

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Planning for the future of the Government's estates, HC 793

Tuesday 13 December 2022

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Members present: Mr William Wragg (Chair); Ronnie Cowan; Mr David Jones; John McDonnell; Damien Moore; Tom Randall; Lloyd Russell-Moyle; Karin Smyth; John Stevenson; Beth Winter.

Questions 1 - 57

Witnesses

I: Siân Jones, Director, Cross-Government Value for Money, National Audit Office; Kate Caulkin, Director, People and Operational Management Insights, National Audit Office; and Ruth Kelly, Chief Analyst, National Audit Office.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Siân Jones, Kate Caulkin and Ruth Kelly.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning and welcome to this meeting of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. Today the Committee is holding its first evidence session in our inquiry into planning for the future of the Government's estates, with the aim of gaining high-level insights into that programme. Given the changes to working practices as a result of the pandemic, it is a timely juncture at which to examine whether the Government estate is being planned for strategically and whether the relocation of civil servants outside the London and the south-east is being co-ordinated in a coherent manner.

We are joined today by three representatives of the National Audit Office. I am going to ask each of them to introduce themselves for the record, please, starting with Kate Caulkin.

Kate Caulkin: Good morning. I am Kate Caulkin, the Director of People and Operational Management Insights at the NAO.

Ruth Kelly: Good morning. I am Ruth Kelly, the Chief Analyst at the NAO, and I lead our central analysis team.



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Siân Jones: Good morning, everyone. I am Siân Jones, the Director at the NAO for our value-for-money work on Cabinet Office and cross-Government issues.

Q2 Chair: My question is a very obvious one. How big is the Government estate? Can you describe how many buildings the Government own and how many they lease, and perhaps the proportions? What is the value of those buildings? How much do the offices cost in terms of annual running costs? I am going to put that to each of you because there may be differences of view. Siân Jones, please.

Siân Jones: That is a very good question to start off with. It is a good point to kick off with the size of the estate. Certainly, central Government property is an absolutely massive asset. It is valued at £158 billion and running costs are some £22 billion a year—quite a substantial amount of Government expenditure.

If I may just talk a bit about how it is structured and then perhaps get into some of the numbers about the size and the scale of the estate. Government property is organised by portfolio. There are 12 portfolios and they are all grouped thematically and run by the relevant Departments, apart from a couple of the portfolios where there is not yet a lead. For instance, health would be managed by the Department of Health.

When we talk about central Government property in our report, we are talking about the GPA, which is the Government Property Agency, and its role in managing offices, and the OGP, the Office of Government Property, and its role in strategically overseeing the whole estate. It is worth saying that strategic management means that decisions on those portfolios are largely left to the devices of those Departments. I am happy to come back to that at some point because I can see that the differences in those roles are quite subtle.

To come back to your question about some of the numbers, Chair, in 2020-21 the “State of the Estate” report, which is the main report that publishes the statistics for estates, said that there were over 136,000 central Government buildings covering some 157 million square metres of floor area. As I said, there is a value of £158 billion and it costs £22 billion to run—no small beans there.

Chair: Does anybody else have anything to add?

Ruth Kelly: I think Siân has covered that comprehensively and I have nothing to add.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed, Siân, for that useful overview.

Q3 John Stevenson: In August this year, the Cabinet Office published an updated property strategy covering the entire Government estate. How long have the Government had such a strategy for their whole estate and what do you think these strategies are meant to achieve? I will start with



Siân again, please.

Siân Jones: As you say, the latest strategy was published in August, which was after our report was published, so we did not go into any detail on the report there. I will quickly run through what that strategy aims to achieve and then perhaps talk about the previous strategy.

The current strategy runs until 2030. It was published at the end of August and has three missions, as they call them. They are to transform places and services, which is things like levelling up; to commission a smaller, better, greener estate, which will include things like disposal of surplus property and making buildings efficient and sustainable; and the third mission is to improve professional excellence oversight.

You are right in saying that it is not the first property strategy the Government have had. I suppose there are property strategies going back over a decade, but in our report we focused on the priorities set out in the 2018 strategy. Those were on areas such as sustainability. The main features we looked at in the 2018 property strategy were the 11 or so big property programmes that the Government had running then. That included things like hubs, which is this concept that grouping civil servants in bigger, larger buildings will promote collaboration as well as reduced costs with the absence of having smaller offices dotted around the country.

How did the Government perform against the 2018 strategy? It was quite difficult to assess that in the report from an audit perspective because the Government had not looked at it as one programme. What we did was look at some of the individual programmes at a high level. I will not go through each of them in detail now, although of course we can come back to individual projects as we go through the session. Some have progressed slower than others, but we would expect the Government to have a better way of tracking it as a whole in their new strategy. It is a big strategic aim for the Government so, once this strategy starts to get bedded in and get operationalised, we would perhaps expect to see a better outline of what is going to be delivered against that strategy.

Q4 **John Stevenson:** Ruth, do you have any comments on the Government strategy?

Ruth Kelly: No specific comments. I would just add to what Siân said about tracking progress and benefits. One of the things that we quite often find in our value-for-money work is that much of the Government's work is not evaluated robustly or, indeed, at all. It is very important to be able to learn lessons from previous programmes and use those to inform future work.

One of the recommendations in our report is for the Cabinet Office to look at the 2018 strategy and measure whether the expected benefits have been realised and to disseminate the lessons that have been learned so far in those programmes. That is not something that has been explicitly



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addressed in the latest strategy, so that is something I would like to see in future.

John Stevenson: Kate?

Kate Caulkin: Nothing further to add on the strategy.

Q5 **Karin Smyth:** Can we turn to the role of the Cabinet Office and the Government Property Agency? With regard to the estate, what is the role of the Cabinet Office and what is the role of the Government Property Agency? Could you take us through that?

Siân Jones: As I briefly outlined in an earlier answer, I think it is quite complicated to break this down, so it is worth spending a little time on demystifying the relationship. The Cabinet Office has overall responsibility for property and it terms that strategic oversight in two ways really. The Office of Government Property, which is a unit within the Cabinet Office, sets the strategy for all Government property. It also sets standards for the property function, which is the grouping of professionals that work on property across Government. It also develops training and standards for property professionals and collects data on central Government property so that it can make those evidence-based decisions. In the report we had a lot to say about data, which I am sure we can come back to at a later point in the session.

