

# Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

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

Tuesday 28 March 2023

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: John Stevenson (Chair); Ronnie Cowan; Jo Gideon; Damien Moore; Tom Randall; Karin Smyth; Beth Winter.

Questions 167 - 270

### Witnesses

I: Alex Burghart MP, Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office; Ravi Chand CBE, Senior Responsible Owner of the Places for Growth programme, Cabinet Office; Steven Boyd MBE, Chief Executive, Government Property Agency.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Cabinet Office](#)

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Alex Burghart, Ravi Chand and Steven Boyd.

Q167 **Chair:** Good morning and welcome to this public meeting of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. Today, the Committee is continuing its inquiry into planning for the future of the Government's estates.

Drawing on the evidence we have received so far and following on from our visit to the Cabinet Office's second headquarters in Glasgow earlier this month, this session provides the Committee with an opportunity to put questions to the Ministers and officials who are overseeing the estates strategy and the plans to move 22,000 civil servants out of London by 2030.

We are joined this morning by Alex Burghart, the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office; Steven Boyd, chief executive of the Government



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Property Agency; and Ravi Chand, senior responsible owner for the Places for Growth programme. Good morning to you all. Please could you introduce yourselves for the record?

**Alex Burghart:** I am Alex Burghart. I am the Parliamentary Secretary in the Cabinet Office.

**Steven Boyd:** I am Steven Boyd. I am privileged to be the chief executive of the Government Property Agency.

**Ravi Chand:** I am Ravi Chand. I am the SRO for the Places for Growth portfolio.

Q168 **Chair:** Minister, could you clarify what your responsibilities are in relation to the Office of Government Property, the Government Property Agency and the overall delivery of the Government's property strategy?

**Alex Burghart:** It is a pleasure to be in front of the Committee today. I am very much looking forward to sharing some of the excellent work that is being done in the Cabinet Office, in Whitehall and across the country.

My responsibilities are to have day-to-day oversight of the two roles, the OGP and the GPA, that you mentioned. I always describe the Cabinet Office as a dogsbody department. It is a brilliant dogsbody department, which does a huge number of things. The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster delegates authority for certain responsibilities to the Minister for the Cabinet Office, and the Minister for the Cabinet Office delegates certain roles and functions to me. I am the smallest dog, and there is nowhere further for things to fall past that point.

The OGP and GPA are mine on a day-to-day basis. There will be times when there are particular issues I might escalate to MCO or CDL, but, yes, I am responsible on a day-to-day basis.

Q169 **Chair:** Are the functions divided between you and the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Jeremy Quin?

**Alex Burghart:** As I say, I have day-to-day oversight of both of those portfolios. The Places for Growth portfolio is managed by my colleague Baroness Neville-Rolfe, but we both report to MCO on these issues. As I say, week by week and sub by sub, it comes to me or, if it is Places for Growth, Baroness Neville-Rolfe.

**Chair:** In practice, you take responsibility.

**Alex Burghart:** That is correct.

Q170 **Chair:** Mr Chand, why did the Government launch the Places for Growth programme and what are its primary aims?

**Ravi Chand:** I will start with how it came about and the analysis we did. Back in 2018, a comprehensive exercise was carried out to assess what the size of the public sector was in London and the south-east compared



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to the private sector, and how many Civil Service roles were based in London and the south-east or in the other parts of the UK.

This analysis threw up a whole bunch of issues that we considered at the time about whether we should have such a strong presence in central London. At the time, the analysis showed that London and the south-east made up 27% of the UK population; 40% of the private sector sat in London and the south-east, as did 33% of the Civil Service, but only 28% of operational delivery roles.

At the time, the concerns from the analysis were that 70% of our senior Civil Service were in the five postcodes of central London, SW1 in the main; 80% of our policymaking capability—our senior civil servants—was in London in SW1. This threw up a number of issues and questions about whether we should be so heavily concentrated in London or whether we should do more to spread the ability to make policy to different parts of the UK.

As time went on, there were some other things that came into the equation. There was a further study done on career options for our people. From surveys of our people, we established that most of our people thought that, if they wanted a senior career or to progress to senior levels in the Civil Service, they would have to relocate to London.

At the time, that was deemed not sensible. We wanted to do more to create career opportunities for people outside of London. The bulk of the Civil Service sat outside London in any case, but those are predominantly operational delivery-type roles. All the policy, power and decision-making was in that central London area.

That was the problem we were trying to address. Part of that took us on a path to do a literature review. If we were to relocate roles, what should we do? What has been done here and around the world? There was quite a comprehensive literature review of relocations around the world. There were 18 particular studies of relocations looked at in some depth to learn the lessons about what has worked and what has not worked. If we were to embark on relocating roles, what ought we to do?

We set that out, and then in 2020 the Chancellor announced that we would relocate 22,000 roles out of London. Those 22,000 roles included, it is worth saying, civil servants of the big Ministries, Departments that got Government grants and those that had direct Parliament votes.

It includes arm's length bodies. There were some 563 arm's length bodies that were potentially in scope. The idea was to see whether we could move Civil Service Departments and their arm's length bodies out of London, if they did not have a strong reason to be there, particularly because they occupied really expensive estate as well.

If you think about it, at the time the estate costs for London were significantly higher—and they still are—than other parts of the UK. The



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estate cost outside of London can be £18 to £25 a square foot. In London, it is about £75 a square foot. The question was, "Do we need to be in an expensive London estate paying higher salaries when there are opportunities to put jobs in other parts of the UK?" There was a strong collective view that we ought to do more to put jobs into other places. We identified—this was our theory of change—the benefits that we thought we could bring about.

As you will know, in 2021 there was a commitment by Government to do much more on levelling up. As part of our analysis, we made some decisions about where we could potentially locate, but we also needed to look through the lens of what levelling up meant and what we could do in different places around the UK.

Coupling those things together led us to identify a set of primary locations, the 15 big cities in the UK, and then some other places where we could do much more levelling up. We knew we would make some financial savings in terms of London weighting and lower churn, because churn for roles outside London was much lower than in London.

Q171 **Chair:** If I could interrupt, I might say that your primary aims were to save money and to relocate to different regions under the levelling-up agenda.

