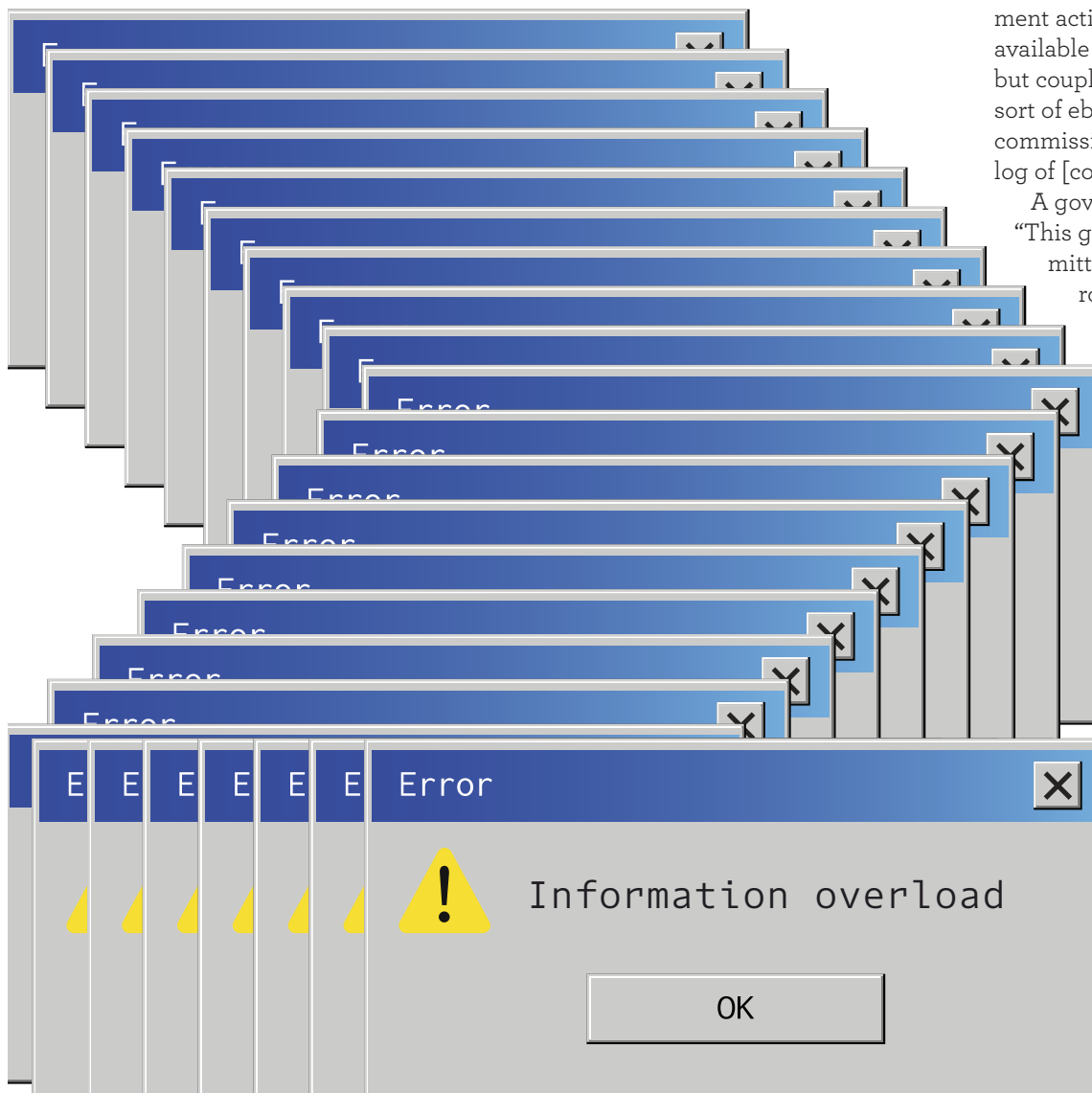
Of course, using information to improve performance is only one part of the puzzle for improving services. Being good at it in isolation has limited impact. Improving service needs you to integrate capability in using information with understanding demand and systematic improvement, the two other guides in our series. Getting these three areas right is not easy – but the size of the prize is worth it. And maybe a week to renew a passport will be the new norm one day. ■