So you have the Office of Government Property, which sits in the Cabinet Office and sets the overall strategy and data standards for professionals, and then you have the Government Property Agency. This is a separate body that sits under the Cabinet Office, but really it is a delivery agency—it is similar to NHS Property Services. It was created to manage Government offices and warehouses. When it was set up in 2018, the plan was that Departments and other bodies would transfer their office buildings' freehold and leases to the Government Property Agency, which could manage them centrally, negotiate better deals and consolidate where possible. The Government Property Agency also has responsibility for the hubs programme, which I touched on earlier, where the smaller Government offices will be closed and Government employees would be relocated.

Thinking about the Government Property Agency, the main responsibilities are the delivery arm, the office portfolio and warehouses. When we looked at the GPA in our report, we looked at the office side of that strategy rather than the warehouses. We then started to look at how it was consolidating the management of the offices. I will pause there and see if there are any follow-up questions.

Q6 **Karin Smyth:** Does the Government have a share in the Government Property Agency, if it is like NHS Property Services?

Siân Jones: It is an arm's length body. Basically, its accounts will be rolled up into the Cabinet Office accounts. It is a separate arm's length body.



Q7 Karin Smyth: Why is it set up like that?

Siân Jones: That is a good question. We do not question policy in terms of the set-up of agencies. However, I would say that in the business case for the Government Property Agency, the Government recognised that they wanted to professionalise various functions across Government. I am sure you are aware of the commercial professionals, the project professionals, and hence the IPA and so on. The GPA was basically set up as a recognition that they wanted to professionalise the management of property, offices and warehouses across Government.

The idea of setting up an arm's length body was to be able to get in experts from the private sector, for instance, with their property knowledge, to bring up the standards and expertise of property management across Government.

Q8 Karin Smyth: Is the way in which it has been set up good value for money? Ruth, do you want to pick that up?

Ruth Kelly: Siân may have a comment on this from the VFM audit she carried out.

Siân Jones: We did not look at whether the Government Property Agency was value for money. We did look at how it was meeting some of its performance targets, and we do comment in the report that it did not meet all of its performance targets in the last year and that it is also having some challenges in transferring a lot of those Government properties from Departments to its own ownership.

We note in the report concerns that if Departments do not transfer their bodies and their buildings to the GPA, they may not get all the benefits that it was set up for. That could have an effect on its ability to garner benefits and its ability to deliver value for money. It would be wrong of me to expand on that because we did not look at that in the report.

Q9 Karin Smyth: To what extent are the Cabinet Office and the GPA learning from common problems across the piece, both currently and historic?

Siân Jones: That is a good question and I am sure, as we do, you return to common, systemic issues again and again. In the report we mentioned five common issues. To a certain extent we do feel that the Cabinet Office and its property bodies are recognising that there is quite a bit of work to do. I will quickly run through the five areas and perhaps pick out a couple that we noted were of particular concern in our work. The five areas are: problems in information and data, insufficient skills and capabilities, unrealistic projections, issues with long-term planning and financial concerns. I am sure those are no surprise to the Committee.

Picking out data, which is one of the central points that we make in the report, I noted that the Office of Government Property is collecting data across the whole of the estate. While GPA is responsible for offices and



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buildings, the Office of Government Property is looking across all those 12 portfolios that I mentioned earlier. It has the ability to unlock all these excellent savings and efficiencies that we think property can bring if managed correctly. However, there are real challenges with the data that it has at present on the property.

One of the issues that we note in the report is that an IT system, called InSite, which was meant to be delivered this year, is very behind. That system would have allowed it to start to consolidate its data, look across all the bodies, where they are located, the ability to be sold, the ability to be downsized or transferred and so on. That system has not been delivered and we do not yet have a timescale for when it will be delivered. At the moment, the lack of that IT system is hampering the Office of Government Property's ability to deliver across.

Having said that, I do believe that all the issues that I ran through, which we raise in the report, are recognised by the Cabinet Office, by OGP and GPA. They are doing work to start to tackle those issues, but I think many of them are quite challenging to unpick. For instance, just to take data, that relies on a lot of different factors. We talked about IT. We talked about the data that are held in Departments. Workforce planning—Kate may want to come in on this—has been a real issue that we reported on, with Departments in the past not knowing the right people, the right place and the right time. That obviously has a knock-on effect when you report upwards in understanding where your people are and where your people should be.

I guess the other issue, which the Chair noted at the outset, is the uncertainty caused by the Covid pandemic. It is safe to say that Departments are still working towards what hybrid working models might look like. That has an effect on occupancy rates in buildings and has a knock-on effect for the various property programmes that are ongoing, but it also has a knock-on effect on the Cabinet Office's ability to strategically plan. There are a lot of interconnecting parts that cause those challenges. Kate, do you want to come in on workforce planning?

Kate Caulkin: Yes, of course. Unfortunately, this is an area that we have touched on in our report for a number of years. We did a report in 2017 looking at capability in the Civil Service. The conclusion in that report was that Departments do not know what skills they have, whether these are in the right place and what additional skills they need. We followed that up in 2020 with a specific report on specialist skills in the Civil Service, looking at the functions that Siân has mentioned already. Again, getting good specialist workforce data was one of the issues that we raised in that report. It is something that has been a theme for a number of years in our report and comes out again in this report.

Q10 **Karin Smyth:** It is very comprehensive, but it is deeply disturbing that agencies, which are set up outwith our normal structures because of the need to bring in professionals and people with expertise and so on, are



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quite so woeful on those basic issues of data collection and long-term planning. Concerns have been reiterated. I do not expect you to comment on policy—I understand that is not something you want to do—but in terms of fixing those problems, particularly in terms of the data, who is accountable? If it is not fixed, what are the consequences? We have had a little bit of that from Kate around not knowing who is where, but what are the real consequences of this quite woeful situation?

Siân Jones: The consequences are quite dire, I would say, if the data problems are not sorted out. The Comptroller and Auditor General noted in his conclusion that data was probably the largest challenge. At the high level, we would say that without sorting out the data you cannot optimise the value for money of your estate because you do not know where all the buildings are, where all the people are in all the buildings, and you do not know how to optimise the value of those.

We talked big numbers earlier: property is one of the Government's biggest assets and it is going to be key to delivering the efficiencies that we hear about, particularly in this environment. It would be the Office of Government Property, and therefore the Cabinet Office, that are responsible for sorting out the data issues that we note in our report.

Q11 **Karin Smyth:** Is that the Minister at the Cabinet Office? Is that the chief executive of the agency? Where does that accountability lie?