**Ravi Chand:** Yes. There were also other benefits in here, such as creating career opportunities for people in other places and improving the way we make policy. These are non-monetised benefits, but things that would really have an impact. Having senior folk in different parts of the UK would allow us to inform better Government policymaking, rather than only developing policy through the lens of people who live and work within SW1 of London. That was really important.

Those other factors are really important. This also brings us closer to communities, making us better engaged with and much more representative of local communities across the UK.

Q172 **Chair:** Those are the primary aims. This started in 2018, but, as I understand it, the proportion of all civil servants based in London has risen from 2010 to the present day. We are doing the reverse of what you are suggesting.

**Ravi Chand:** A lot of factors have come in since we announced this in 2020. Numbers have gone up as a consequence of Brexit and the pandemic. We saw numbers rise, particularly in test and trace. Numbers have risen.

More recent numbers have shown that this is beginning to drop or we anticipate it dropping. My engagement with Departments in London has shown that they are looking to reduce their numbers. We have a plan called the "plan for London", for which I am the SRO as well. That plan is looking towards getting London down to around about 75,000 FTE, from around about 100,000 FTE, by 2030. The plan is still to reduce the



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London numbers, but there was this increase as a consequence of other factors, which we are now addressing.

Q173 **Chair:** If we move 22,000 posts out of London tomorrow, the proportion of civil servants will still be higher in London.

**Ravi Chand:** Real roles should be relocated out of London. These are real posts. They should not be recreated back in London. There should be 22,000 real roles out of London by 2030, which have not been reappointed to London.

That does not take into account other activities and growth that may take place that would lead to increases. For example, in the pandemic, we had an increase that was unrelated to the Places for Growth portfolio.

Q174 **Chair:** Minister, why just 22,000? Where did 22,000 come from? It feels very arbitrary.

**Alex Burghart:** The 22,000 was worked out based on what we could reasonably do over the course of the spending review. It was based on where the opportunities to move to were and what the opportunities to move out of London were. A great deal of work went into that number. I certainly refute the idea that it was pulled out of a hat.

Q175 **Chair:** You would agree with me this started in 2018. We are now in 2023. Not a lot has happened in between.

**Alex Burghart:** It actually started in 2017. As you will remember, it was in the Conservative Party manifesto in that year. As Ravi has already said, one or two things have happened in the interim that have slowed processes across Whitehall, across the country and across the world. As Ravi has just laid out, we have very ambitious yet fulfillable targets over the next few years.

Q176 **Damien Moore:** Good morning, Minister. The Cabinet Office opened a second headquarters in Glasgow last year. What makes a second headquarters different from a hub? Which teams there work closely with Ministers on a regular basis?

**Alex Burghart:** Glasgow is really a hub and a second headquarters. We have a number of excellent civil servants from the Cabinet Office there who we work with, but also in Glasgow itself there are representatives of very many Departments, because it is an excellent city in which to work, with fantastic transport links, a fantastic skills base and great wealth of experience.

What makes it a second headquarters for us is really that the Cabinet Office has more senior roles in Glasgow than anywhere else. In giving it that title, we wanted to make a statement about our commitment to the city and the region. We have elements of the Crown Commercial Service, Government Business Services, with which I work on a regular basis, a security element that Baroness Neville-Rolfe works with and a Civil Service employee element that the Minister for the Cabinet Office works



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with. In a standard working week, I would be talking to somebody from Glasgow at some point on least one occasion.

Q177 **Damien Moore:** Since its opening, Ministers have worked there only six times in the last year. Is this enough? How often are you and other Government Ministers planning to work from the Glasgow headquarters? What work are you planning to do there?

**Alex Burghart:** It has been six times in the past year, which is about once every eight weeks. If at the same time you look at the other locations across the country that Cabinet Office Ministers have worked out of, you are at one visit a month. There is good engagement. As I said in answer to my previous question, the truth is that we work with people in these areas, not just Glasgow but all the other areas where we have Cabinet Office civil servants, on a daily basis. We are in frequent contact.

My next visit to Glasgow is in May. That will be an important visit for me because it will be my first one since I have taken up post. I would have gone up sooner, had it not been for the fact that I have been taking the Procurement Bill through the Commons, which has taken up a very great deal of my time.

The work I will do on that visit will be twofold. First, I will be holding workaday meetings with the officials who work on the portfolios I cover. As I have found on my visits to other locations, you also get to kick the tyres a bit when you are there in person in a way you do not when you are on screen.

You see the status of the building; you get to walk around the floor, talk to people at random, see how they feel about it and see how they are using the space. Hopefully there are advantages for officials in having Ministers do that as well. To a certain extent it is like being in any office space physically rather than virtually. You can see the advantages to it.

Q178 **Damien Moore:** You have touched on a couple of the benefits of you being able to work in the Glasgow office, but what practical challenges stop you from spending a working day in that office?

**Alex Burghart:** The practical challenges are fairly straightforward. It is four and a half hours on a train to Glasgow. If you fly, there is a carbon element involved in that.

For me as a Minister, the limitation is mostly on time. I went to Birmingham the other day, and you are door to door, literally, in under two hours. We have an excellent location in the old Woolworths building right by the station. That is much more doable to pop up for a meeting. The further away you get, the bigger the constraints are.

With that said, for a lot of our sites the choice has been because of the excellent transport networks they are on. You can get to Manchester in just over two hours; you can get to Darlington in two and a half hours. In



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a lot of instances, it is easier to do. Glasgow is a little further. With time constraints, it is a little harder to spend more time there.

Q179 **Damien Moore:** Moving slightly eastward, there is a UK Government hub in Edinburgh, which was completed in 2020, that contains a dedicated Cabinet meeting room. How often, if ever, has the Cabinet met there? When does it next plan to do so?

**Alex Burghart:** I am afraid I cannot tell you that, Mr Moore. Not being a member of the Cabinet now or ever, I am unaware as to whether the Cabinet has met in Glasgow.

I know the previous Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, worked from that secure room in Edinburgh. I can think of at least one occasion when he did. I have no doubt the Cabinet will want to take up the opportunity to hold a meeting in Edinburgh at the first available opportunity.