***Alec Steel is the head of operational management at the National Audit Office***

***Download the NAO's guide to improving services by using information here: [bit.ly/3XmG2B1](https://bit.ly/3XmG2B1)***



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ment action or to use enforcement powers available to the information commissioner, but coupled with that, there has been a sort of ebb and flow where the information commissioner has built up a huge backlog of [complaints] cases to deal with”.

A government spokesperson said: “This government remains fully committed to its transparency agenda, routinely disclosing information beyond its obligations under the FOI Act, and releasing more proactive publications than ever before.”

### Transparency tribulations

Last year, the ICO ran a consultation seeking feedback from the public on how it handles and prioritises information complaints. It is looking for ways to improve Freedom of Information casework services so information rights work more effectively than at present.

“The present system means cases are taking a long time to complete, which ultimately hinders the delivery of effective transparency and open government,” the watchdog said.

Part of the problem is that the ICO still partially delivers the same service as in 2005, when information-

access rights came into effect, according to Warren Seddon, ICO director of FOI and transparency. Over those 17 years, however, there has been a “pretty significant increase” in the number of the complaints.

At the same time, according to Freeguard, requesters have also become more sophisticated in the last 17 years, so requests are more complicated.

This has led to a perfect storm situation, with limited funding, a higher FOI caseload for the ICO and what the regulator itself describes as an “increased need to support stretched public authorities”.

Baines said that for those seeking support from the ICO in ensuring public bodies fulfil their transparency obligations, the last three or four years have been particularly bad.

“If you had made an FOI request to a public authority, and you wanted

A ‘perfect storm’ of factors helped create a significant backlog of information-access complaints – but the data watchdog has a plan to improve. **Katherine Hapgood** takes a closer look

**F**or an “incredibly basic” and routine public records request, Gavin Freeguard found it troublesome to obtain the information he required.

Four months after submitting a request to the Cabinet Office for the list of members on committees, Freeguard – a freelance consultant specialising in data and policy, and an experienced Freedom of Information requester – received a refusal.

He questioned the grounds of refusal, and the Cabinet Office’s reasoning changed several times. Freeguard eventually gave up and did not file a complaint with the Information Commissioner’s Office, the UK’s independent regulator for data protection and information rights law.

Experts and frequent requesters have noticed increasing challenges with FOI requests, exacerbated by the pandemic.

Jon Baines, senior data protection expert at law firm Mishcon De Reya, said that, “in the last 10 years, government departments especially realised that they didn’t have to comply, because there was no risk of non-compliance, no risk of enforcement action”.

He added that the ICO “has not been robust enough, it’s been too tolerant of lack of compliance by public authorities, there’s been an unwillingness to take enforce-

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a determination from the information commissioner, which is your statutory right – their statutory obligation – at one point there was a 12-month waiting list before they would even pick a case up to look at it,” he said.

#### Priority cases

The ICO has set criteria for the consultation – which closed on 19 December – including questions regarding the public-interest value of FOIs, the effect on vulnerable groups, and operational benefits.

“What we’re talking about is an improved quality of service for everyone,” said Seddon. “There will also be more stringent deadlines set for prioritised cases.”

The proposed changes would mean the ICO will attempt to allocate priority cases

within four weeks and complete 90% of all cases within six months, including complaints made under the FOI Act and the Environmental Information Regulations.

However, this prioritisation does not mean predetermination of the outcome of cases in the system. According to Seddon, caseworkers will facilitate objective decision making.

“The criteria are fairly straightforward and easy to interpret, and we also have really experienced caseworkers who have been doing this for a long time, and when new caseworkers come in, we have buddy systems and mentor systems that we set up to help people understand.”

