

## Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

### Oral evidence: The work of the Cabinet Office, HC 118

Thursday 22 October 2020

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Members present: Mr William Wragg (Chair); Rachel Hopkins; Mr David Jones; David Mundell; Tom Randall; Lloyd Russell-Moyle; John Stevenson.

Questions 380 - 458

### Witnesses

**I:** Simon Case, Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service; and Alex Chisholm, Chief Operating Officer for the Civil Service and Permanent Secretary for the Cabinet Office.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Simon Case and Alex Chisholm.

Q380 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to another hybrid session of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. I am in a Committee Room in Portcullis House with the small number of staff required to facilitate this meeting, suitably socially distanced from one another of course.

Our witnesses with me here are Mr Simon Case, the new Cabinet Secretary. He is accompanied by Mr Alex Chisholm, who appeared before the Committee three weeks ago. Mr Case, we are very grateful to have you with us today. We fully understand the reasons for the postponement of the meeting last week. We are grateful to you for giving us notice of that. Would you introduce yourselves for the record?

**Simon Case:** I am Simon Case, Cabinet Secretary and head of the civil service. I apologise for having to delay the appearance by a week. I thank the Committee for its understanding.

**Alex Chisholm:** I am Alex Chisholm, permanent secretary at the Cabinet Office and COO of the civil service.

Q381 **Chair:** Mr Chisholm, thank you for writing to the Committee with the diagram of the various roles at the Cabinet Office. Could I ask, further to



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that, if you might be able to provide the names of the personnel who occupy those positions and ensure that all of that is up to date on the Cabinet Office website?

Rather than beginning the meeting admonishing people in that way, can I ask you, Mr Case, why you think you were appointed, and what experience and qualities you bring to the role of Cabinet Secretary?

**Simon Case:** I have a few points to make, if I may. My CV shows long experience of the centre in No. 10 and the Cabinet Office, combined with roles in line Departments working on national security, international negotiations, Northern Ireland and so on, and of course most recently working for the Royal Family.

In each of those roles, I have managed to form a close and trusting relationship with a range of Ministers from a number of different Administrations, based on an ability to give what I think of as fearless and frank advice. Those experiences are what I bring to the role.

Q382 **Chair:** Unlike most of your predecessors in the role of Cabinet Secretary, you have not run a major Government Department. Are you at all concerned that that might put you at a disadvantage? If not, why not?

**Simon Case:** It is a question I asked myself before applying, as you would expect, to try to understand whether it was a bar. Of course, there were Cabinet Secretaries in the past who also had not been permanent secretaries. I discussed this question with a number of former Cabinet Secretaries and current permanent secretaries to get their views, and concluded that it was not an issue. What mattered was the experience of the centre and the ability to form close relationships with Ministers from a number of different Administrations and their teams, and to be an effective senior representative of the civil service to the Prime Minister.

It would be impossible and foolish to hide from the fact that there are gaps in my experience, as you say, not having been a permanent secretary of a large Department. But we all have gaps in our experience. It is why, right from the outset, I approached the job as leading through a team, with Alex and other permanent secretaries. We all make up for each other's strengths, weaknesses and experience.

Q383 **Chair:** As the Prime Minister's principal private secretary, you were responsible for making sure that the Prime Minister got their way. As Cabinet Secretary, you will have to stand your ground and say no to the Prime Minister. Have you ever had to say no to a Prime Minister before?

**Simon Case:** Plenty of times, to a number of different Prime Ministers. If you don't mind, I won't go into all of those. I think it is quite important for the maintenance of good relations between civil servants and Ministers that we do not go into the details of our advice, but, yes, I have. It is actually something that many civil servants do as part of their role day in, day out, when we are working on the basis of our core values of giving impartial,



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evidence-based advice. Loyal but fearless advice must come, and that involves sometimes saying no.

Q384 **Chair:** I respect that you are not going into the detail, but is it easier to say no to some Prime Ministers than it is to others?

**Simon Case:** I think, Mr Chairman, this is one that historians will enjoy going over, and many biographers. Prime Ministers and all Ministers have their own style, their own background and their own experience. My honest experience of working with a whole range of Ministers is that nearly all of them welcome the honest and private advice that civil servants can give. I have wracked my brain through Prime Ministers and Ministers that I have worked for, and I have certainly not worked for anybody who I thought did not welcome sometimes difficult advice.

Q385 **Chair:** As Cabinet Secretary, is your role the same as that of your predecessor?

**Simon Case:** No. As the Committee will know, Mark was Cabinet Secretary, head of the civil service and National Security Adviser. I do not hold the post of National Security Adviser. My three main responsibilities are, first, as the principal official adviser to the Prime Minister on policy delivery. Secondly, I am head of the Cabinet secretariat, so I oversee the smooth running of Cabinet government. Thirdly, I am convener of the top leadership of the civil service, and with the permanent secretaries like Alex and others I set the direction for the civil service.

Q386 **Chair:** As you mentioned that, do you, for example, retain line management responsibilities for all permanent secretaries?

**Simon Case:** Line management responsibilities for permanent secretaries are split between me, Alex and Tom Scholar. I took the view, endorsed by the Prime Minister, that it was important that we brought the centre together in setting the direction for Government, so it made sense for practical reasons as well as administrative reasons to share out the line management responsibilities between the three of us.

Q387 **Chair:** Are you being replaced with a new permanent secretary at No. 10, either on an acting or permanent basis?

**Simon Case:** No, I am not. I was the second permanent secretary in No. 10. It is an unusual post, and the Prime Minister and I decided that that post did not need to be backfilled in No. 10.

Q388 **Chair:** Would it be possible to request the division of labour, as it were, with that line management responsibility? Perhaps you could write to the Committee afterwards.

**Simon Case:** Yes.

Q389 **Chair:** Thank you. This is an open-ended question to conclude my first section of questions. What are your priorities for your tenure as Cabinet Secretary?



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**Simon Case:** It is the big question. Immediately, I have five priorities. Obviously, managing the response to Covid. Everybody working in public life shares that priority. Second is managing the economic consequences and recovery from Covid. Third is the transition out of the EU. Fourth is working with Ministers to maintain the integrity of our Union. Fifth is ensuring that the Government deliver on their manifesto commitments.

Among all those policy and delivery priorities, there is leading the civil service through these unprecedented times. That is a role I share with Alex and all my permanent secretary colleagues. Maintaining the standards of the service, the values and the sheer hard work of the civil service, through this time is a responsibility that we all share.