Siân Jones: Accountability would traditionally lie with the Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office for those decisions. I believe, when they did give evidence in front of the Public Accounts Committee, that that area on data and IT was given quite a lot of coverage around the concerns that we have collectively on data for the estates.

Karin Smyth: Thank you.

Q12 **Ronnie Cowan:** I am throwing this out to all three of our witnesses, although I think Siân touched on part of this earlier on. What are the main differences between the Government's new property strategy—the one published in August this year—and their previous strategy published in 2018?

Siân Jones: I will kick off. At the high level the biggest changes are more focused on the greening of the estate. Of course, that will still have been present in 2018. I think there is also more focus on the levelling-up agenda, even though I think that is a continuation rather than a new direction. From that perspective—I am giving my personal perspective here because we did not cover it in the report—the new strategy is a continuation of some of the themes that you see in the old strategy. As we know, levelling up, places for growth and net zero are all things that are high on everyone's minds.

One of the reasons we looked at property was because it intersects with all these major meta issues. I would say that it is a continuation rather than anything surprising in terms of the new strategy.



Q13 Ronnie Cowan: You mentioned the big property hubs programme for larger properties to promote co-operation. Isn't it a move away from that to have people working more from home, spread around the United Kingdom, so that we are getting away from this idea of there being big hubs?

Siân Jones: We did not particularly look at that in the report. That was mainly because, by the time we had finished our report, the hybrid working models were only in their infancy so we did not have any audit evidence to base that on. The hubs programme is still pushing ahead. The uncertainty that I mentioned and that you note in your question is still uppermost in the minds of those who are managing it. Do we still need those hubs? What do they look like?

I suppose the position of the Government, as we have seen, is that in respect of hybrid working as a model, having people face to face is good for collaboration. It is about working where business benefits best. We do not comment on that particularly in the report but I would say that we have not had any indication that the hubs programme is unwinding. Our understanding is it is going ahead as normal.

Q14 Ronnie Cowan: I appreciate that in 2018 the programme was announced and we had two years of Covid that maybe changed a lot of things and a lot of working practices. I am not being critical; we are all learning from that process. Do you believe that there will be more hybrid working? Or is there a case to say people can only learn from each other if they are working in the same environment—in the same building—and they are learning soft skills and soft powers when they are physically working in the same building?

Kate Caulkin: I am happy to come in on this. What I was going to add to your earlier point was that I think we heard Cabinet Office at PAC recognise that it was having a review of the hubs programme, in relation to hybrid working, and it would be considering what locations and what capacity it would need in the hubs.

With hybrid working itself, I may well have some personal reflections on where we are with it. However, I think it is fair to say—reinforcing Siân's point—that it is very early stages and the Government have not put forward a full position in terms of what that means for ways of working in the future. The only thing I would add is the Government do report on occupancy levels for their central headquarters Departments. They are published on a weekly basis. We are seeing between 50% to 90% in those central offices on a weekly basis in relation to the occupancy levels that they are looking at.

Q15 Ronnie Cowan: I do not have an answer for this and I hope you will give me an answer. At one point during Covid we worked remotely and we even voted remotely. Now we have gone full circle and come back to the idea you have to be in the building. You have to be shoulder to shoulder with people. What is the driving force for you? Do you believe that people



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work better in a building together or they can do this remotely, as we are doing here today?

Kate Caulkin: I can only comment on what Gareth has set out for the National Audit Office. You would have seen that last week. We are very much an organisation that needs to work together in the office, particularly for our trainees. It is still a flexible working approach.

In terms of Government, I do not think a formal position has been set out around hybrid working, but we have seen a request from most Departments for people to come back into the office.

Q16 **Ronnie Cowan:** I am trying very hard not to step on some of my colleagues' questions. I may come back to this later on. In this new property strategy, the Cabinet Office has committed to introducing KPIs—they fix everything; how should KPIs be framed and reported in order to provide transparency on progress?

Ruth Kelly: That is a great question. KPIs need to be seen within the broader framework of evaluating what works and understanding how well the intervention or the programme is delivering on its desired outcomes. It is too early for us to have audited the new strategy but it is good to see that, in comparison to the 2018 strategy, there is more mention of KPIs and milestones.

What we want to see is the extent to which the KPIs allow a clear line of sight between the intervention and the work that intervention or that programme is trying to deliver, and then that being used to give decision makers the right information they need about whether to expand, to continue, to change or indeed to stop those programmes. One of the challenging things with many of the estate's programmes is that some of the outcomes they are trying to deliver are quite long term in nature.

For example, the outcomes of the Places for Growth programme are very much around stimulating regional economic growth, bringing civil servants closer to local decision makers and trying to diversify our thinking. Those are quite long-term outcomes. It can be quite difficult to pick the metrics that can measure them in the short term. The primary KPI for the Places for Growth programme appears to be headcount, with a number of civil servants relocated. That is acceptable, but what we would like to understand is the extent to which that is then linked or correlated to those long-term outcomes. What is the theory of change for how moving civil servants to regions delivers local economic growth? It is then possible to measure the intermediate outcome and have confidence that that is going to deliver the long-term outcome.

The other thing I would note around KPIs is that it is really critical to have the right data—that they are measurable and it is possible to get the information that is required. Siân has already pointed out that we found that a lack of good data on office occupancy in London exit is potentially a barrier to that effective decision making.



The final thing I would say on KPIs is that in addition to some of the headline metrics, such as headcount or office occupancy, it is important for the KPIs to capture all dimensions of success. For example, for things like the impact on recruitment and retention of civil servants, you want to look at the full effect of the success criteria and make sure that those are being measured and that it is not one-dimensional in nature.

Q17 Ronnie Cowan: Just to polish off this question, how confident are you, Siân, that these new KPIs will demonstrate good practice and enable scrutiny of progress?

Siân Jones: As Ruth says, it is encouraging to see they are there. We would have to reserve judgment until we see delivery and no doubt go back again in a few years. We tend to revisit the property portfolio across Government every few years in our audit work, so no doubt when we go back we will be looking at those KPIs. Having those KPIs is a good start, but the proof will be in the pudding, as they say.

Q18 Ronnie Cowan: Roughly how long before we can measure them? Are we talking years?

Siân Jones: Yes, I would say we are talking years, so that we can have a couple of years' data to see what it looks like.