Q180 **Damien Moore:** You and other Cabinet Office Ministers have been working remotely. Are you happy to work remotely or do you prefer face-to-face meetings with officials?

**Alex Burghart:** I am very happy to meet with my officials virtually. This is my third Government role. I was in education before, and in DWP after that, before I came to the Cabinet Office. I have to say I am very relaxed about it. These days, it is perfectly possible to hold high-quality meetings and have high-quality discussion in a hybrid form. As a Minister, on and off, for the past 18 months or whatever it is, I am very happy to work in a hybrid way.

Q181 **Damien Moore:** I am just looking at where people go from and to. Have you, or do you know whether any of your ministerial colleagues have, requested that an official working on another site or another hub come to London for a meeting?

**Alex Burghart:** I cannot talk for my colleagues, but I certainly never have. That does not mean people do not choose to move location, just as I sometimes choose to work elsewhere. No, I have never made that requirement. I have been in meetings with ministerial colleagues where there have been people on screen and they seem perfectly content with that.

Q182 **Damien Moore:** Moving to you, Mr Chand, the Cabinet Office is currently advertising for a Bill manager, a role that involves significant parliamentary engagement and a regular presence in London, but the job advert specifies that it has to be based outside London in either Glasgow or York.

Why was London excluded as a base given that this is where the person who does the job will have to spend much of their time? Is this symptomatic of the Cabinet Office recruiting with the aim of filling the Government's non-London hubs rather than recruiting for the job at hand?





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**Ravi Chand:** It is for each recruiting manager to make a decision about where a role can be located. Much of the Bill manager role can be done in a hybrid way online. If I think about my time, spent predominantly dealing with Ministers, all of my meetings have staff from all over the country online.

We make clear for any role that, if there is a requirement to travel, you need to put that in the advert. I have not seen this particular advert, but I would imagine they have set that out clearly. They would have made an assessment that the individual postholder would spend a predominant amount of their time in Glasgow. That is why the role would be advertised there. If that was not the case, it would be unfair to the individual concerned and I would ask the recruitment manager to reconsider where they are placing that post.

Q183 **Beth Winter:** Mr Burghart, you commented about visiting Glasgow. This is the second headquarters with around 350 staff. This is a significant relocation that has taken place. I note that in the Declaration on Government Reform in 2021 the Government made a high-profile commitment to regular ministerial presence, not visits. That clearly has not happened. Is that acceptable?

In terms of management and leadership, a large proportion of senior civil servants have been relocated. You have just described what you have termed as infrequent visits, not actual presence.

**Alex Burghart:** I do not want to get into a semantic debate with you about visits and presence, but one of the ways in which you acquire presence is by visiting. What I have described is that currently about twice every parliamentary term there is a ministerial presence in Glasgow.

Q184 **Beth Winter:** How long has that been for? When you say "presence", for what duration was that?

**Alex Burghart:** The last time the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster went up there, he went up for 48 hours.

**Beth Winter:** He visited.

**Alex Burghart:** He was present there. He exhibited a presence in the office in Glasgow, in much the same way as I am presenting myself in front of you in this committee room.

If you are asking whether it will ever be possible for Ministers to go up to Glasgow every day, the answer to that is no, probably not, because of the nature of their work and their commitments in Parliament. Will they be there regularly? Yes, absolutely.

Q185 **Beth Winter:** Does that not make a mockery of the whole premise of relocating to these hubs, which was to spread Government across the UK and embed people in communities? There is clearly a lack of ministerial





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presence. We have had some evidence that there is still an expectation for senior civil servants to spend quite a significant amount of time traveling to London to be able to fulfil ministerial duties.

**Alex Burghart:** I do not know what evidence you are pointing to. As I just answered in my response to Mr Moore, that is not an expectation I put on my officials. In fact, as I said, I have meetings with people in Glasgow on a very regular basis on screen. We find it a satisfactory working arrangement. I do not think that people in Glasgow feel disconnected from Ministers or that it is preventing them from doing excellent work.

The truth is that the relocation of civil servants around the country is partially about investing in those communities and seeking the benefit of the expertise and skills that exist in those communities. That is very apparently happening.

Q186 **Ronnie Cowan:** I have a brief supplementary on that. If it is such an onerous task to spend four and a half hours on a train to Glasgow, I suppose the likes of Dundee and Aberdeen have no chance whatsoever.

**Alex Burghart:** No chance of what?

**Ronnie Cowan:** They have no chance of having an office based there, given the travel time.

**Alex Burghart:** As you will have just heard me say, there are opportunities for higher-grade civil servants to get together, work together and communicate over hybrid working. There is absolutely no barrier to hubs being formed or offices being opened or run in those places.

Q187 **Ronnie Cowan:** The Cabinet Office's written evidence says that Glasgow was chosen as the location for its second headquarters "on the basis of the Places for Growth location evidence base and criteria". What in the blooming heck does that mean?

**Ravi Chand:** When we did the assessment of great places to go, we found certain criteria that showed whether you could successfully relocate large numbers of Government jobs. Glasgow was one of the locations that we identified. There were 15 locations in the first round of assessments and Glasgow was one of the first 15 we identified. There were certain factors that helped to decide that. You need about 500,000 people in the travel-to-work area. You need about 100,000 people who have NVQ level 4 and above qualifications within the travel-to-work area. You need access to schools, good universities and good transport links.

Q188 **Ronnie Cowan:** What is a travel-to-work area?

**Ravi Chand:** Travel-to-work area is an Office for National Statistics assessment of how far people travel from their home place to their workplace.



Q189 **Ronnie Cowan:** How long is it?

**Ravi Chand:** It varies from place to place. The better the connectivity or, in other words, the faster the transport, the wider the area. If you have fast transport from A to B and you can get there in 20 minutes, half an hour or an hour, that is great. As a general measure, about an hour of travel is normally the travel-to-work area. Some people go further. If I look at London, London has a travel-to-work area of one and a half hours to two hours. People will travel for two hours or more to get to London. It varies from place to place.