Q390 **David Mundell:** Mr Case, could I follow up on a specific? Then I am going to ask you about constitutional and primarily devolution issues.

You said that responsibilities in respect of permanent secretaries were divided between yourself, Mr Chisholm and Mr Scholar. Who is the line manager of the permanent secretary of the Scottish Government?

**Simon Case:** We are finalising the division of labour at the moment. We will set that out for the Committee, if that is all right.

Q391 **David Mundell:** It is quite important to do that, so I hope that we will hear from you. You will be aware that there is an ongoing Scottish Parliament inquiry into many of the actions of the Scottish Government during the period of the previous First Minister. While I would not want to draw you into commenting on that specifically, I am very keen to establish what is your direct interest in the day-to-day functioning of the permanent secretary in Scotland and Scottish Government officials.

**Simon Case:** The reason I do not want to set it out at the moment is that it is important, as you understand, to have all the necessary conversations internally to get it all set up. We will then set it out for the Committee as soon as we can.

As for the bigger question, which is my involvement in relation to Leslie and the team of civil servants, obviously as head of the civil service I take an overview of the role that all civil servants are playing across the United Kingdom. We are, after all, one civil service, each of us supporting the relevant Government of the day. These are important questions, as you say.

Q392 **David Mundell:** Are you following the events of the Scottish Parliament inquiry into the conduct of the permanent secretary in the Scottish Government?

**Simon Case:** Not in detail at the moment, Mr Mundell.

Q393 **David Mundell:** But you will obviously pay heed to any report that subsequently emerges.



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**Simon Case:** The conduct of everybody in government and everybody in public life are vital questions, and we look forward to the conclusions of reviews.

Q394 **David Mundell:** That is a very civil service answer, if I may say so, in the traditional sense, and not necessarily in the new radical sense of the civil service that we are led to expect. I will move on to what you see as your constitutional roles and responsibilities.

**Simon Case:** There is a really interesting question about the constitutional underpinning of the role of the Cabinet Secretary. It is set out in a number of different places, principally now the Cabinet manual, which pulled together lots of precedents.

The Cabinet manual sets out a number of different roles. Forgive the order. It is not necessarily important—it is just the way they appear: support of parties, if they want it, for coalition negotiations; keeping the Sovereign informed of progress; overall responsibility for co-ordinating the process of pre-election contacts with opposition parties, once authorised by the PM; advising the PM on the machinery of government; advising the PM on Cabinet and Cabinet Committee systems, structure, membership and terms of reference, agenda and matters to be considered. The Cabinet Secretary is the head of the Cabinet secretariat, with a duty to attend all meetings of Cabinet and responsibility for the smooth running of Cabinet minutes. Permanent secretaries are responsible to the Cabinet Secretary or head of the civil service for effective day-to-day management of their Departments.

There is an interesting question, perhaps not always widely understood, although I think the Committee is well aware of this, about the other places where the Cabinet Secretary is or is not mentioned. The Ministerial Code briefly mentions the Cabinet Secretary by making clear that it is not the role of the Cabinet Secretary to enforce the ministerial code. Perhaps most surprisingly of all, the role of the Cabinet Secretary is not mentioned in either the civil service code or the underpinning CRaG Act, which I have to say surprised me.

Q395 **David Mundell:** You mentioned the Cabinet manual. What other sources would you rely on in giving constitutional advice to the Prime Minister and the Cabinet?

**Simon Case:** There are a range of sources, as I said—the Cabinet Manual and other documents. There is the overarching guide of history and being aware of what has gone before. Obviously, in any individual moment and question, you have to a large degree to be guided and give advice based on the evidence in front of you.

Finally, something that I personally prize very highly is guidance from colleagues and former Cabinet Secretaries. As I said, I approach the leadership task as a team, conferring and consulting with permanent secretary colleagues, and of course I have my own close team. All of those



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are important sources in helping me form judgments about the advice that I would give.

**Q396 David Mundell:** What do you see as your role in the relationship between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations? Do you see yourself as playing a role in that process? That is outwith the questions I was previously asking you in relation to line management. What do you see as your role vis-à-vis relations between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations?

**Simon Case:** The distinction you have made is a very important one and bears out the practical realities of how Government and large organisations work. Line management and what you might think of as policy responsibility or interest are not necessarily the same thing.

As I said, one of the priorities for my time in office, as I set out and agreed with the Prime Minister and have been transparent about with all my colleagues, is working with Ministers and others in the civil service to maintain the integrity of our Union. In the detailed division of labour in the central team, Alex has policy responsibility in the Cabinet Office for supporting the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and other Ministers. Do you want to say more, Alex?

**Alex Chisholm:** Happily, if that would be acceptable to the Committee. There are a couple of things to add. We are very conscious that relationships between the UK Government and devolved Administrations are led by Ministers. That is the Joint Ministerial Committee structure that we have. It has been particularly active in relation to EU negotiations and set some of the frameworks necessary to implement the consequences of having left the EU. The Joint Ministerial Committee on EU negotiations has met 25 times since it was first established, so it has been very active.

I think you have seen the work that has been going on through the same forum to co-ordinate the response to Covid and the statement that was made on 25 September. A lot of what we are doing is in support of Ministers, and of course there are important parliamentary processes.

As well as all of that, it is worth mentioning that I speak with the heads of the Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland very regularly about our own priorities. Those are not just in support of policy priorities such as Covid and EU transition, but to exchange best practice and learning about running Administrations—some of the reform things that I mentioned when I was before you three weeks ago.

**Q397 David Mundell:** Can we clarify that, Mr Chisholm? When you said heads of the Administrations, do you mean Nicola Sturgeon or Leslie Evans?

**Alex Chisholm:** Leslie Evans. I do not have meetings with Nicola Sturgeon.

**Q398 David Mundell:** I didn't think you did. I was not trying to draw you into saying that you did, but if you use the expression "head of the



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Administrations" it might be suggested that that is what you meant. That is why I asked for clarification.

Mr Case, do you see yourself as having a specific role in ensuring as smooth an operation as possible, or dealing with disputes that arise, between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations? That was really the direction of my question rather than the process that exists around it.

**Simon Case:** The answer is that it will develop. For example, at the moment, in the middle of the Covid pandemic, which is taking up an awful lot of our time, I spend a good deal of my time with Leslie Evans, Shan Morgan and representatives of the Northern Ireland civil service talking about the intra-UK response to Covid. At the moment, my role in relation to the UK is very much focused on the main policy issue of the day. As for how it will develop over time, I look forward to discussing that with the Committee in due course.