Q19 Mr David Jones: This is one for Ms Caulkin. Could you say how much progress the Government have made towards meeting their commitment to move 22,000 posts out of London by 2030?

Kate Caulkin: Of course. I should make it clear, first of all, that the NAO has not looked at the Places for Growth programme, so we have not reviewed it in detail, but Government have shared some of the progress with us.

I think you probably know that the target was 22,000 roles to be moved out with an aspiration, I think, that 50% of those would be senior Civil Service roles. Government have shared progress with us in relation to that and, if you just bear with me, I will get you the exact figures they shared with us recently. They report nearly 6,000 relocations—so 27% of the commitment—were completed by March 2022. It aims for a further nearly 10,500 to be completed by 2025. That is the data that has been shared with us in relation to progress, but we have not reviewed the Places for Growth programme as yet.

Q20 Mr David Jones: How are individual Departments deciding how many posts to move and where to move them to?

Kate Caulkin: Again, we have limited information on this because we have not looked at the programme. Our understanding is it has very much been delegated to Departments to decide on their individual approaches. One that we can highlight, where some information has been provided, is the approach that Treasury has taken. Treasury at its Darlington campus has very much taken the approach that any role can



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be at that campus. It has its second Permanent Secretary based at that campus as well.

Some of the other Departments—if you look at Revenue and Customs and Home Office—have had a regional presence for years and years. The regional presence has very much been around their operational delivery side of things and the teams that are based around that service to customers in that region.

Q21 Mr David Jones: There is quite a disparate list of locations and it does make one wonder why individual Departments have decided on those locations. You have no more information than you have just given us now?

Kate Caulkin: I do not think there is anything else to add. There have been some approaches where Departments have looked at things like where our arm's length bodies are already based. The example there is probably the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, which announced a Manchester presence, which is where the BBC and others are. Departments are looking at, "Where is our customer base and where are our arm's length bodies based already?" I think that is probably it. I do not know if Siân or Ruth have anything to add.

Siân Jones: Nothing from me.

Q22 Mr David Jones: Could you tell us how much the Cabinet Office is budgeting to spend on relocation packages to help staff to move from London to other areas of the country?

Kate Caulkin: I do not have that information. Siân, I don't know whether you do?

Siân Jones: I don't and that may well be a good query for any Government officials you speak to as part of your inquiry. We do not have those figures.

Q23 Mr David Jones: Where posts are being moved out of London to other parts of the country, are staff being moved on to regional salary scales? If so, do you know how much the Cabinet Office is expecting to save as a consequence of that?

Kate Caulkin: Again, I do not think we have specific figures but what I can add for you is that the senior Civil Service is on a national pay scale. There is no regional pay scale for the senior Civil Service, and the rest of the pay is delegated to Departments for grade 6s and below. It may well be different in different Departments because it is not one approach for everyone. My understanding is that there are some Departments that do have regional pay.

Q24 Mr David Jones: Do I take it from your answer that it is not necessarily the case that staff will be moved on to regional salary scales?



Kate Caulkin: It is not something we have looked at so I am not able to provide any more detail.

Q25 **Mr David Jones:** As you have mentioned, the Government are committed to moving 50% of senior Civil Service posts out of London by 2030. Have the Government clarified to you how many current senior posts in London they are planning to move?

Kate Caulkin: I do not think they have published any figures but what we can do is look at how many senior civil servants there were when they provided the baseline. The baseline goes back to 2020. There were around 6,500 senior civil servants in 2020, so you could do a bit of maths work on that. I think it is just over 3,000, but that is not a figure that they have published at all—that is just basing it on the 50% and looking at the baseline from 2020.

Q26 **Mr David Jones:** This one may be for Ms Kelly. Previous Governments have moved civil servants out of London before, but the senior Civil Service has largely remained in London. What is the reason for this? Is there any good reason to believe that it will be different this time around?

Kate Caulkin: Ruth, I am happy to come in first because some of this possibly touches on the most recent leadership report that we published. In our leadership report we point out the senior leadership, in particular the Permanent Secretaries, and the dual role that Permanent Secretaries have in terms of delivery for their Department and then serving their Minister. Some of this is driven by where the Permanent Secretary is based and where the Minister is based. That has definitely been the case in the past. It will depend on where that senior leadership is based.

As I mentioned earlier, we see some moves now—you have the Treasury second Permanent Secretary who is in Darlington—so I think the more we see senior leaders move out of London, the more we will see SCS move out of London. There have been some shifts in terms of SCS outside of London, although the majority outside of London still seem to be the delegated grades and the lower grades.

Ruth Kelly: Just to add to that, one of the stated goals of the Civil Service relocation is to try to tap into a broader labour market and to allow opportunities for people in the regions. That is one of the driving factors behind the Places for Growth programme. We would very much expect to deliver that focus also on senior civil servants.

Q27 **Mr David Jones:** To what extent is there a risk that spreading senior Civil Service jobs more thinly across the country makes it harder for officials to get promoted and stay in the same region?

Kate Caulkin: It is a bit difficult to comment on that. It was just checking the figures. We have seen SCS grades outside London: 11% is outside London compared with 33% in London. I think those figures have changed over time. We cannot comment on whether promotions will be impacted.



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The only other thing I can mention is that where we have seen a shift over the last few years is where jobs are advertised. You now see senior Civil Service jobs advertised in a number of locations. It is not one specific location. London is normally included, although there are some where London has been excluded. We have definitely seen a shift in terms of more SCS roles being advertised outside London. It might be interesting to look at where people are then appointed from, because that data is not easily available, but they are definitely being advertised more broadly now.

- Q28 **Mr David Jones:** What could individual Departments do to ensure that people who are based at a regional office or who work remotely are not disadvantaged compared to colleagues in London, who obviously have more contact with Ministers and other senior colleagues? Who would like to take that one?

Kate Caulkin: I cannot add much because I do not think it is something we specifically looked at. I don't know whether colleagues have anything to add.

- Q29 **Mr David Jones:** It is right to say—isn't it?—that it is expected that Ministers will be spending more time in regional offices too? Have we seen much evidence of that yet?

Kate Caulkin: It is not something that we have looked at, but we have definitely had Ministers attending the Treasury site in Darlington.

Mr David Jones: Thank you very much.

- Q30 **Chair:** I might be misremembering but I think there was an advert for a senior post at the Treasury campus in Darlington, which gave the option for 100% home working. Have you come across any rather interesting adverts in that respect?

Kate Caulkin: That is the first time I have heard of that one.