Generally, local authorities make these assessments themselves. They take the data and they analyse it. They look at how far people travel, and they use that to make an assessment about how they can keep jobs in their place so people do not have to travel so far. We use it to make an assessment of how far people might be able to travel if we were to offer jobs in Glasgow, for example. You can then work out the size of population and proportion of the population with a qualification, and you can then make an assessment about whether you are going to be able to draw the skills you need in a place.

Glasgow had all those great qualities of a place where we could really attract talent. It has great universities, lots of highly qualified people and great transport links, all the factors that are really important to us, which we looked at. We assessed Glasgow as one of the places we could use. We then went into Departments and asked the Departments.

Q190 **Ronnie Cowan:** Did any of the 15 not satisfy the criteria?

**Ravi Chand:** The 15 were Edinburgh, Glasgow, Belfast, Cardiff—

**Ronnie Cowan:** So Edinburgh does not have any of those criteria.

**Ravi Chand:** Edinburgh is one of the locations we identified that meet the criteria. Bristol, Birmingham, Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool are all places we have identified. We also identified Newcastle, Sheffield and Nottingham.

**Ronnie Cowan:** You are just naming big cities.

**Ravi Chand:** Yes, but they are the ones. On the basis of the criteria, you are more likely to be in the big cities. The evidence base we had suggested that we would have more success landing these relocations in these bigger cities. When we got to the levelling-up discussion, we then looked at places around not just big cities but other locations that we could try.

We knew the risk around those places might be slightly greater because our access to skills might be a more of a risk. When we settled on places for levelling up, we ensured that those places did have access to skills, despite being slightly further from those big cities.

Q191 **Ronnie Cowan:** My concern with this is that you are centralising things



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here. You have closed down HMRC in Cumbernauld; you are closing down offices in East Kilbride. You are bringing them into Glasgow, where people are expected to do an hour's travel in and an hour's travel home. That is two hours' travel a day. Over a week, I am doing 10 hours' traveling. The Minister has just said that it is an onerous task to do four and a half hours up to Glasgow in a week.

**Ravi Chand:** Those are consolidations of Departments where they have taken decisions about where it is easier for them to—

Q192 **Ronnie Cowan:** You are consolidating Departments. You are taking people out of those communities who are spending money in those communities. You are centralising them all in the middle of Glasgow.

**Ravi Chand:** It is my understanding, from the analysis these Departments have done, that individuals continue to live in those places but travel to these offices.

On East Kilbride, I do not believe they have left. The HMRC centre 1 tax office is still up and running there. We also have what was the former Department for International Development, which is now part of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. That is still there, and they are growing their numbers. East Kilbride has seen an increase in numbers as a consequence of Places for Growth. We should see an additional 400 or 500 people there by 2030. The number of jobs has increased in those places. That is a really good thing for those places.

Cumbernauld is slightly north of Glasgow, as you know. The office was in a residential area. What we now have in 1 Atlantic Square in Glasgow provides a much more modern and great place to work. I have visited Cumbernauld—I have been to many of the offices that existed—and 1 Atlantic Square, in terms of what it provides our staff, is of much better quality than what was available in Cumbernauld.

Q193 **Ronnie Cowan:** The Government's press releases have cited research that suggests that, for every 1,000 jobs relocated to an area, that area benefits by £30 million, with workers putting 50% of their salaries back into the local area. If I am spending my money in central Glasgow, I am not spending my money in my own local community, where I live.

**Ravi Chand:** We are trying to make an assessment of the region and the wider area in which that might be spent.

Q194 **Ronnie Cowan:** What is the region?

**Ravi Chand:** Generally speaking, there is an assessment that says people will be spending money where they live.

Q195 **Ronnie Cowan:** When you say "region", you are talking about greater Glasgow.

**Ravi Chand:** Yes. In this case, it would be greater Glasgow. I should be clear: when I am talking about regions, I am talking about travel-to-work



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areas. The area we assess to be the travel-to-work area is where the impact happens.

We looked at various models and in the Treasury Green Book to see how we might measure this. There are a number of ways of measuring what we think that economic impact might be. I worked with economists across Government. I asked ONS to look at what we were doing. We arrived at a theory about what we think might be a measure for economic impact, and we set that out.

We are about to undertake an exercise to evaluate whether we are having the level of impact we anticipated. That is a piece of work that is going to take place this year. Then I will be able to report back on whether we are having the right impact or we need to do something differently to get economic impact in these places.

Q196 **Ronnie Cowan:** How did you get to the figure of 50% of salaries going back into the local area?

**Ravi Chand:** There were various models. We looked at how economic impact is measured. Some relocations carried out in the past took into account that 100% of salary would be spent in a place. They said, "People will spend 100% of their disposable income in a place, and therefore we can count that as an economic impact to the area".

Q197 **Ronnie Cowan:** Is it salary or disposable income?

**Ravi Chand:** It is salary, sorry. We took a far more conservative estimate of what people might spend in the area and landed on 50%, which we will test to see whether it is true when we come to evaluate. We will do; we will make that assessment to see whether we have that.

There are other factors like job multipliers, GVA, GDP impact and other assessments that can be made. We will come back to these to assess whether those are taking place. That was seen as a fair, proportionate and sensible measure to use to make that assessment.

Q198 **Ronnie Cowan:** Do you have a breakdown of this? I find it very hard to believe that 50% of someone's salary is spent in a place, after their mortgage, any loans, their tax and their national insurance. I would really like a breakdown of that figure. Disposable income would have been more understandable. Do you have a breakdown of that?

**Ravi Chand:** Like I said, we looked at where salary had been used—

**Ronnie Cowan:** Can you show your workings for this figure?

**Ravi Chand:** Yes, I can. I can show you a range of studies.

**Ronnie Cowan:** Can you send them to the Committee? That will make it quicker.

**Ravi Chand:** I can show you what the studies we looked at showed us. I can share that.



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Q199 **Ronnie Cowan:** The research on the economic benefit assumes that all the workers live in the local area and come into the office every day. How are these economic calculations affected if people commute from far away and only come into the office a couple of times a week?

**Ravi Chand:** We made the assessment before the pandemic, to be clear on this. This is why it is really important to make an assessment now as to whether, as a consequence of changed behaviour in terms of people going into office and how much time they spend there, that is having a different impact to the one we anticipated.