I have an overarching responsibility for supporting the Prime Minister and the Cabinet in delivering their objectives. One of those is clearly the maintenance of the Union. I am involved in discussions with the Prime Minister and his team of ministerial advisers and the likes of Alex about the UK Government's approach to the Union. As the senior official policy adviser to the Prime Minister, the Union is something that I will spend a good deal of time on, I expect.

Q399 **David Mundell:** I absolutely agree with you that dealing with the Covid pandemic should be the focus of this and the devolved Governments, but it did not stop the Constitution Cabinet Secretary in Scotland, Mr Michael Russell, announcing today that he intended to press ahead with a referendum on independence in Scotland next year. Do you agree with me that the focus on keeping the United Kingdom together has to be very sharp in such circumstances?

**Simon Case:** The Government's stated commitment to maintaining the Union is clear and unambiguous. I will, as I have always done, support the Government of the day to the fullest of my abilities, as I have done in the past when it comes to questions of the Union. I will keep supporting Ministers to the best of my ability on that subject.

Q400 **David Mundell:** In that context, have you yourself read the Dunlop report?

**Simon Case:** I have not read the Dunlop report. I am sure it is something that Alex has spent more time on over the last six weeks. I have largely been focused on Covid, as you would imagine.

**Alex Chisholm:** We discussed that a little bit at the previous hearing. I do not have very much to add to what I said then. You asked a question of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, when he was appearing before you, about when the Government would be publishing their response. He said "Shortly," and that he was keen to make sure that we had fully completed our actions and agreements about how we would implement that response before publishing it. I think that remains the situation.



Q401 **Chair:** Has shortly got any shorter?

**Alex Chisholm:** Yes, it must have.

Q402 **Chair:** By definition. Do we have a measure of that shortness?

**Alex Chisholm:** No.

Q403 **David Mundell:** Chairman, it would be helpful if either Mr Case or Mr Chisholm was able to write to us to explain what the civil service has done and is doing in relation to a response to that report once it has been published. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in his answer said that some things that were identified in the as yet unpublished report had already been done, or that some things were going to be done that were in accordance with the spirit of the report, if not necessarily the actual recommendations set out. It would be very useful to have that analysis once the report is published. Although Mr Case has not read it, of course when he gave evidence before this Committee Mr Sedwill had previously committed to its publication.

**Alex Chisholm:** The report will be published, and a Government response. On the back of that, we are very happy to write with our response, if a separate one is needed from the Government as a whole, on the things that fall to the civil service separately.

Q404 **Chair:** The JMC was not used for Covid response because, we heard, it was not fit for purpose. Mr Case, what do you say to that?

**Simon Case:** At the moment, the primary vehicles being used for Covid response are the four nations Cobra mechanism and, secondly, the Covid operations Cabinet Committee, which regularly meets, with representatives from the devolved Administrations in attendance. There is an enormous amount of day-to-day official contact between Administrations on the management of Covid; for example, the four chief medical officers work very closely together. Officials working on health, education and what have you are in constant contact with one another.

Q405 **Rachel Hopkins:** I want to press you a little bit on the intergovernmental relations between the UK Government and the devolved Governments. Some observers would say that they are at the lowest ebb ever. There are media reports that some UK civil servants, with regard to the EU transition preparation, deliberately censored some documents on the reasonable worst-case scenario that was being used for planning purposes before sharing it with devolved Governments. What do you say about that?

**Alex Chisholm:** On the broader question of intergovernmental relations, as I think the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said when he came before the Committee, both the UK Government and the devolved Administrations are very keen to press on with that and to use that structure to further reinforce productive working between each other. I referred already to the very positive statement they made together on 25 September.



We have worked very closely with the devolved Administrations, both in relation to Covid and the EU work, sharing as much as possible and as quickly as possible both at the ministerial level and the official level. That is not only a matter of decision-making type processes formally, but of very close working relations between technical staffs, such as the chief medical officers speaking on an almost daily basis. That would be my response to you. Rather than any reported lack of inter-working or trust between us, we are intensely interested in supporting them in their efforts to help people in Scotland, in the case you mentioned, deal with Covid, as they are in our efforts to help people in England, and for all of us across the UK as a whole.

**Q406 Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Can civil servants be directed by Ministers to do something that breaches domestic or international law?

**Simon Case:** This is a really important question, and I will go through quite carefully how it is spelt out in the civil service code. The civil service code makes it clear that, if a civil servant thinks they have been asked to do something that is in breach of the code, they can raise an issue under the procedures set out in the code and the underpinning CRaG Act. That involves talking to the line manager or someone in the line manager's chain, or a nominated officer in the Department.

Of course, if there is evidence of criminal or unlawful activity, they must report it to the police or the appropriate regulatory authority. If they do not get a reasonable response from the Department, they can then go to the Civil Service Commissioner. In the end, if the matter cannot be resolved through those processes, the civil servant has to resign.

The overarching point is an important one. The civil service code makes it clear that civil servants must uphold the law, and that civil servants are accountable to Ministers, who are entirely accountable to Parliament on these matters. The processes are clear.

**Q407 Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** If I am clear about what you have just said, eventually if a Minister pushes on an issue, a civil servant has to resign rather than refusing to take an action if it was in breach of the law. It might not be criminal, so it might not involve the police.

**Simon Case:** Obviously, it is difficult to get into a hypothetical situation. The components that answer your question—the key planks—are there. First of all, the constitutional position of the Law Officers is clear. The Attorney General is the chief Law Officer for England and Wales.

**Q408 Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** If a Minister tells a civil servant to do something that they believe breaches either domestic or international law—there is a secondary question as to who makes that determination, which is probably the Law Officers—and they are on solid ground and it is not a criminal matter per se, you have listed the steps they have to go by. The last step you listed was that they should resign. You did not mention, for example, getting a letter or written direction to confirm the action, to give them



protection. In the list of things you have just listed, you did not say that a civil servant could just refuse to take the direction if it was against the law. That indicates to me that they would have to follow the direction or resign. Is that the case?

**Simon Case:** By definition, a Minister should not be asking a civil servant, and cannot direct a civil servant, to do anything that is in breach of the law. Obviously, the way that the Government determine the legality of their actions is through well-established processes, including taking Law Officers' advice. I hope that prior step makes it clear that, before you get to the civil service code, and the questions and the escalation that I set out, if there were any questions around the legality of the action, the Law Officers would be consulted and would have to make a determination on the legality or otherwise of those actions.