Chair: It may have been an outlier, which slightly defeated the point.

- Q31 **John Stevenson:** The Government Property Agency is charging rent to Departments for the use of their own office buildings in London, even though they are the freeholders. What is it seeking to achieve in doing so and is it effective in doing so?

Ruth Kelly: Siân may have more to comment on this, having looked at this in the report. There clearly are commercial reasons for taking that approach. I think it is also one of the intentions of the Government Property Agency to be able to co-ordinate and bring together many of the property services. Managing that from a central point obviously creates efficiency. Siân, you may want to comment on that from a property perspective.

Siân Jones: I am happy to. We did not go into this in the report but I believe that this is the concept of imputed rent. We talked about this in our 2017 report and I believe the Permanent Secretary also mentioned it



in a 2020 PACAC hearing. Imputed rent is a theoretical value where the owner—in this case the Government or GPA—is using property it owns instead of renting it out. My personal perspective on this is that the GPA does not use imputed rents. It receives cash from Departments who then rent their office property from the GPA. The Treasury then provides the cash to Departments to cover the rent.

As Ruth said, there are a number of reasons why that would be the model—equally, being able to self-fund the GPA might be one reason why they would be charging out to Departments. They would also then be able to reinvest in schemes to support the upkeep of the Government estate. They would be able to have property standards and controls and have that professional relationship with Departments, which perhaps would not exist if that charging system was not in place. I have to say we do not have any detail on that.

Q32 John Stevenson: Would you agree that it does seem rather peculiar that one Government Department is charging another Department for rent on a building that it already owns? It does seem—

Siân Jones: If you think about the overall plan for Departments to transfer all their buildings to the GPA, in that case they will be renting those back from the GPA. As I said, it is not something we went into.

Q33 John Stevenson: The GPA is a Government agency so, effectively, it is renting from itself. It is one Government building renting its property from another Government agency.

Siân Jones: That is right. Again, maybe that is something to ask Government officials about. There are a number of instances in Government where you have some chargeback relationships between different Government bodies. Commercial might be another one. We are only theorising as to what was done and exists there. I am sure Government officials can probably give you a much better answer to that question.

Q34 John Stevenson: I appreciate that but, from your perspective, is that not a waste of money and resource—all that effort to work out what the rent should be, calculate that rent and then serve them a notice for the amount of rent and get paid that rent, and it is between one Government body and another? Does that not seem a misuse of resource and professionals?

Siân Jones: I do not think we could comment on that because we have not audited it, but the idea of consolidating the GPA as the one owner of Government offices and then having, as you say, that charging system among the Departments means that the Government save money as a whole because they are standardising all the management of those buildings. They are standardising the controls and the facilities management, of those buildings, so Departments are no longer responsible for having to pay for those services. As I said, it is a relationship that the Government have used in other places and for other



functions, but it probably would be best to ask Government officials what the dynamic is there and what the benefits are. I am sure they could probably answer far better than I can.

Q35 John Stevenson: I will be very interested to see what they have to say. From your perspective, is that something you would look to audit?

Siân Jones: We certainly do audit Government services and the giving of one service to another, but it is not something that we currently have planned in any forward programme.

Chair: Lloyd Russell-Moyle has a supplementary question.

Q36 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I wondered about the risks of charging commercial rent for buildings that you own. Is there a risk, or have you looked at the risk, that Departments then choose to use privately rented buildings for short-term gain but it ends up undermining the Government's estate because Departments are not effectively using the freehold estate well because they can get a marginally cheaper rate in the commercial sector? Is there a risk around that? Or is it that these rents are set so low that it is always advantageous to use the Government freehold where one exists?

Siân Jones: Again, it is not something that we have looked at. What you state there sounds like a very logical idea that there is a risk in terms of Departments that might seek buildings elsewhere. One option could be that the rent is lower so it does not incentivise Departments to take those decisions. I guess the other is that if you think about the role of GPA and OGP together, they are meant to be controlling and strategically managing the estate so that those decisions are made in the right way and you are not having these outliers where Departments may be making decisions that are not value for money.

Equally, at the end of the day, these property portfolios managed by Departments do have that level of autonomy. This is why you need good data and there are property controls in place. I mentioned at the start that OGP oversees these property controls, so that does mean that a close eye is kept on private leases. I would expect there to be a process by which those would need to be approved at a certain level to mitigate against money being wasted on private rent, for instance. Again, the intricacies of the renting out is not something that we looked at in the report, but there are certainly good questions to ask any Government officials who come in front of you.

Q37 Lloyd Russell-Moyle: You are saying that the Departments are not necessarily free to choose what location they wish to be, and what rent they wish to pay, because that is overseen centrally, so this rent that is charged to the Departments is not really a choice that they can mitigate against by changing offices. It is just a compulsory chargeback— isn't it?—by central Government?



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Siân Jones: That is my understanding, but again I am veering off from my knowledge base so I would not want to go any further into that.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: That is useful, thank you.

Q38 **Damien Moore:** This is to Ruth Kelly. In the summer, the NAO reported that Departments had not yet decided how often staff should work in the office. How can the Government plan for how much office space the Civil Service needs if they do not have a good idea of how often people will be using the space?

Ruth Kelly: That is an excellent question. We have touched before on data limitations and the fact that the Cabinet Office at the moment does not have very good information on office utilisation, which is very important for good decision making. The business case for many of these programmes was also premised on certain assumptions around per FTE—office space based on assumptions around the average amount of time in the office. There is a huge amount of uncertainty and many of these business cases were put together pre-pandemic. A lot of those assumptions will have changed in the meantime.

What this reinforces is the importance and the value of scenario planning and ensuring that options are robust against a number of different potential outcomes. Many of the decisions being made here are quite long term in nature. They are tying the Government into long-term leases or long-term arrangements, particularly when it comes to things like the hubs. It is very important to think about ways to de-risk that approach and to make sure that they are future-proofed against potential out-turns that are perhaps different from some of those original assumptions.

Q39 **Damien Moore:** The report recommended that Cabinet Office works with Departments to improve their workforce planning over the next five years, and you have mentioned the future-proofing there. What would you expect good to look like if the Departments were to act on this recommendation?

Ruth Kelly: I am going to hand over to Kate who did a report on exactly this topic.

Kate Caulkin: It is not something we have specifically looked at, but one of the reports that I can refer to is when we looked at the nursing workforce back in 2020. When we looked at the nursing workforce, we reviewed all the work we had done over the last 10 years or so.