It is too early for me to assess at this point in time what that is, but I completely appreciate that things have changed. We have also learned that people are prepared to travel further because they are in the office for fewer days and other things because they can work in a hybrid way. These are factors we now need to assess.

Q200 **Ronnie Cowan:** I appreciate that the pandemic has changed everything. Potentially, that could turn everything you are trying to do here on its head.

**Ravi Chand:** It could do, but relocating real jobs to places, regardless of whether someone is in the office two days a week or five days a week, has an impact on economies. Every study I have looked at shows that it has an economic impact, particularly with higher-paid work.

Q201 **Ronnie Cowan:** It has an impact on the economy. I am trying to get my head around which economy it is having an impact on. Is it where I live or where I work?

**Ravi Chand:** Our expectation and our policy has been clear. We expect individuals to live and work within the travel-to-work area of the office location where we expect them to work from. That is really important. That allows us to take a measure of the travel-to-work area of that office. That is what we have asserted very clearly with Departments and repeated.

There will be some individuals who will travel a bit further. Generally, my experience is that, the more senior you are, the more likely you are to travel a bit further because you can afford to. As PACAC will know from your visit to Glasgow, the majority of our people live and work within central Glasgow. You asked that question of them. The majority clearly said they live and work within central Glasgow. We have high confidence that the majority of people live and work in the area.

Q202 **Ronnie Cowan:** Maybe my concept of central Glasgow is not the same as your concept of central Glasgow. They are not living in central Glasgow. They may be living within easy commuting distance, but living in accommodation within central Glasgow is not quite like London. The city has a different layout.

Mr Boyd, I want to bring you into this conversation. You are not here just



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as window dressing. Last year you told the Public Accounts Committee that there were two hubs you had not originally planned to open. One was the Treasury hub in Darlington and the other was the levelling-up hub in Wolverhampton. How were these locations chosen? Why did you not originally plan for them to be there?

**Steven Boyd:** We respond to departmental workforce planning, which is informed by the Places for Growth work. In the last spending review, SR21, there was a period of negotiation between Departments as to what they wanted to achieve and how that aligned with the Places for Growth planning. That allowed us to arrive at a number of hubs that could be funded in that period.

At that time, that did not include some of the buildings that have now come into our programme. The hubs programme is a very long-term commitment to change where the Civil Service is based in the United Kingdom, looking at all the nations and regions of the United Kingdom. It is not a surprise that there are changes during the length of that programme.

Some new requirements have come from Departments since then. As you say, that includes Wolverhampton, which has become the second headquarters of DLUHC. That also includes Stoke, where we are fitting out an office as we speak, which will be opened in the next month or so, to provide space for the Home Office.

There are inevitably changes, but these depend on departmental workforce plans. As we have talked about previously, the pandemic has led to considerable changes in Departments' workforce planning. We are responding to those things as best we can. In lots of cases it remains largely unchanged. In other cases new buildings have come into our programme.

Q203 **Ronnie Cowan:** We heard earlier that there is a list of potential cities that these hubs can be located in. Are you saying that the places you looked at on the original list were not suitable, and then you discarded all of those and made a second draft, which included Darlington? How did Darlington force its way to the top of the list?

**Steven Boyd:** I am not at all saying the original list of hubs was not correct. If you match the list with the 18 hubs that have so far been delivered and are open, you will see there is a very high agreement with the list of PfG target locations Ravi was describing earlier on. That is how those came to be identified.

Since that time, there has been a wider consideration about how you create a network of offices. Rather than a series of hubs that work in a radial way, reflecting only back to London, we have been thinking about how our important new, modern and digitally connected offices can work as a network.





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That will be national—for instance, connections between Glasgow and Edinburgh or between Newcastle and York—but it will also include having more than one office in a travel-to-work area. In many of our key cities we have many buildings. If you take Nottingham, for instance, we currently have 13 buildings in Nottingham.

**Q204 Ronnie Cowan:** I am particularly interested in Darlington and Wolverhampton. My impression was that they were not part of the original conversation. If I were being totally cynical here—and I love Darlington; I worked there for seven years and it is a great place—it was a bit of a surprise when the then Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that the financial hub was going to be so close to his constituency.

**Steven Boyd:** Darlington—I agree with you—is a great place. The provision of the Darlington Economic Campus in that location will make a really big impact on the area. We have already opened one building in Darlington at Feethams House. There are close to 600 civil servants working there now. That has already made a big impact, and there is further expansion to be had in Darlington.

I would point you back to my earlier response. We are delivering the property to meet the workforce need. It would not be appropriate for the property tail to wag the dog. It is for Departments and the Civil Service in the round to say, “This is where we need to have our people”, and then it is our job to go out and find space. Sometimes we can find space in an existing property, which is great, because we can then achieve that relocation on a very low cost.

For instance, of the 11,000 roles that have already been located from central London as part of the Places for Growth programme, we have found space for 4,000 in existing buildings. That has allowed those moves to happen at almost no cost, which is really a good news story. It comes back to us responding to the need of each Department and its workforce requirements.

**Q205 Ronnie Cowan:** Just to allay my fears, there is no political reason why Wolverhampton was chosen, given that it is close to Robert Jenrick’s home, and Darlington was not chosen because it is close to the now Prime Minister’s constituency.

**Steven Boyd:** The workforce requirements from the Department of Levelling Up in the case of Wolverhampton and from the group of Departments that represent the Darlington Economic Campus pointed to Wolverhampton, which has wonderful connectivity into the centre of Birmingham, and subsequently to Darlington as the location of the economic campus.

Darlington has great connectivity. On the main line, you can go up to Newcastle or down to York and Leeds very quickly. Going back to Ravi’s earlier points, that allows civil servants to build a career over the long term in a number of Departments, working from a number of buildings





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without having to relocate to London. That allows us to draw on all the best talents that exist in all parts of the country, including in the north-east of England.

**Q206 Ronnie Cowan:** I fear I have taken up a lot of the Committee's time this morning. Maybe we could get through this a little bit more quickly. It is my fault. How are you planning to evaluate the extent to which the Places for Growth programme is delivering the expected economic benefits to the areas in which you are relocating jobs?