Q409 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Very often, something can breach international law but it is not a crime or even a civil offence in Britain. The Law Officers might accept that in very specific and defined circumstances that law was being broken. Would civil servants in that case be expected to resign?

**Simon Case:** The answer is actually being set out for us now and is in play. The allusion behind your question is the UK Internal Market Bill. We have tested this. The Government have taken the unusual step of setting out their view on the legality and the interplay between international obligations and domestic law via a statement. That statement provides the necessary assurance to civil servants that the actions in support of that Bill, which is going through Parliament now and is being hotly contested, provide the framework for civil servants. It is clear that civil servants can support the Bill.

Q410 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Are the Law Officers the authority that decides whether something breaches domestic or international law for the purposes of a disagreement between civil servant and Minister, or is it just their line manager or the Civil Service Commissioner who decides? Who makes the decision about whether it is acceptable or not?

**Simon Case:** Well-established practice through the ages, set out in the Cabinet manual, is that the Law Officers have the key role in ensuring the lawfulness and constitutional propriety of legislation. That is the key authority in government for determining the legality of any course of action.

Q411 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Can a civil servant access a Law Officer if there is a dispute in this particular area?

**Simon Case:** I am sure that the answer to that is yes. I will take the question away because it is quite a detailed question about process. As things played out, I would expect that through the process that I described earlier, set out under the civil service code, it would make good sense for the views of the Law Officer and their determination on any matter to be played into that process. I will come back to you if I am wrong, if I may.



**Chair:** Thank you. Perhaps you could do that in writing to the Committee afterwards. It would be gratefully received.

Q412 **John Stevenson:** Mr Chisholm, the Prime Minister's adviser was quite critical of the civil service. He mentioned things such as a lack of technical expertise and lack of accountability. Do you agree with his criticism?

**Alex Chisholm:** The civil service, like any other professional organisation, should look to try to improve itself constantly. One of the areas that we have focused on, through our own processes of consultation, reflection and comparison, has been digital skills. That is common ground between the Prime Minister's advisers, the civil service leadership and indeed colleagues right across the civil service.

We have been conducting a very open consultation. We had 14,000 responses, and a lot of people said as part of that that they would like better access to data and more advanced systems and to be able to enhance their skills. Although there is a very successful digital academy, we would like to further improve our skills in that regard.

Q413 **John Stevenson:** What would your priorities for reform be?

**Alex Chisholm:** That would certainly be one of them. To highlight some of the others, there is an ambition to try to extend the civil service successfully across the whole of the UK. Of course, we have civil servants working across the whole of the UK now, but at the moment a large concentration, particularly of the more senior roles, is in London. We want to reduce that Whitehall-centricity. That is an important area of focus.

We are very keen to improve our record in managing large, complex programmes, too many of which currently run over their budgets and over their assigned timetables. We are very conscious that with the repatriation of a lot of powers, consequential on our departure from the EU, there is a good opportunity to think again and freshly about the quality of the regimes that we have in place across many different sectors and areas of regulation.

Q414 **John Stevenson:** Do you think the actual civil service itself needs an organisational revamp? For example, every Department would appear to have its own HR department. Would it not be far more sensible for there to be one central one that looked after civil servants right across the sector?

**Alex Chisholm:** I am pretty open to that myself, speaking candidly. We have at the moment an approach for some of the cross-cutting functions that are involved in the management of the civil service. They are done on a centralised basis; they are employed centrally. That is true of the Government legal department. It is true also of internal audit and the commercial function. However, HR, finance and some other areas are currently within the departmental boundary.

We ask ourselves questions constantly about the best way to do it and what is the case for change. As part of that process we are, at the moment,



in an exercise to put the communications professionals on a single employment-type basis. We are very willing to continue to look at the evidence to see whether there is a case for other functions, including the one you mentioned, HR, to be similarly centralised.

**Q415 John Stevenson:** Mr Case, it is interesting that you set out your five priorities for your role, but one of them was not civil service reform. Do you not see that as an important part of your remit?

**Simon Case:** I think I said there was an overarching sixth question, which was about leading the civil service, and that, of course, involves reform. There needs to be a breakdown of responsibilities. Alex is the lead for civil service reform. It is one of his top priorities and he has been working very closely with the Prime Minister, other Ministers and of course myself on it. I strongly support what Alex said about the priorities.

Through managing our response to Covid, we have seen some real innovation in the civil service. Responsiveness to the challenges of the pandemic has actually helped us accelerate some of the changes that we need to make. There is an enormous amount of data analysis at the moment feeding into policy making in a way that probably has not happened to quite such an extent before.

The vital requirement on us all is to avoid the old ways and the siloed working that perhaps was around in the past. As Alex says, we share a common drive among Ministers and civil servants to get a civil service that looks, feels and operates geographically more like the country it serves, less London and more out there in the country.

**Q416 John Stevenson:** I have two questions that flow from that. First, there has always been the commitment to move civil servants out of London and into the provinces, but in many respects it has rarely been properly delivered, particularly at policy level, the higher level. Is there a real commitment to do that?

Secondly, now that you are in post what do you perceive as the weaknesses of the civil service at this moment in time?

**Simon Case:** I will let Alex do the first half, and then I will come in on the second half.

**Alex Chisholm:** In terms of the programme of trying to deliver the transfer of 65,000 roles currently in London to non-London locations, which is a 10-year programme by 2030, your question is about why you should feel confident it is going to happen, if I could paraphrase it. There are a couple of things that I hope will help you with that.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Following the session, the witness clarified that there are currently 65,000 civil servant roles in central London and the programme will transfer 22,000 civil service roles outside of central London by 2030.



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First of all, there is a very strong commitment from the Prime Minister down and shared right across the civil service. It was obviously contained in the programme for Government but is something we were working on even before this new Administration. As a consequence, we now have the major Government hubs programme for new offices, most of which will have civil servants from a number of different Departments operating in them. Some very large substantial office blocks, with thousands of civil servants, and some smaller will be established in 15 different locations across the country. Within the next 18 months, we will have capacity in those offices for tens of thousands of civil servants to be located. That is a vital factor. It is no good wishing people not to be working in London if we do not have the capacity in other parts of the UK to house those people, from an office perspective. That is absolutely critical.