Currently, the ICO is working through

a case backlog from during the pandemic, which decreased by 2,100 over the summer to 1,500 in December last year, with a goal of 1,000 by March. After clearing out most

**“The ICO has been too tolerant of lack of compliance by public authorities, and there’s been an unwillingness to take enforcement action or to use the powers available”**  
**Jon Baines, Mishcon de Reya**

of this backlog, the ICO will implement the prioritisation plan, including consultation input. Seddon said the ICO plans to do this within their existing resources.

“This isn’t about needing more resources now, this is about using the resources that we do have as effectively as possible.”

#### Clearing the backlog

This consultation on prioritising access was one of the first outcomes of ICO25, a three-year plan from the ICO which has four set objectives: safeguard and empower people; empower reasonable innovation and sustainable growth; promote openness and transparency; and continuously develop the ICO’s culture, capacity and capability.

The consultation aimed to address the ICO’s ‘openness and transparency’ objective. The proposals are an attempt to mitigate current issues in the system while the ICO works through the case-load backlog, bring response times down and “improve the performance of public authorities”. The ICO resolves more than 6,000 FOI complaints each year.

According to Freeguard, the prioritisation proposal shows that the ICO is “starting to grip the various problems around FOI”.

The improvements in recent months include a “considerably shorter time in the allocation of cases”, soft-enforcement action and practice recommendations issued to some public authorities, Baines said. He gives much of the credit to new UK information commissioner, John Edwards, who began his term in January 2022.

“In the last few months more definitely seen a more proactive and positive approach from ICO and the government,” Baines said. ■

**2005** Year in which information-access rights came into effect

**6000**

Number of FOI complaints resolved by the ICO each year

**Four weeks** Timeframe in which priority cases will be assigned, under ICO proposals

**90%** Proportion of complaints the regulator aims to close within six months

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# Red team security unit to test departmental defences

A dedicated Government Security Red Team is assessing departmental defences with exercises in which external experts are conducting digital and in-person reconnaissance and attempting to exploit vulnerabilities found.

Common in the worlds of cybersecurity and defence, the role of red teams is to better understand the effectiveness of an organisation's defences by mimicking attackers or other hostile actors. Red-teaming exercises can often involve not just cyber penetration testing to analyse IT security



systems but also social engineering and in-person spying, as well testing physical security measures, such as locks and gates.

The Cabinet Office-based Government Security Red Team – known as GSRT or referred to as OPEN WATER – recently signed a six-month £150,000 deal with specialist supplier Cerastes, which will support the provision of “physical penetration exercises” targeted at three Whitehall departments.

These will involve a process of collecting open-source intelligence (OSINT) and conducting in-person reconnaissance on each of the trio of target organisations. The aims of this information-gathering include “identifying vulnerabilities and exploitable information and/or pattern of life” details. This intelligence will then be used in “attempting to gain access based on the findings of OSINT and reconnaissance”.

“If access is successfully gained, then the supplier will be executing the scenarios as agreed between GSRT and target department and, in addition, looking for other opportunities for compromise which may not have been previously identified and to be agreed between the supplier, the GSRT and the department as the testing progresses,” according to commercial documents.

Cerastes will be expected to provide Cabinet Office security officials with a “detailed report... including recommendations for remedial actions to be considered

**“If access is successfully gained, then the supplier will be looking for other opportunities for compromise which may not have been previously identified”**

for implementation by the department”.

It is not known which departments may be targeted or the extent to which they may be forewarned – although the text of the contract suggests that the GSRT will reach some kind of agreement with the agencies in question concerning the proposed testing “scenario”.

The Cabinet Office indicated that it did not comment on security matters. ■

# HMRC in-house IT firm will transfer to BT in £50m deal

HM Revenue and Customs has signed a potential £50m deal with BT that will see the telecoms firm take over the long-term delivery of services currently provided by RCDTS Ltd – the department's soon-to-close in-house IT provider.

Staff from RCDTS will become employees of BT under TUPE regulations, a process which the tax agency has pledged will be accompanied by a “full and open consultation” with those affected.