**Ravi Chand:** I should have said earlier that the 15 locations was our starting point. In the end, there are 32 locations. There is a really good spread across the entire United Kingdom of PfG locations. We are embarking on an exercise to look at this. I set out some of this already, but there are two areas that we will test. One is monetised benefits, so economic impact to areas, whether we are making real savings in estate costs and salary costs, and the benefits to the local economy, which includes job multipliers. If I put public sector jobs there, how many private sector jobs do I create as a consequence? We want to test that.

Then there are the non-monetised elements. That includes the degree to which we are having an impact on how we make policy in place and place-making. We really want to get a real assessment of how that is working and how well we are engaged with our partners in a local place.

**Q207 Ronnie Cowan:** I do not want to take too long on this, but how do you measure that?

**Ravi Chand:** That is the exercise we are embarking on now, to see how we can do that. There are two ways that will be done. One is a quantitative analysis of the data we hold, which we can collect from ONS and other places, and through surveys. The second will involve some qualitative work. We will need to go to various places and, through interviews and meeting partners, make an assessment of the degree to which those have had real impact.

Those are two areas that we have brought into the scope of our plan for the evaluation that we want to carry out this year.

**Ronnie Cowan:** It will be a quantitative analysis of data.

**Ravi Chand:** It is quantitative and qualitative.

**Q208 Ronnie Cowan:** That means nothing. What are you measuring?

**Ravi Chand:** If I take a role from London and put it in Glasgow, how much money have we saved the taxpayer in terms of estate costs? If we are going from £75 a square foot down to £20 a square foot, can we realise that money? If I am recruiting for a role in Glasgow that was previously in London, paying national instead of London pay scales and saving the London weighting, am I saving real salary for the individual? You can make those kinds of assessments.



The other bit we need to assess is whether, as a consequence of the jobs, where we have a critical mass of jobs, we see evidence of job multipliers in an area. In other words, do we have more coffee shops and more jobs in the local market that have come as a consequence of having greater numbers of jobs in that place?

Those can be measured. They can be quantified, and we want to do that, but they are not the only measures. There are non-monetised benefits as well. Are we really helping to shape policy and make policymaking better? Do people in place feel they are better connected to central Government in a way they were not before? Do they better understand what central Government does for them and how they can support their needs as well? There are other factors we are shaping in our evaluation that we want to assess.

**Q209 Ronnie Cowan:** Very briefly and finally, when you are looking at the evaluation, in particular the first one you were talking about, with people's salaries being spent and so on, there is almost a spreadsheet approach to it. Will you also take into consideration the fact you have closed 170 local offices around the United Kingdom when you think about the net benefit you hope to be causing by centralising these Departments?

**Ravi Chand:** The Places for Growth portfolio is not involved in any consolidation programmes that the Departments run. They made these decisions based on their own operating models. What is the most efficient way to deliver those public services at low cost? That is a judgment call they make.

The challenge we have—we can measure some of this stuff—is that jobs drop and grow in places, whether it be private or public sector. Even the private sector has consolidated in places. If we were to start to take those into account, it would really overly complicate what we are trying to assess ourselves.

What we are going to do, as a consequence of what we are doing, is ask whether we are adding value to a place in monetised and non-monetised ways. We will make that assessment. Of course, that will be assessed against the backdrop of other things that are happening in that place.

**Q210 Ronnie Cowan:** You get my point. If you are closing offices in Wrexham and Cumbernauld, and centralising those functions, you have to take into consideration the unintended damage of closing those offices in the first place before you will get the benefit of opening up in Glasgow, Cardiff or whatever.

**Ravi Chand:** The Departments that consolidate will have to make sure that in their business case they have taken those into account. They would only close offices, relocate and centralise if the business case



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stacked up and presented value for money for the public purse. They would do that only on that basis.

**Q211 Beth Winter:** Mr Chand, I am slightly perplexed. You are saying that relocations bring economic benefits, but then you have not undertaken the evaluation to evidence the extent to which the economic benefits will exist. There is some research that has already been undertaken by the Public Accounts Committee that has identified economic losses.

At this stage, rather than us continuing this conversation, can you send us as a Committee the methods by which you will undertake the research, the measurement tools, the evaluation tools and the existing research that has been undertaken that you claim evidences the economic benefits? I am not sure whether all that has already been published. If you could send us all the data, the qualitative and quantitative tools, and the existing evidence, we can analyse that as part of the Committee's findings. It is probably better if you send us the evidence.

**Ravi Chand:** That is fine, yes. Just for clarification so there is no doubt in terms of what I am saying—this is really important—when you embark on a programme portfolio like this, you carry out some really in-depth analysis to make judgment calls and see whether the business case stacks up to do it.

**Beth Winter:** Please do send us that.

**Ravi Chand:** That took place. You then have to deliver the programme. There is a point in time in that programme when you carry out an evaluation. For this particular portfolio, it was important that we had a critical mass of roles outside London. We have that. We have had huge success in getting over 11,000 roles outside London already in the first three years of a 10-year programme.

We feel this is a good time to evaluate the impact. It is really difficult to evaluate the impact unless you have a critical mass of roles that you can measure. You cannot measure job multipliers unless you have a significant number of roles in that place. Now is the right time to do the evaluation. That is why we are doing it. I would never have done an evaluation earlier. It would not have made sense because we did not have critical mass.

**Q212 Beth Winter:** Send us the analysis, which you have just referenced. I am not sure whether all that has been published.

**Ravi Chand:** It has not been published. I am more than happy to share the numbers.

**Beth Winter:** If you could send us that, any interim reports and subsequent evaluation tools, that would be really useful.

**Q213 Chair:** Just on that last point, when will the evaluation be complete?



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**Ravi Chand:** We are just embarking on setting up the criteria of what we want to measure. I am hoping to be able to have a report by the autumn.

Q214 **Chair:** Will that be made available to the Committee?

**Ravi Chand:** It will have to go through the circuits of Government to be discussed and for us to make a decision about what steps we are going to take next. I am sure at some point we will be able to make that available.

Q215 **Chair:** Will the Minister undertake to make that available to the Committee?