I am very pleased to be able to report to the Committee that we have been engaging closely with civil servants across different Departments, and there is great support for the programme. In a consultation we did called Beyond Whitehall, there was a real sense among civil servants who were not based in London that they felt constrained in their career opportunities by the fact that so many senior roles were in London. There is great support across the civil service, as well as ministerial direction, to make sure that the programme is successful. We are putting in place the office infrastructure to try to enable that.

It is becoming easier to move people around and to be able to operate from multiple different locations. We have all had a crash course in that, of course, over the last six months, with the need to be able to respond to Covid. We have had people coming in and out of the office at various points. The expression I used at the Committee before was that we have got used to hybrid working. Hardly a meeting takes place now without some people present, as we are today, and others on screen. That has made it much easier to achieve the vision of a UK-wide civil service. I can be having a conversation very easily with people in different parts of the country on screens. Equally, it will be much easier for me, when I am free to move around travel-wise, to be able to do so and remain in constant contact with people through the service.

Hopefully, that gives you a sense of why this time you can have confidence that the programme will be successful. Thank you, again, for your question.

**Simon Case:** I will come in on the second part. I think I ought to start by setting out the things I do not want to see change. I think the Committee will support this; there are some vital eternal values that underpin the work of the civil service. They motivate the underpinning values that I hope do not change, and I do not expect them to. Second is the commitment to public service. I came back into Government in June and have seen what I can only describe as heroic shifts put in by some deeply committed public servants to support this country through unprecedented and difficult times. I hope that commitment to public service never dwindles or drains.



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As for the weaknesses, I echo quite a lot of what Alex said earlier. I find the long history of debate about civil service reform quite interesting. It comes up a lot in public debate at the moment. Funnily enough, the people I meet who are the most radical about civil service reform are civil servants, especially the more junior ones who see the work of the civil service at the coalface. The things they say, many of which Alex picked up, are what we should focus on: giving people the skills they need, especially in making more use of data; more cross-cutting teams; stripping out bureaucracy wherever we can; trying new things; and managing risk in a different way. The conversation about risk appetite in governance has been going on for a long time. We have to make a challenging cultural shift to give people the confidence to take sensible risks and be confident that, if they try new things and they do not work, that is okay as long as it is within sensible parameters.

I pick up the point Alex made in the first part of the answer. A civil service that looks and feels more like the country it serves will help us, not as an end in itself but to get better outcomes from Government. If a civil service reflects the country it serves, it will design, develop and deliver policies and advice that better suit the needs of the full range of citizens of our country.

**Q417 John Stevenson:** Mr Case, there is often criticism, arguably justifiable, of ministerial churn, but there is also quite a bit of civil service churn, not just at the top level. How do you go about dealing with that?

**Simon Case:** It is a really difficult problem for us, made even more challenging than a decade ago in eras of pay restraint. It is about cultures and processes that help us support and maintain talent in post by various initiatives, like promoting people in post so that progression in the civil service does not just rely on having to find a new job. That can sometimes be what drives the churn lower down that you are talking about, but I will let Alex come in on that because he has been thinking about it and coming up with proposals.

Underpinning all of it is creating the right culture in the civil service, whichever bit of the organisation it is. We talk about one civil service; actually, it is a multifaceted organisation spread all around the country, but in all of those places we want people to feel that the work they do is valued and that they are supported in making judgments and the progress they want to make. If we get that culture right, it will help address a good deal of it. Alex, do you want to correct me?

**Chair:** Thank you, Mr Case. We will explore the issue further with Mr Jones.

**Q418 Mr Jones:** Mr Case, it may be that you answered this question a few moments ago, but you may wish to expand it. What would you say are the biggest challenges facing the civil service today?

**Simon Case:** To be very direct, the pressure we are working under is phenomenal. We are managing a pandemic and its economic



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consequences, and the Covid and non-Covid health consequences. We and others have talked about the Union and the end of the transition period. The pressure on everybody in government—Ministers, civil servants and political advisers—is phenomenal at the moment. Giving people the skills and space they need to do the great jobs they want to do day in, day out for people in the country is, if I may say so, our biggest challenge at the moment.

Q419 **Mr Jones:** Would you say that you have sufficient levers at your disposal to overcome those challenges?

**Simon Case:** In relation to some aspects of the pressure we are under there are, quite frankly, elements of these crises that we cannot control. We are working against a novel virus where we have to learn all the time. I would like a good deal more when it comes to understanding how best to tackle the virus.

What are the key levers at my disposal? The biggest is the 450,000 people I work with, led by a phenomenal team of permanent secretaries with whom I work very closely. We work as a team in trying to tackle these serious challenges for the country. They are my key lever. I feel personally very well supported by them and very able to rely on them.

Q420 **Mr Jones:** In terms of permanent secretaries, there has been significant turnover in the last 12 months or so. As the head of the civil service, does the rate of attrition of permanent secretaries cause you concern?

**Simon Case:** Having taken on the job five or six weeks ago, my immediate focus is on the team that I have. The Prime Minister and I are very confident in the team of permanent secretaries that we have. There is an inevitable and, to be honest, desirable level of churn in all organisations, public sector or private sector. You need turnover. A good deal of the churn you refer to is people retiring or coming to the end of their term.

One of the things that sits before me, Alex and all of our permanent secretary colleagues is making sure that we have the pipeline of talent we need coming through at all levels of the civil service, so that we have our future permanent secretaries. Are we making sure that we have the plans and programmes to bring that talent forward all the way through? A big part of the challenge for us is making sure that we have talent coming through all the time.

Q421 **Mr Jones:** But not all the departures of permanent secretaries recently have been a consequence of retirement; there have been other causes. Do you think there is an underlying problem that is causing, apparently, a significant number of permanent secretaries to depart before they were expected to?

**Simon Case:** I do not think there is an underlying problem. The explanation for each departure is different and always more complicated than the simple media headlines would ever suggest. My experience throughout my career, especially in the last five or six weeks since I have



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taken on this job, is of a very positive relationship between civil servants and between civil servants and Ministers. I do not think there is an underlying problem, but we have to remain ever watchful.

**Q422 Mr Jones:** What are you doing to improve diversity among permanent secretaries?

**Simon Case:** I will ask Alex to come in on this in a moment. We have a number of programmes in place, some well established and some more recent, to help develop diverse talent across the civil service. Alex, can I ask you to set out a little bit more about the details of those?

**Alex Chisholm:** You particularly focused on permanent secretaries, Mr Jones. There are a number of different dimensions of diversity. Some of those reflect which part of the country people come from, their educational or professional background and the experiences they have had. It is extremely diverse from all those perspectives.