Some of the key themes coming out in relation to workforce planning and things that you need to get right—we have touched on this already—are accountability first of all: being clear who is accountable for workforce planning at both national and regional level, and being clear in that conversation we have had around what the Cabinet Office is accountable for and what Departments are accountable for individually.



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There is then workforce planning in terms of trying to understand what the future need is in relation to skills and, again, in relation to location. Within that, there is looking at your current supply routes. That is something Ruth mentioned, looking at locations: where is the labour market coming from in future? But also, what are the supply routes that are working for you at the moment and what can you rely on for the future there?

Those are just a couple of things; there are some more in our report but I will just mention those for now.

Q40 Tom Randall: Kate Caulkin, what is your view on how well Departments are providing civil servants with a positive reason to come into the office?

Kate Caulkin: As I mentioned before, that is not something that I can comment on because we have not seen anything in relation to ways of working.

Q41 Tom Randall: The Government Property Agency has highlighted community as a reason for working in the office, but obviously if you are in a hub that is hundreds of miles from your colleagues in the same team or you work in an office with your team but they are working on different days of the week and so forth, that can perhaps put a strain on the sense of an office community. Do you think there is going to be a challenge there? Or is that something you cannot say?

Kate Caulkin: I am afraid I cannot say. All I can say is that Gareth had a visit to Darlington and there were people from both the Treasury and a number of different areas working in the same building. I think he felt there was a sense of community when he went up to the Treasury, not just within the Department but, as I say, across a number of different areas. Yes, it is probably not more than that that I can add.

Q42 Tom Randall: The Government Property Agency has suggested that central London buildings provide something of a draw for coming into the office. Do you think that should provide a rationale for holding on to more central London office space if there is a bit of a cachet attached to that?

Kate Caulkin: I think that probably goes back to the comment I made earlier when I touched on some of the things we pulled out in our leadership report in terms of where the Permanent Secretaries are based and where the senior leadership of the organisation is. That is probably the draw rather than perhaps the office itself.

Tom Randall: Thank you. I wonder if any of the other witnesses want to comment on those points at all. No, okay. Thank you.

Q43 John McDonnell: Can we come on to the question of how the location of regional offices is selected? We banish all cynicism and scepticism from the considerations of this Committee, of course, but eyebrows have been raised, for example, at the fact that one regional hub was located close to the constituency home of the Secretary of State. You have mentioned the



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Treasury's new Darlington office, which is located close to the Prime Minister's but was actually chosen as the location when he was the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Others have raised eyebrows at the fact that it is close to what is described as a red wall seat that returned a Conservative MP in 2019 for the first time in 27 years.

If you were reviewing how Departments were choosing where to locate new regional hubs and headquarters, what would you be looking for to demonstrate reasoned and transparent decision making?

Siân Jones: Looking at it from an audit perspective, we would definitely expect to see a robust business case. Thinking about the Treasury Green Book and what it says about approvals for projects or programmes, we would expect this to be set up as a project or programme, relocation or a new office. We would expect the property controls that I mentioned earlier to be in effect. We would expect those decisions to be made with due regard to what property professionals think of as value for money.

Outside of the property profession, we do comment in possibly nearly all our reports about the value of a good business case, and that is not just because it is good to get things down on paper and have a record of them. It is because the business case generally forces officials to think through the costs and benefits of what they are doing, the different options, and then also compels them to lay out their logic and thinking as to a location.

Ruth, I know you have done a bit more on business cases than I have. Did you want to come in on that?

Ruth Kelly: Yes. Siân has explained it well. It is very much that we would expect to see a clear set of strategic objectives for that programme: what are the key measures of success and what is the programme trying to deliver?

When it comes to thinking about location, there are obvious points around the cost of the estate, but it is also broader things such as the regional labour market and whether there are likely to be the skills that are needed. It might also be something to do with a coherence with other Government programmes in terms of creating regional clusters, having a holistic view across a range of programmes to deliver shared objectives, and things like transport links.

There is a whole range of things that one could potentially look at and what you would like to see is those very clearly laid out, demonstrating a clear appraisal of how the various options match up against those objectives so that it is very much evidence based and not led perhaps by other criteria.

These things can be quite difficult to judge from the outset, so what we would expect to see is testing and trialling. Ideally, where there is uncertainty, there should be some form of phased roll-out or piloting to be able to test out whether the assumptions are working well, the criteria



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for what might make a place a good location, and the extent to which those are then borne out in reality so that you have the lessons learned then for future phases of the programme.

Q44 John McDonnell: Kate, do you want to comment on that? No, okay, thanks.

The Institute for Government says that an official is reported to have said that “staff might be able to stay in London”—this is after relocation—“work remotely and commute to the West Midlands a couple of times a week.” It says: “This would help minimise staff losses, but risks being a relocation in name only.” How common is it that staff who were supposed to have been relocated to another city are commuting there from London perhaps only once or twice a week? Who would like to answer that? Do we have information on that?

Kate Caulkin: I am happy to come in on this. Again, we have not looked at this specifically, but our understanding of the Places for Growth programme is that this is something that they specifically look at. They look at things like the postcodes of individuals and how many people can be scored against a role being moved out of London. We do not have the data specifically, but it is definitely something that you could ask the Government for.

Q45 John McDonnell: The issue around how often Ministers are working in their Department’s regional offices was raised before. Is there any data on, for example, how many meetings Ministers have in those regional offices or how many meetings senior civil servants are having in those offices? Is there any data on any of this?

Kate Caulkin: There is not anything that I have seen; I don’t know whether Siân has seen anything. We have just seen the occupancy levels that are published on gov.uk and, again, that is just for the headquarters rather than some of the regional offices.

John McDonnell: There is no evidence of any trace of a Minister being in their regional offices at any time in the recent period?

Kate Caulkin: I think our answer is that we have not specifically looked at it and we have not seen the data, but the Government may well hold data that we have not seen.

Q46 John McDonnell: Can we come on to assessing the achievement of long-term objectives? These are questions for you, Ruth. In December, under your direction there was an NAO report published, which in some instances was quite shocking for some of us, about the monitoring and evaluation of projects. It reported that of the 108 most complex and strategically significant projects in the Government’s major projects portfolio, only nine—8%—are evaluated robustly. How good would you say the Cabinet Office is at evaluating the success of its own programmes?