**Alex Burghart:** Yes, I am happy to share with you the analysis. As Ravi says, it depends on what your timescales are. The evaluation is not going to be complete until the autumn.

Q216 **Chair:** We will have our report out, but I am sure we might come back and do a supplementary on the evidence that is produced.

Mr Boyd, you are in charge of the Government Property Agency. You are theoretically in charge of all Government property. Is that correct?

**Steven Boyd:** No, I am in charge of the portfolio of central Government's offices and warehouses. Government property is divided into a number of portfolios around particular asset types—hospitals, prisons, offices, etc—and there is a responsible body for planning and delivery of each of those portfolio types.

In the Cabinet Office, the Office of Government Property has an overview of all those asset classes. GPA has responsibility for offices and warehouses. As you know, we are a reasonably new body. We are prioritising offices first before warehouses, but that is our responsibility. If you ask me any tricky questions on hospitals or prisons, I will have to defer, but I can answer about offices.

Q217 **Chair:** It was reported that HMRC, DWP and Defra will transfer their offices to you by 2025. Is that correct?

**Steven Boyd:** The SR21 settlement required Departments to plan with us to transfer their buildings at an appropriate time. Today, we plan and manage 100% of the offices in the portfolio, regardless of whether they are controlled specifically by us. We look right across the whole office portfolio in terms of planning for the future.

We do that at a national level through an annual strategic asset management plan, which is published, and we do it at a local level through a number of portfolio plans. We look, for instance, at the Greater Manchester area or the Greater Birmingham area in a portfolio plan. We look at all of central Government's offices in that space, regardless of whether we are managing them.

From a strategic planning point of view, we look at 100%, but as of today about 44% of those assets have been transferred; 13 of the 16 large



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Departments have either transferred or agreed to transfer. Some of the ones that you have listed are in the later part of the transfer programme.

Q218 **Chair:** They have not been transferred as yet.

**Steven Boyd:** Not all of those Departments have been. For each of those Departments there are a small number, ones and twos, that have been transferred. In the case of HMRC, for instance, the transfer of London 100 Parliament Street has already taken place. In the case of the Department of Work and Pensions, we are working on the transfer of their headquarters from London Caxton House.

Q219 **Chair:** The intention is for all of them to be transferred.

**Steven Boyd:** That is the intention for almost all of the Government offices.

Q220 **Chair:** You say “almost all”. Is the intention to transfer them all or not?

**Steven Boyd:** I would like to transfer them all.

Q221 **Chair:** The ultimate goal is that your Department should have complete control of all those offices we have just discussed.

**Steven Boyd:** Yes.

Q222 **Chair:** That is meant to happen by 2025, is it, or is there not a strict timescale?

**Steven Boyd:** The SR21 settlement required Departments to plan with us to do that. It will not all be complete by 2025.

Q223 **Chair:** How much efficiency savings will be obtained by bringing everything under one roof?

**Steven Boyd:** There are considerable efficiency savings to be achieved. If you look at what was happening—

**Chair:** Can you quantify them?

**Steven Boyd:** So far we have calculated the benefits that we have delivered as around about £900 million. You will recall that the Public Accounts Committee, based on the report produced by the NAO, asked us to look again at those benefits to see whether we were capturing everything or whether there had been any double counts. We have therefore engaged a consultant to help us with that work. We are reviewing all of those benefits, focusing to begin with on those additional benefits we have delivered this year. Once we have done that, we will then go back and look at what we have done in the past.

The financial benefits are really quite clear. We have already had some answers that have described the very large difference between the cost of property in central London and other parts of the United Kingdom. That is an obvious saving by relocating roles around the UK. There are also considerable savings in rationalisation.



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Before GPA came along, there were nearly 250 Government bodies managing offices, often in silos without any central co-ordination. There was no strategic planning and no forward thinking. GPA has come along and it is doing that. We have discovered that, frankly, we have too much space. The advent of changes in working patterns post the pandemic has accelerated that.

There is too much space. As well as supporting the Places for Growth programme by moving roles out of London, which saves a lot of money, we are also rationalising in towns and cities across the UK to make sure we have no more space than we need. On top of that, there are savings by investing properly in lifecycle planning to make sure we are not facing increased maintenance costs and disruption to business because we are not doing that in a proper way.

We are also investing in sustainability work for buildings we are going to retain in the longer term, which saves us money on utilities costs and saves on carbon. There are several clear ways in which we are already saving a great deal of money, and there is more of that to come. If the Committee is interested, I can give examples of how we are doing that in specific cities.

Q224 **Chair:** Does the legal ownership pass to your agency?

**Steven Boyd:** All of the property in the Government is held under the name of the Secretary of State of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, but the assets sit on our balance sheet, correct. They are transferred to us.

**Chair:** You effectively have control.

**Steven Boyd:** That is correct.

Q225 **Damien Moore:** Do we just look at these buildings in financial terms? Maybe you have not been involved in this, but I think this move to sell some buildings, like the Old War Office Building at the end of Whitehall, is the wrong decision.

Why throw people into random buildings when there are these good buildings? Yes, they take maintenance, but this building is going to cost an awful lot in the next few years in itself. It is appropriate for people to work in and it is very close. We could be supporting people to work in very nice civic buildings. The Cabinet Office in central London is very nice. I would not want that to be moved somewhere else.

Are we looking at this just in financial terms, and not at the pride in these buildings and other associated values from the actual building itself?

**Steven Boyd:** That is an excellent question. We do not look just in financial terms. As I described in answer to an earlier question, we are looking to create a network of offices. Clearly, that will include our offices in central London. We control most of the offices along one of the sides of





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Parliament Street. Those are clearly iconic buildings, in which we intend to continue to invest.

I will give you an example of work we have recently done in Birmingham. This shows how we think much more broadly than financial considerations. In the last year, we opened a new office in Birmingham at 23 Stephenson Street, which, as the Minister was previously saying, is a repurposed retail space. It was previously the Woolies. This is right in the centre of town. We closed eight buildings in the immediate central Birmingham area, and those have been consolidated into that building.

There are now 1,700 civil servants working from that building. That is 20 different Departments, which were previously fragmented, with offices that were two-thirds full and one-half full. That has all been reduced. They are now in a single building with excellent workplace design that supports modern working practices. We are also providing consistent property technology: the Wi-Fi, the room booking and the access control, all of those things that allow civil servants to work in a really productive way.