The most obvious, almost typical, measure of diversity is gender. Currently, the number of women is 38.5%, to be absolutely precise. I think it is the highest proportion we have had, not ever but certainly for a number of years. Where we have a less representative group at the moment is people from an ethnic minority background. There are people from ethnic minority backgrounds among the DG group, the future permanent secretaries, and many more among directors and deputy directors. That is the sort of talent pipeline Simon was speaking about.

A big part of what we are trying to do is make sure that the top of the shop, so to speak, is as representative of the whole country as the rest of the civil service is. Looking at the civil service as a whole, whether by gender, ethnic minority background, disability or sexual orientation, it is a very representative organisation that works extremely well from that perspective. You can see why it is admired as such and tends to win very good awards externally; for example, I think the civil service fast stream was the No. 1 rated employer in the most recent independent assessment. That is very encouraging to me, because that is exactly the type of civil service we want, where all the talent in the country feels they can give of their best and participate.

We are hugely better than we were when I first joined the civil service, a long time ago, but we are not quite as good as we would like to be, particularly in the more senior ranks. That is where we need to finish the job and make sure that when people look at the most senior civil servants they think, "Those are the fully meritocratic people we would expect to see, and the people in the most senior roles in the civil service understand where we are coming from and understand the lived experience of communities across the whole of the UK."

**Q423 Mr Jones:** Mr Case, do you have a track record of improving diversity?

**Simon Case:** In the roles I have worked in before, yes, bringing forward a range of talent on a number of grounds, both gender and ethnic diversity.



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One of the organisations I worked in before was GCHQ, which has been doing tremendous work, including, while I was there, improving its diversity. It is one of those organisations that does not often get to talk about itself and put its workforce on display. One of the most interesting things that GCHQ has been doing is to focus on neurological diversity, which is one of the things that also matters. I think I have a strong track record in bringing through talent of all sorts.

Q424 **Mr Jones:** You were at No. 10 for a good few years. What would you say has been the trend in diversity during your time there?

**Simon Case:** A good number of the staff in Downing Street are political appointees. On the civil service side, I am trying to think through the roles. I believe we expanded the number of senior women in key roles in Downing Street while I was there, but I would have to go back and look at the track record.

Q425 **Chair:** Would you care to include that in your letter to the Committee post this meeting?

**Simon Case:** Yes.

Q426 **Mr Jones:** Permanent secretaries are appointed on five-year contracts that can be renewed, but few are. Is there a reason for that?

**Simon Case:** They are appointed and there isn't a presumption of renewal. Each case is taken separately. Some have been renewed recently, others not. It is dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Q427 **Mr Jones:** Are you personally on a fixed-term contract?

**Simon Case:** Yes. It is the standard permanent secretary contract, which is for an initial period of five years, subject to review.

**Alex Chisholm:** Perhaps I might add a point of clarification or interpretation. When the five-year appointments were introduced back in 2014, one of the thoughts behind that was to provide a review point, rather than permanent secretaries, as the name implies, going on and on, and to give the opportunity to reconsider fresh leadership. That was the idea in introducing those fixed-term appointments.

If I could add a response to the earlier questions about what we are doing about churn in the wider civil service, we are now introducing capability-based pay to try to encourage the idea that people do not need just to hop around between different roles in order to improve their pay, but can actually do so by improving their performance, knowledge and capabilities within a role. That is what we will introduce initially at SCS.

We are also making more use of so-called pivotal role allowances and special arrangements to encourage people to complete the major programmes they have started. If you are on the Public Accounts Committee, as some of you have been, you will be familiar with the fact that some of the most difficult projects tend to be those that have had a



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whole series of different SROs over the term of the project. We want to try to keep people in place for longer and recognise that what success looks like is successfully delivering major programmes of change for our fellow citizens, and for that to be the most celebrated and admired activity. That is to some extent a bit of a cultural change, as well as the more technical changes in the terms of appointment.

Q428 **Mr Jones:** Mr Chisolm, can you give an example of a permanent secretary whose contract has been renewed?

**Alex Chisholm:** I do not take those decisions. I am trying to think of the ones that have come up. Certainly, people have been extended. My predecessor's appointment was extended for a longer period.

Q429 **Mr Jones:** But in terms of a five-year renewal, can you think of one?

**Alex Chisholm:** I do not know that it has been possible for anyone to have been extended for the whole five years, because the scheme was introduced in 2014, six years ago. There have been some extensions. It is not the case that everyone finishes at the end of five years exactly.

Q430 **Mr Jones:** I appreciate that there may have been extensions, but has anyone been given another contract for a term of five years, whether or not he or she has completed it?

**Alex Chisholm:** Yes, I am sure there are one or two.

Q431 **Mr Jones:** Could you write to us about that?

**Alex Chisholm:** Yes, no problem.

**Chair:** The letter is getting longer and longer, but we would appreciate the information if you could provide it.

Q432 **Tom Randall:** In his recent Ditchley lecture, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster said that the civil service should more closely reflect the views of the population and perhaps the views of the Brexit-voting majority. Does that imply an end to the principle of political impartiality enshrined in Northcote-Trevelyan?

**Simon Case:** It is important to state very clearly that the answer to that is no, it does not imply an end to the Northcote-Trevelyan traditions. The centrality of impartiality is one of our core four values.

Q433 **Tom Randall:** Therefore, there is nothing to come of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's speech with respect to the civil service in that statement.

**Simon Case:** Of course, we do not recruit civil servants on the basis of their political views; I do not believe many organisations do, outside political parties. It comes back to the broader point Alex and I have been making, that by expanding our recruitment from a wider range of backgrounds we will better reflect the whole range of views and perspectives in the country. I think that was what CDL was referring to. I



do not wish to be in danger of reinterpreting the views of the Minister. I am sure he will correct me if I am wrong.

Q434 **Tom Randall:** The Government have recently made a number of public appointments as part of their Covid-19 response. I am thinking of Lord Deighton, Lord Mendoza, Baroness Harding and Kate Bingham. Are those people civil servants?

**Simon Case:** No, they are not. They are what we call public appointments. I have just written to Baroness Smith on this and I am very happy to extend the letter to the Committee, if you would like to see it, because it sets it out. They are not civil servants; they are public office holders and therefore subject to the Nolan principles and code of conduct.

Q435 **Tom Randall:** Was there a formal process by which they were appointed, or was their appointment just by ministerial discretion?