Ruth Kelly: You are right: that is a shocking statistic. It is something that we find generally in a lot of our value-for-money work—that the Government do not evaluate much of what they do, so there is often little understanding of what really works to deliver outcomes. The review that you mentioned was actually carried out by the Prime Minister's implementation unit, looking at the Government's major projects portfolio.

To their credit, the Government have acknowledged that there are weaknesses here and that there needs to be improvement. We have seen some good momentum in this area. The Evaluation Task Force is something that has been set up and, in fact, is a joint Cabinet Office-Treasury unit. Evaluation requirements were built into the most recent spending review.

In our report, we did not specifically call out individual Departments. This is because we see weaknesses and variability across the board, both within Departments and across Departments. What we sometimes see is that some Departments in a particular policy area are particularly good at evaluation, but they will be quite weak in other areas. We did not call out individual Departments because what we wanted to emphasise here was the scope for improvements across the board.

When it comes to Cabinet Office and estate specifically, one of our direct recommendations in the study was that we would like to see Cabinet Office measuring the expected benefits from its 2018 strategy and disseminating the lessons learned from the programmes to date. This is so important for evidence-based decision making and something that we see as a real weakness in many policy areas—that it is really not clear what difference has been made by the spend.

What we look to see when we examine these questions is four things. One is a clear view of what the problem is that the intervention is trying to solve and a clear what we call theory of change for how that intervention is going to solve that problem. How does it address the issue and deliver the objectives?

We want to see evaluation being built into the design of the policy or the intervention. That means things like considering phased roll-outs or piloting in order to be able to test before something is rolled out at scale. It also means thinking about what type of data collection and monitoring systems need to be built into the programme to enable that future evaluation.

Most critically, we want to see how evaluation has been used to inform decision making. That feedback loop is often the missing element. We do not often see how that has been used to inform decisions on the programme and what needs to be amended—indeed, whether it needs to be stopped.

Q47 **John McDonnell:** Just to be clear, going back to the earlier question, did



the Cabinet Office property programme feature among the nine major programmes you identified whose evaluation was judged to be robust?

Ruth Kelly: That piece of work—that analysis—was carried out by the Prime Minister’s implementation unit, so we did not see the individual assessment. We saw the overall outturn, which is that 8% of spend had robust plans in place, but we did not see the individual assessment of each programme or project.

Q48 Beth Winter: My questions are primarily directed to Ruth Kelly regarding the economic benefits of relocating Civil Service posts. The Government have clearly stated that they see the relocation of posts as an opportunity to level up regions and nations and boost economic growth in those areas. Would you agree with that, Ruth?

Ruth Kelly: It goes back to the original point, which is: what is the mechanism by which that relocation is going to encourage local economic growth? It is quite possible through boosting regional clusters and potentially encouraging other forms of inward investment if it makes that area more attractive. There are a number of causal mechanisms for how that could work. We have not seen anything published on that causal chain.

It is also technically very challenging to evaluate policies that are designed to encourage local economic growth, because often outcomes can be affected by many policies and many circumstances. It is hard sometimes to disentangle the specific impact of that one policy. There are options—we spoke earlier about building into that evaluation by design ways to test and to pilot.

There is also something here around sharing good practice across Government. The levelling-up White Paper committed to working with academics and industry experts to design ways to evaluate these often quite challenging areas. The towns fund has been looking at something called a difference-in-difference approach. Essentially, it creates statistical comparators between towns that have received funding and towns that have not.

There are ways to look at these questions and to ascertain whether they are having the desired outcome, but it is something where the Government needs to draw on the learnings from other parts of Government and have the courage to look at these questions and, if it turns out that the way the policy has been implemented or rolled out is not quite delivering on it, to think about what changes can be made to deliver a more successful outcome. That is the point of evaluation: learning through doing.

Q49 Beth Winter: Are you saying there are no measurement tools in existence currently for assessing the economic effects of the relocation? I would expect that those measurement tools and evaluation systems in terms of best practice would form part of the decision-making process as



to whether or not to relocate in the first instance. Has that not happened?

Ruth Kelly: There are a few things here. When it is challenging it is difficult to isolate the impact of one programme such as relocation of civil servants and work out what is the improvement in economic growth that is attributable just to that programme. There are ways to do it and there are ways that are being currently explored. For example, for the levelling-up fund, DLUHC is carrying out some feasibility studies of different ways to evaluate these very same questions. There are ways to do it.

What I think would be a good question to explore with the Department—because we have not seen anything public on this—is how it is planning to test this out. Is it collecting the right information and is there a clear plan for how it is going to evaluate the success of these measures in terms of the long-term regional economic growth impact?

Q50 **Beth Winter:** I suppose my concern is that it has predetermined the outcome before assessing the programme, which is the wrong way around, quite frankly.

Ruth Kelly: When it comes to evaluation there are two sides to it. One is looking at the existing evidence base from previous evaluations and being able to say, “Yes, we think this intervention is going to deliver economic growth because previous similar interventions have done that using the same approaches.” Now, if that evaluation evidence does not exist—and generally it does not—we see, particularly when it comes to local economic growth policies, there has been a history of very poor evaluation in the past, so Government generally does not know what works to facilitate local economic growth.

That is no reason not to then use this programme as an opportunity to build on that evidence base, and what we would like to see is a very clear plan for how that is going to happen as well as potentially thinking about ways of building in the learning as the programme develops. Given that there is a very limited evidence base, perhaps think about a phased roll-out or a slow start—what is called a stepped-wedge design—where you can then test and look at the early starters and learn from that for later. There are ways and we would like to see that.

Q51 **Beth Winter:** I suppose that best practice would be that those would already be in place. We have discussed that.

The relocation of Civil Service posts does involve a decentralisation from the centre and the south-east, but conversely it involves the centralisation of posts within regions and nations. There is evidence—I know the Public Accounts Committee has done some work on this previously—that that has a negative impact on the local areas, which have lost jobs. Can you provide any comment on that? Would you agree with that analysis?



Ruth Kelly: The Green Book is really clear that when a project or proposal is being appraised, net impacts need to be looked at, and that includes displacement effects like the ones you have mentioned. There is also a requirement now to do distributional analysis for a proposal that has a very clear place-based approach.

I think it is possible that fostering regional clusters does create displacement effects from surrounding areas. What we would like to see is robust appraisal of the likely extent of that and then evaluation to test whether that is happening in practice. There is also something there around the fact that you cannot level up everywhere and there is a bit of an ideological question about whether it is appropriate to focus on particular regional hubs so that you have centres of economic activity throughout the country. There is a question there for DLUHC in its approach.