Recently published commercial documents reveal that HMRC entered into an initial four-year contract with BT on 25

November. If the engagement, which covers managed network services, is extended to its full potential term of seven years, this figure will increase to £48.6m.

The suite of services covered has previously been delivered by RCDTS Ltd, a government-owned company that, for the last seven years, has been dedicated to providing HMRC with IT services. It was announced last year that the firm, which was established to help the tax agency migrate away from major long-term outsourced IT contracts, is to be shut down by the end of



the 2022/23 fiscal year.

The department indicated that all 750 staff of the government-owned company will either become HMRC employees or be transferred to commercial firms taking over delivery of services – as is the case with the BT contract. Once all such transfers have been concluded – a process which the

department said is “already well underway” – RCDTS Ltd will be formally wound up.

An HMRC spokesperson said: “We confirmed for the RCDTS networks team that, subject to consultation, they will transfer under TUPE with their work to BT. We are committed to full and open consultation with colleagues and all affected parties, as well as supporting our people through any potential change.” ■

# Civil Service Awards 2022

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# Introduction

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The Civil Service Awards offer the opportunity to recognise and celebrate the wealth of inspirational individuals and innovative projects within the Civil Service.

Nominations for the 2022 programme opened on 8 June and closed on 29 July, and we received a staggering 1,144 nominations. Sifting panels were conducted throughout August and September to whittle down the nominations in each category. Panels were chaired by their respective Category Champions, and panel members consisted of stakeholders and individuals selected either due to their skillset or their membership in a profession or network.

Our Awards Champion, Shona Dunn, and her final judging panel then selected the top 3 finalists for each category, forming the official shortlist for 2022.

On Thursday 8 December, 300 guests attended the glorious halls of Lancaster House for the 17th annual Civil Service Awards ceremony. Welcomed by vocals from the Civil Service Choir, it was a night to remember as we celebrated the fantastic finalists and announced the winners of each category. Whether you were nominated, shortlisted or one of our winners – it really is an achievement you should be incredibly proud of.

***The Civil Service Awards Team***

# Meet our Champions



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**Shona Dunn**  
Second Permanent  
Secretary, Department of  
Health and Social Care

***“It has been a huge privilege to work with colleagues across the Civil Service to review more than 1,000 nominations. Every year I am moved by the dedication and ambition of civil servants who continue to deliver excellence.”***





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## Rizwan Ahmed

2021 Civil Service Award winner  
of the Prime Minister's Award  
for Exceptional Public Service



## Madeleine Alessandri CMG

Permanent Secretary,  
Northern Ireland Office



## Sam Beckett

Second Permanent Secretary,  
Office for National Statistics  
and Deputy Chief Executive  
Officer, UK Statistics Authority  
and Joint Head, Government  
Economics Service



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## Simon Case

Cabinet Secretary and  
Head of the Civil Service



## Alex Chisholm

Civil Service Chief Operating  
Officer and Permanent  
Secretary, Cabinet Office



## Jo Farrar

Second Permanent Secretary  
and Chief Executive Officer,  
HM Prison & Probation  
Service, Ministry of Justice



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**Tamara Finkelstein**  
Permanent Secretary,  
Department for Environment,  
Food and Rural Affairs



**Dame Elizabeth  
Gardiner**  
First Parliamentary Counsel  
and Permanent Secretary,  
Government in Parliament  
Group, Cabinet Office



**Sue Gray**  
Second Permanent  
Secretary, Cabinet Office



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**Jim Harra**  
First Permanent Secretary  
and Chief Executive, HM  
Revenue and Customs



**Tricia Hayes CB**  
Second Permanent  
Secretary, Home Office



**Sarah Healey**  
Permanent Secretary,  
Department for Digital,  
Culture, Media and Sport



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**Paul Kett**

**Director General, Skills Group,  
Department for Education**



**Dr Rannia Leontaridi  
OBE FRSA**

**Director General, Aviation,  
Maritime and Security,  
Department for Transport**



**Cat Little**

**Non-Executive Director and  
Head of the Government Finance  
Function and Second Permanent  
Secretary, HM Treasury**



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**Myrtle Lloyd**

**Director General, Customer  
Service Group, HM  
Revenue and Customs**



**Emran Mian**

**Director General, Regeneration,  
Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing and Communities**



**Mel Nebhrajani CB**

**Director General, Employment  
with Economic Recovery and  
UK Governance Directorate,  
Government Legal**



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## Vijay Rangarajan

**Director General, America, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Middle East, Overseas Territories and India, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office**