**Simon Case:** It was ministerial discretion in appointing them.

Q436 **Tom Randall:** Are there any constraints on their roles, so that they do not become de facto Ministers in undertaking their duties?

**Simon Case:** There are constraints on some of their roles, for example those who are peers and how they vote, but under none of those appointments have we altered fundamental ministerial accountability to Parliament. For example, in relation to Baroness Harding, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care remains the Minister accountable to Parliament for the performance of Test and Trace, and it does not affect the roles and responsibilities of the accounting officer either.

Q437 **Tom Randall:** As an MP, if I want to hold those people to account, it is through Ministers.

**Simon Case:** Yes, although Baroness Harding, for instance, spends a good deal of her time in chairs not dissimilar to this one answering questions from Select Committees about the work of Test and Trace, as would any other senior officials—although they are not officials—or senior advisers in government.

Q438 **Tom Randall:** Do you have any oversight of their conduct while they are in post, or did you have any role in their appointment?

**Simon Case:** They were all appointed before I took up post, so I did not. I cannot answer for what role my predecessor played in their appointment. In general terms, I would have a role in helping Ministers hold them to account for the performance of whichever bit of the operation it was, but I do not have formal oversight of their roles.

Q439 **Chair:** In an informal sense, could you describe that oversight?

**Simon Case:** On Test and Trace, PPE, or vaccines in the case of Kate Bingham, they regularly report to Ministers on what is happening in their taskforce and the progress being made. In my role supporting Ministers in driving and getting the right performance from those organisations, I get



to ask them questions very regularly, some would argue too regularly, about what is happening inside the organisation, or about this or that bit of performance or innovation. That is standard business of government.

Q440 **Chair:** Who would argue too regularly? Do they resent the interference from Mr Case?

**Simon Case:** I am sure they do not resent it, but we can ask some pretty challenging questions.

Q441 **Chair:** Would you agree rightly so?

**Simon Case:** I would say so.

Q442 **Chair:** Are those public appointees also politically neutral?

**Simon Case:** It is complicated. I will share the letter that sets it out so that you have chapter and verse: "Such office holders must exercise proper discretion on matters directly relating to the work of the body and should not become embroiled in matters of political controversy." There is no bar on such post holders taking up a political party whip, although an assessment is made on a case-by-case basis for each role. That was the subject of the letter I was answering, which obviously applies to peers. In relation to Baroness Harding, I have debated the matter with the Select Committee on Health and Social Care. She volunteered not to vote on health or social care-related topics and would be cautious about speaking in such debates.

Q443 **Rachel Hopkins:** I am very interested in what has already been said about the civil service supporting talent and the importance of culture. I am interested in the results of the 2019 civil service people survey, where 12% reported being bullied or harassed in the previous 12 months. What are you doing to prevent people from being bullied or harassed?

**Alex Chisholm:** The figures of 12% relating to bullying and harassment and 13% for discrimination have been pretty constant for the last five years or so; they have hardly moved around. That is disappointing because we would like to reduce that figure. We do not want it to be reduced by a reduction in people's confidence in reporting what they have seen, because it is important that people should feel confident that they can do that, but obviously we want the observed number of instances of actual bullying, harassment and discrimination, or things people experience themselves, to go down. That is true for the Cabinet Office and all other Departments.

We put a lot of effort into that, through a combination of training and focusing on the areas in the wider civil service, or within Departments and particular business units, where there are observable problems. The people survey is very useful in that, because it is not just department-wide; you can see group by group where issues are arising. We make it clear that we have a zero tolerance attitude, and we take sanctions against people where necessary. We try to support management more broadly, as well as HR professionals, in dealing skilfully with the behaviours of people in their



teams, to prevent those instances occurring. That is absolutely our aspiration, but I am not saying for a moment that we are satisfied with 12%. It will never be zero, but we want to try to get those figures moving down.

**Q444 Rachel Hopkins:** I am pleased to hear you say that you are not satisfied with where it is, because from my understanding only 51% of respondents said that they had reported bullying or harassment. Of those who did not, virtually half, a common reason for not reporting was that they did not feel that any sort of corrective action would be taken. What would you say to that?

**Alex Chisholm:** In the Cabinet Office, of which I am permanent secretary, willingness to come forward to report has improved 10 percentage points year on year. One of the reasons is that about 65% of those people had confidence that action would be taken, based on what they had observed in the past. That was quite encouraging, but I would like to see more than that.

We are doing a lot within the Cabinet Office, as I know other colleagues are across Government, to encourage confidence that action will be taken. We are involved in doing this year's people survey, which takes place in October. We have said to people: "Please complete this, because here's the evidence of what we did last time in response to the things you told us in the survey." I am pleased to see that that message has been commonly distributed across the civil service and is going down well, and people have some confidence that action is being taken. More is undoubtedly still required.

**Q445 Rachel Hopkins:** I agree. I hear what you say about some of the policies you have put in place on training and that sort of thing. Do you think they are robust enough? You mentioned that over the last five years or so it has been pretty static. Is the behaviour of staff sometimes a consequence of overwork and increased pressures, particularly when staff numbers fell for many years? I know they have increased recently. In the round, are the actions robust enough?

**Alex Chisholm:** You are right to look for the underlying causes, and sometimes pressures of work contribute. We have a big focus in our HR and management practices on trying to support people under pressure, with techniques around making sure that people's personal resilience is maintained.

Mental wellbeing is obviously a vital factor. A lot of people come in and share their expertise and personal experience. There is a lot of peer-to-peer support. I think we have become a very human organisation in which to work, where we are very conscious that people do not just come to work as robotic professionals. People are individuals and have pressures from their home lives; they have a lot of differences between them. As a civil service we have to be very expert at getting people to rub along together, to be respectful of each another, able to trust each other and work very



productively on a common purpose. Most of the time we are very successful in that.

The civil service is a good employer. It is a great place to work, and that is shown by the sheer number of people who want to work for the civil service. I think this year we had 65 applicants for every fast-stream post. It has never been more competitive. People are very keen to work for the civil service. If any of them are watching, I encourage them to do so. The work is fascinating, interesting and worth while. Although we get some cases where people do not feel well treated and respected at work, we are absolutely committed as a civil service leadership to try to eradicate those cases and create an even better environment.

**Q446 Chair:** If I may interrupt briefly, Rachel, may I direct a question to Mr Case? You were kind enough, a week previous, to send your message to the entire civil service. You are head of the home civil service. What drives you to deal with any underlying issues or developments in this whole topic? What is it that drives you, reflecting your responsibilities in this area?