Q52 **Beth Winter:** As an example, in Wales my understanding is that there is a hub in Cardiff and in the north of Wales in Wrexham that has resulted in about 250 jobs. That must have a detrimental impact on that local economy, without any doubt.

Ruth Kelly: We have not looked specifically at this to be able to comment on that, but from an economic perspective there are agglomeration benefits. By creating hubs, you often end up developing economies of scale and scope, so that becomes a more attractive destination for other forms of investment. While it is possible that you end up with jobs being moved from a local region, there might also be net benefits from having created that cluster. We have not looked at this specifically. I am not sure of the extent to which that is happening in reality and it is something that you would expect to see as part of an evaluation—what has been the impact on the local labour market and on that travel-to-work area?

Q53 **Beth Winter:** You would expect and encourage the Cabinet Office to take into account economic losses in the localities where the jobs have been relocated from, and that has not happened to date.

Ruth Kelly: We would expect that to be part of the appraisal and we would expect that to be part of what is then evaluated. We have not seen anything formal on this, so that is a good question to explore with Departments. I would say that regional clusters do have net benefits in some cases. From the outset it is difficult to say exactly what the net effect is in the long term, both positive and negative.

Q54 **Beth Winter:** Thank you. This is the last question from me. In terms of the decision to relocate the jobs in the first instance, to what extent, if at all, were staff involved in those decision-making processes? To what extent were the devolved Governments and people like the metro Mayors in the regions also involved in making those initial decisions in terms of setting up these regional hubs? It seems to me that there is very much a top-down approach.



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Ruth Kelly: That is not something I can comment on specifically. I do not think we are aware of the approach that the Cabinet Office took to selecting the location of the hubs and that is not something that we looked at, but it is a valid point to explore with the Department.

Q55 **Chair:** Could I ask this of Ruth Kelly? If anybody has other observations, please do chip in. Beyond the economic measure of relocation, the Government have stated that they are moving posts outside of London to increase a diversity of views and change the culture of decision making. Ruth Kelly, how should the Cabinet Office go about evaluating those less tangible objectives and whether they have been achieved?

Ruth Kelly: Those are also, again, very challenging things to evaluate. There has been a lot of progress to date in the evaluation techniques for less tangible benefits. For example, there has been a lot of work done on wellbeing by the Government Economic Service. It is possible.

What we sometimes see when it comes to these less tangible benefits is that it may not be possible to measure this in a quantitative way, but what we would like to see is a clear mapping out of what the causal chain is between the intervention and that desired outcome. There are then some approaches, mostly theory-based evaluation approaches, that rely upon qualitative data, which test out in a rigorous way the extent to which those are working in practice.

Again, we have not looked at this specifically or seen what the Cabinet Office is planning here. There are approaches and often these are fairly technical evaluation approaches. We would look to see the extent to which people like the Evaluation Task Force have been brought in to provide expert advice. This is not something that is unique to this programme or to Cabinet Office.

Chair: Thank you. Does anybody wish to add anything?

Kate Caulkin: I have a very small point, which is around looking at where professions are based. If you look at it from the professions that are within the Civil Service, we know that 64% of policy professionals are based in London. Looking at the moves in terms of which professions move out of London as well as the SCS and the overall numbers could be something to look out for as well.

Chair: Thank you very much. The final questions are from Lloyd Russell-Moyle.

Q56 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** The regional Government hubs do sound quite similar to the regional Government offices that we used to have. They were abolished a decade ago under the guise of the idea that we were now more interconnected with the internet and did not need to have expensive regional hubs where people would trundle into work. Before launching the new programme, how important is it that Departments perhaps investigate the reasons why similar programmes have failed



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and/or been cancelled—it depends, I guess, on your perspective—in the past? Should there be a risk of a future closure in any business case that is laid out?

Siân Jones: The report did not cover the Government offices, though from a personal and professional perspective I am long-serving enough at the NAO to recall the Government offices as well as the RDAs. My recollection is that the Government offices were a representation of central Government in the regions, if that makes sense. There were areas—I recall one in Newcastle—that had representatives from a number of Government Departments sitting, serving that region if you like, taking the national perspective on their Department, say Transport, and looking at local issues, much like the RDAs were, as we all know, enablers of local and regional growth bidding for those pots of money.

Our understanding of the hubs is that they are slightly different. They are not representing that particular area. They are a collection of Civil Service colleagues, from different Departments quite possibly, relocating into one location but their work is location-agnostic. I could be relocated to York along with colleagues from five or six different Departments, but my work may not change. I am physically based in York but I am not delivering on priorities that may affect York or the local area. Does that make sense?

Q57 **Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Is there an assessment that that is a better innovation than what happened last time?

Siân Jones: We have not evaluated the hubs. We took an early look at hubs back in 2018 but obviously the case now is that there are more hubs up and running. I think there is definitely a case for revisiting the hubs once they have been in operation for a little more time, to have a look at whether they have learned lessons from past offices regardless of the role or priorities that they were delivering.

Going back to the business-case point, we would certainly expect to see mitigation against risks or obsolescence—if I can call it that—in terms of hubs and offices as Government strategy evolves and develops, particularly with hybrid working. That high level of uncertainty that we have all alluded to throughout the session does mean that the Government need to be mindful to keep assessing the cost-benefit analysis of those hubs as they open them and as they mature.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: Ruth, did you want to come in?

Ruth Kelly: Yes, just briefly. Further to Siân's point, this is something that we see a lot—that there are often missed opportunities to learn lessons from previous versions of a similar initiative. We are aware that for the hubs programme, for phase 1, HMRC has shared lessons learned with the GPA, but in our understanding it was not a formal evaluation. That is a positive thing. It is so crucial in order to be able to identify barriers or failures with things that can be addressed in the design of the new programme.



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In our study last year, we surveyed heads of policy profession across all the core Government Departments and more than half of them said that the knowledge base of existing evaluations was difficult to access. Government were not very good at disseminating, capturing and accessing lessons from previous interventions. That is something we really major on in a lot of our VFM work and, as I said, it feels like a missed opportunity when that does not happen.

Chair: That concludes our questions this morning. I thank our three witnesses, Siân Jones, Ruth Kelly and Kate Caulkin, for giving their time and sharing their expertise with us. We very much appreciate your input at the start of our inquiry. Thank you very much indeed.