## Antonia Romeo

**Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Justice**



## Jae Samant

**Director General, Public Safety Group, Home Office**



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## Peter Schofield

**Permanent Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions**



## Ceri Smith

**Director General, Strategy and Investment, Department for International Trade**



## Sir Patrick Vallance

**Government's Chief Scientific Adviser, Head of the Government Science and Engineering Profession and National Technology Adviser**

# Excellence in Delivery Award

Recognising those who have used their skills and expertise in a range of fields to deliver exceptional outcomes for citizens and made a tangible positive difference to people's lives.

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## NHS COVID Pass Programme

Department of Health and Social Care

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The NHS COVID Pass continues to be a critical tool for guiding the UK out of the pandemic and helping citizens return to a more normal way of life, unlocking international travel for work, pleasure and reuniting families and friends. Despite extreme time pressures, the service was delivered on budget and ahead of schedule, including supporting services such as a letter service for those with limited or no digital access. The NHS COVID Pass propelled the NHS app to be the most downloaded app in 2021, encouraging expansion of NHS digital services, leading a c700% increase in those using the app to access other health services.



Proud sponsors of the  
**Civil Service  
Awards**



**Congratulations to all those nominated, the finalists and to the winners of the Civil Service Awards 2022.**

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# Developing and Supporting People Award

SUPPORTED BY



Recognising excellence across learning, skills development, strengthening capability, and talent management, or demonstrating a highly effective contribution to promoting or improving health and wellbeing within the Civil Service.



## Junior Leaders Networking Events (JLNE) Team

Cross-Government

The Junior Leaders Networking Events (JLNE) team has shown remarkable commitment and made tremendous achievements through intentionally developing, strengthening and building the capability of cross-government junior colleagues (AA-EO) over the last three years. In the context of the pandemic, and completely in addition to their day jobs, they have adapted their offer to deliver online and beyond their initial audience within the East, South East and London (ESEL) region. JLNE has impacted colleagues across 14 departments and several agencies, thus ensuring that our Civil Service junior talent is retained, have access to developmental opportunities and feel valued.

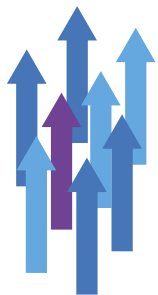


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& INCLUSION**

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in Local  
Government**

PROFESSIONAL WOMEN  
CONFERENCE SERIES

8<sup>th</sup> December 2022 – London



**Women in  
Education**

PROFESSIONAL WOMEN  
CONFERENCE SERIES

24<sup>th</sup> January 2023 – London

To view our upcoming event schedule, please visit:

[www.dodsdiversity.com](http://www.dodsdiversity.com)





# Diversity and Inclusion Award

Recognising those who work to embed diversity and inclusion, driving positive change for our colleagues and making the Civil Service a model, open and transparent employer to better serve the public.

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## Servicewomen's Health Improvement Focus Team (SHIFT)

Ministry of Defence

The House of Commons Defence Committee's report into 'Women in the Armed Forces' highlighted health and wellbeing (HWB) challenges our Servicewomen face that have an enduring personal effect on them and impact their ability to achieve their full potential in Defence and on Operations. SHIFT brought together Whole Force expertise in HWB, healthcare, human performance research, training, information, and communications to deliver an ambitious project within six months. The team's tireless dedication saw them delivering improvements for Servicewomen in all aspects of their HWB, especially menopause, breastfeeding, urination and menstruation, supported by a campaign to demystify women's health and educate the Chain of Command and colleagues.

# Proud sponsor of the 'Best Use of Data and Technology' Award

Congratulations to the shortlisted teams.