**Simon Case:** We have to create environments all around, not just in the civil service but in all institutions. Parliament has been tackling some of these things. We have to create an environment where people feel they can succeed. We need to do a whole range of things, much of which we have already covered in this session, so that people feel comfortable that they can do their best; they can speak up and speak out, and nothing they say or do, or anything to do with their background, will be held against them or in some way hold them back. First, for all of us in public leadership roles, it is absolutely vital that we make clear that that is a shared ambition among all of us. I know that in relation to Parliament that is being clearly set out. One of my big roles is to say things like that.

The second is to make sure, working with Alex and permanent secretary colleagues, that if that is the show part of setting the message and the directions—the sorts of things Alex talked about—we have the processes in place to drive the cultural change. We have the policies and procedures in place, but I would hesitate to argue that we have got it licked. The numbers tell us we have not. It is important that we work across the whole public sector, and with private sector colleagues, on how to manage and tackle these issues, because it is a challenge for many organisations.

**Q447 Rachel Hopkins:** Can we reflect on the relationship between Ministers and the civil service? What is your view about that relationship? You talked about it a bit earlier. Should officials continue robustly to speak truth to power, and how can you encourage them to do so?

**Simon Case:** I say to all civil servants I meet that they absolutely must keep speaking truth unto power fearlessly and in line with our values. I can tell you that in my pretty decent experience with a whole range of Ministers that is what they want from the civil service, and they mostly complain if they do not get honest, underpinned evidence. My experience across a range of Administrations has been that Ministers, special advisers and



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officials all work very closely together to solve huge problems and deliver for the country.

Q448 **Rachel Hopkins:** To deal with harassment and bullying, people feeling that things will be dealt with is really important. You made the point about speaking truth to power. With those two things in mind, what is the status of the Cabinet Office investigation into the Home Secretary?

**Simon Case:** It is important that we tread carefully on this out of respect to all of those involved in the process. As you say, the Prime Minister asked the Cabinet Office to establish the facts. Of course, that is done under the ministerial code. As the Committee will well understand, under the code the Prime Minister is the arbiter of conduct. I am sorry; I am going to be accused again of giving a very civil service answer, but it is the one I give. Out of interest to all of those involved in the process, we are not giving a running commentary on the process. What I can say is that I am sure the Prime Minister, once he has made his conclusions, will make them public at the end of the process.

Q449 **Rachel Hopkins:** I appreciate your sensitivity. Do I understand that the report will be published at the end?

**Simon Case:** The Prime Minister is the arbiter of conduct. He is the one who has to draw conclusions from the process. It is then up to the Prime Minister, of course, to set out what he sees most fit at the end of that process.

Q450 **Rachel Hopkins:** He would be responsible for deciding—for authorising publication of the report.

**Simon Case:** Absolutely. As the ultimate arbiter of the ministerial code, this is a matter that rests absolutely with the Prime Minister.

Q451 **Rachel Hopkins:** We will wait with bated breath.

**Simon Case:** Thank you for the sensitivity in the line of questioning. This affects a good number of people and we would [*Inaudible*].

Q452 **Chair:** Perhaps I could ask a few concluding questions. The Cabinet Office webpage, which is where I get all my information about the civil service, describes its role as supporting the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister is also supported by No. 10 staff. Mr Case, given your first-hand experience of both, how do you view the working relationship between the Cabinet Office and No. 10?

**Simon Case:** May I say that the inquiry you are setting off is really interesting? As a bit of an aficionado of government history, I read with real interest the evidence you took a couple of weeks ago from Cath Haddon, Alex Thomas and Patrick Diamond about that. It is very hard to quibble with a good deal of what they said.

I cannot think of a less jargonistic way of saying this. No. 10 is a business unit, in administrative terms, of the Cabinet Office, but it has some special



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characteristics, not least being headed by the Prime Minister. The reality is that day to day there is incredibly close working among No. 10 officials or political advisers, and the same in the Cabinet Office. Throughout my time in either the Cabinet Office or No. 10, it has been the same—very close team-working, largely based on topic. Traditionally, it is a very rank-blind place to work. People tend to be there on the basis of their expertise and contribution, not their grade. I think that throughout, certainly in recent times, the role of the Cabinet Office has always been to support the Prime Minister and Cabinet Office, and I do not think that has changed now.

Q453 **Chair:** If, for example, we imagine a scene in a previous sitcom with the famous door, which we are now told is a sort of pod—

**Simon Case:** It is, I am afraid to say.

Q454 **Chair:** Whatever the status of that entry and exit point, is it open, locked or ajar at the moment? How would you describe the situation between the two, to use that analogy?

**Simon Case:** It is as open as it always has been in my time in No. 10 and the Cabinet Office.

Q455 **Chair:** What is that, might I ask?

**Simon Case:** Very, to answer directly. People in the Cabinet Office are constantly going through to meetings with the Prime Minister and the No. 10 team and vice versa. There is a constant cross-current of ideas and interactions, and in my experience it is the same now as it was in the past.

Q456 **Chair:** Are those cross-currents particularly choppy?

**Simon Case:** No. I would not say so. As you understand especially well from a constituency point of view, the challenges the Government is dealing with at the moment and the pressures we are working under are absolutely phenomenal. The determination on both sides of the linked door, as we call it, to work with everybody, not just the centre but all the expertise from all round Government and beyond, to support the country through this, is paramount.

Q457 **Chair:** Should there be a Department of the Prime Minister?

**Simon Case:** I am chuckling, because when I first came to this Committee, probably 20 years ago, I was sitting in the back row. I was a PhD student under Peter Hennessy, who was sitting here giving evidence on these sorts of topics.

Q458 **Chair:** Our questions never change on this Committee. We hopefully get them answered.

**Simon Case:** I look forward to the answers this time around. The debate has ebbed and flowed. Right now, my focus has to be on getting the machinery working on the pressures of today. That is what matters, and the best way to serve the country is by focusing on the outcomes. That said, I will never stop being interested. I really look forward to your



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conclusions on this as the next contribution to this personally fascinating debate.

**Chair:** Thank you very much. That concludes the questions from members of the Committee. Mr Case and Mr Chisholm, thank you both for your appearance this afternoon and for the service you give. Public service is sometimes forgotten about, but I certainly recognise it in both of you. I would be very grateful to receive the letter with the answers to our questions in as short a turnaround time as possible. I thank members and staff for facilitating the meeting.