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# Best Use of Data and Technology Award

SUPPORTED BY



Recognising excellence in the application of data or digital technology to solve problems or improve things; celebrating people whose commitment to technological improvements creates measurable outcomes.



## Team Phoenix

Department for Work and Pensions

DWP Digital has delivered a new Passport Benefit Checking Service that enables NHS Pharmacies across England to perform a real-time DWP benefit check, at the point of dispensing the medication. This provides confirmation that an individual is entitled to free prescriptions based on their benefit. Working in close partnership with NHS colleagues, the service was piloted initially in the North East of England and has now been rolled out nationally, not only saving the NHS c£240 million a year in administration costs but also ensuring citizens don't incorrectly pay for their medication.

# Science and Innovation Award

Championing and using the best scientific insights available (including from academia and outside institutions) to support innovative policy design and delivery.

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## Antivirals and Therapeutics Taskforce

Department of Health and Social Care

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This nomination recognises the exemplary use of scientific evidence by the Antivirals and Therapeutics Taskforce (ATTF) and its delivery partners, most notably the NIHR, to identify potential COVID-19 therapeutics, trial them as part of an advanced programme of clinical trials and deploy safe and effective treatments to UK patients. The ATTF used robust scientific evidence collected through horizon scanning for evidence of safety and efficacy generated by UK and global clinical trials, to make decisions about compound prioritisation, procurement and deployment to patients. As a result, the ATTF rapidly identified and made available nine COVID-19 treatments to UK patients.

# Evaluation and Analysis Award

Recognising development in the areas of evaluation and analysis for improved insights and to better inform our work.

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## Russia/Ukraine Economic Analysis Team

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

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In 2022, economists in the FCDO responded to the unprecedented demands of the Russia / Ukraine crisis with a huge surge in resource, cross-team working and innovative use of data and analysis techniques. The team delivered outstanding analysis that shaped UK policymaking in real time on the full range of Russia and Ukraine issues and remains ongoing to shape policymaking as the conflict continues. The analysis was shared widely with international partners, helping secure UK objectives and building credibility

# Project Delivery Award

Recognising skilled programme, project or portfolio management to deliver complex work to a high standard, in line with the Government Functional Project Delivery Standard.



## Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

Despite having only 4.5 years instead of the usual 7, despite some of the wettest winters and hottest summers on record, despite the global pandemic; and despite global supply chain and workforce challenges, the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Delivery Unit have worked tirelessly - across HMG and the Games partner organisations - to deliver a Games that was under budget, on time, and with a record attendance for any Commonwealth Games held in the UK. Birmingham 2022 was a global spectacle, a mega event that will leave lasting benefits for the city, region and UK.

# One Civil Service Award

Recognising excellent collaboration that spans the boundaries between administrations, government departments, agencies and bodies.

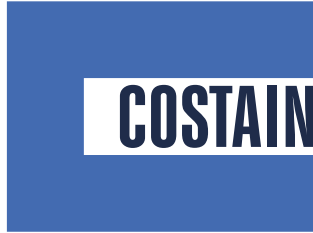
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## Cost of Living Payments to low income and disable benefit claimants

### Cross-Government

In just 7.5 weeks, a cross-government policy, legal, analytical, communications and project team (from HMT, HMRC, DWP, MoD, OPC, GLD and DAs) designed the Cost-of-Living payment policy and delivered primary legislation enabling payments worth £15bn to be paid to 8million low-income families and 6million disabled people. The team worked collaboratively to problem-solve, meet time-critical deadlines, deliver objective policy advice, and produce legislation and complex delivery mechanisms to pay claimants across multiple benefit types. This project has significant national impact by delivering financial support to the most vulnerable citizens across the UK. By 22 July, 7.2million payments had been made to 99% of eligible low-income, DWP-benefit claimants and 1.2million HMRC payments were made to eligible tax credit claimants in early September.



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# Productive Partnerships Award

Recognising those who successfully build, maintain and make the most of strong relationships between organisations across different sectors (public, private and third).



## CEOP

### National Crime Agency

This nomination is for the excellent collaboration between NCA officers and BAE Systems Ltd working in partnership with our international partners to tackle child sexual abuse (CSA). Officers from the NCA, BAE data analysts and BAE data architects worked together in a blended team to develop tooling that assisted and continues to assist, in the identification of CSA offenders globally. The intelligence gained from this tooling has enabled the safeguarding of hundreds of children across the world. It has also provided novel insight into the use of the internet in CSA offending, which is being used to influence industry partners and reduce offending worldwide.



# Proud sponsors of the Civil Service Awards.

Many congratulations to all those shortlisted and this year's winners. We're honoured to have worked alongside some of the nominees to deliver measurable impact for staff and citizens.

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We partner with government to deliver and embed change which guarantees to measurably improve outcomes, ways of working for staff, and the financial sustainability of the public sector. We believe in our approach, and therefore make our contracts totally accountable to our clients and the taxpayer by putting 100% of our fees at risk against the delivery of outcome-focussed results.

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# Rising Star Award

Recognising the potential of someone in the first five years of their Civil Service career.

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## Tassie Ghilani

HM Prison and Probation Service

Tassie has battled extreme adversity in her life, with experience of both the care and criminal justice systems. She joined MoJ in June 2021 via the GFIE scheme to improve life chances for those leaving prison and demonstrated exceptional policy aptitude and leadership in her work to improve outcomes for prison leavers. Her tremendous potential has been recognised by her securing a permanent appointment on promotion, and she now leads work to improve experiences and outcomes for prison leavers across MoJ.

# Cabinet Secretary's Outstanding Leader Award

Recognising individuals who have demonstrated  
outstanding leadership, regardless of grade or role.

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**Sara Rathore**

Home Office

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The Home Office Liaison Officer Team was formed at pace in response to Operation Pitting, the largest UK military evacuation since the Second World War, during which HMG evacuated c15,000 individuals to the UK. These individuals were a combination of British nationals and their families, and Afghans eligible for relocation under the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy (ARAP) having worked alongside British forces and other HMG teams. Sara Rathore was identified as an exceptional civil servant, transferring from her DHSC role as incident lead, managing NHS supply incidents and supporting Managed Quarantine Services, to build dynamic Home Office operational capability.

# Programme of the Year Award

Recognising exceptional achievement from a programme anywhere across the Civil Service.

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## COP26 Unit

Cabinet Office

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The COP26 Unit delivered the largest multilateral political event the UK has ever hosted, during a pandemic, reaching agreement among all 196 countries on ambitious action on a global existential issue. This entailed a massive logistical operation to safely gather 38,000 delegates in Glasgow including 120 world leaders, a bespoke global vaccination programme, leadership of the most complex multilateral negotiations process, and a series of initiatives to drive urgent practical action. The result - the historic Glasgow Climate Pact agreed by all countries, and more than 150 enhanced national pledges - accelerates action to reduce emissions, improve resilience and mobilise finance worldwide.

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# Prime Minister's Award for Exceptional Public Service

Recognising someone at Grade 6 or below who has performed exceptionally, going above and beyond the call of duty to make a tangible difference to our nation and the lives of its citizens.

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**Clarice Pettit**

**Ministry of Defence**

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Clarice has made an outstanding contribution to Task Force Kindred (TFK) since it was established in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. TFK leads the provision of all UK military aid to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Clarice volunteered for TFK in the early, hectic days of the conflict and quickly brought order to the team. She has led a variety of essential projects including: the policy and planning required for gifting essential UK defence equipment to Ukraine; working with partners across government to orchestrate an unprecedented global search for equipment and ammunition; and co-ordinating the highly sensitive delivery of a shipment of tens of thousands of rounds of artillery ammunition which AFU directly credit for facilitating their offensive to retake Kharkiv. Through all of this Clarice has brilliantly modelled the best of the Civil Service, demonstrating a total commitment to public service and astonishing capacity and work ethic which inspires those around her.

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# Congratulations to our winners!

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