The building repurposed that retail facility. We delivered it to BREEAM “very good” and EPC B, which is a very high standard of sustainability. That is supporting the Government’s policy and saving carbon along the way. The construction and fit-out supported jobs in the area. Clearly, there were people doing that and they are now servicing that work. We have made running cost savings of £2 million per year going forward.

From a financial point of view, that is great. That is all good so far. As you point out, Mr Moore, there is much more than that. In addition to that, we invest in the services and the design to make sure civil servants are supported from both a wellbeing point of view and a productivity point of view. The building was recently awarded the Leesman+ certification, which is an internationally recognised certification for the way a building works in the round, in its design and its services. That is a very rare certification. It puts that building in the top 5% of commercial offices worldwide that have been reviewed. It is one of only a handful of public sector buildings that have ever achieved that.

If I can give you some of the information that came from that study—

Q226 **Chair:** Can you put that in writing, please? I am conscious of time and we have quite a lot of questions still to get through. It would be interesting to get good examples of good practice.

**Steven Boyd:** I would love to put that in writing. I was just going to go on to say that we measure the impact on community, the impact on pride, the impact on productivity and the impact on wellbeing. All those things are hugely up. It saves money and delivers better space.

**Alex Burghart:** Mr Chair, I am just going to come in very quickly to Damien’s original point. What we say in Cabinet Office is that we are not





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in the business of selling the family silver. We do not even sell the family pewter very much, but there are some base metals that need to go. They go because they have reached the end of their lifecycle in terms of how much they will cost to maintain. To your point, we do not tend to sell historic buildings.

**Q227 Jo Gideon:** To Mr Boyd, we have heard evidence that DWP is embarking on its own major property programme. It is shutting lots of local offices, including Stoke-on-Trent, and moving to its own regional centres. Is this being co-ordinated with the Government hubs programme you run or is it standalone?

**Steven Boyd:** It is being co-ordinated to a point, in that the DWP currently is involved in two main portfolios. It is involved in the office portfolio and it actually has quite a small number of offices, which support its necessary back office function. We are working very closely with the DWP on those buildings, looking to transfer some of them to us initially, with more later. I mentioned Caxton House earlier on.

We are also, importantly, collaborating with them on the workplace design, to make sure it has the same look and feel as our buildings, and on the property technology. There is the collaboration on the office space, but the DWP also—this is a major part of its work—looks after a large network of jobcentres, around 700 at the moment. I do not have the exact figure, but they are obviously in every part of the United Kingdom. We do not collaborate with them on those. That is their business to deliver those under the overarching co-ordination of the Office of Government Property in the Cabinet Office.

**Q228 Jo Gideon:** I am just going back on that and the example you gave about consolidating offices within Birmingham. In Stoke-on-Trent, the people who have been moved out of a very old office, which was not fit for purpose, are being told that they should go to Telford. The average train time to travel to work is two hours and 12 minutes. Is that acceptable? I would imagine not. Would this not be an opportunity to co-ordinate the Government buildings that are happening in the centre? How might you work with the DWP to co-ordinate this better?

**Steven Boyd:** I agree with you that there needs to be better co-ordination. That is one of the reasons why GPA was created. Where we control the buildings directly, we can obviously co-ordinate that extremely well, because we know about that. With those buildings that are not yet transferred, including those from DWP, we meet with them extremely regularly to plan ahead, as I mentioned, particularly on the large back office buildings, where we have really good collaboration with them. As to the smaller buildings that support the jobcentre programme, which I admit I do not know a lot about, I cannot comment.

**Q229 Jo Gideon:** This was back office actually. To move on, we have also heard evidence of towns and cities such as Wolverhampton that lost Government offices under phase 1 of the Government hubs programme,



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but were later gaining new offices under phase 2. What does this say about joined-up policy, taking away and then giving back?

**Steven Boyd:** If I can answer in two parts, there is first of all the workforce planning point and then secondly the strategic planning of offices. In the case of workforce planning, it is a departmental issue to decide where they want to locate their people. The NAO Report, on which this hearing is partly based, did point out that there would be some advantages of better co-ordination at a Civil Service level between departmental workforce plans. Since we have been created, which as you know is reasonably recently, we have taken a strategic view in locations about how to join up.

I suppose the closure of one office in a place and then, a year later, the opening of a new office in the place without obvious co-ordination is in itself a really good justification for the creation of GPA.

Q230 **Jo Gideon:** Minister, given that so many civil servants have shown that they are perfectly capable of working from home, does the business case for spending public money on commissioning a number of large new office buildings around the country still exist?

**Alex Burghart:** Yes, it very much does. We do not want to move to a world where everyone is working from home all the time. There are very good reasons to have people working in offices and collaborating, in some cases just as a general point. For example, there are many jobs across Government that have to be conducted in secure or relatively secure environments. I was in Peterborough the other day and the Passport Office is there. They have occupancy rates of about 70% to 80%, because a lot of the roles are dealing with sensitive personal information. They cannot be done at home. It must be done in the office.

Although some people work from home full time now, the majority of people do not and do not want to, and we do not want them to. It is good to have high-quality buildings of the type that Steven has described that are fit for the needs of the 21st century, and to help the Government invest in places and get the benefit of the skills in those places.

Q231 **Jo Gideon:** I am going back to the aims of Places for Growth, which was to get the voices from people around the country. Could this not be delivered through homeworking rather than new hubs? You did say, Minister, that actually, rather than travelling to Glasgow, you were quite happy to Zoom in on conversations. That can be done from home, obviously.

**Alex Burghart:** That is right to one point, but there are two different things here. There is homeworking and then there is remote working. Every day I will have a meeting with somebody—at least one person and normally many people—who is not in the same office as me. That does not mean they are working from home. They are working from an office where they have colleagues around them who they chat to formally and informally throughout the day. Then there are some people, actually



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quite a small number of people, who work from home five days a week. That might be necessary for them personally. It might be because of their personal situation.

It may also be because they are at a particular stage in a particular project where they want to sit in isolation and not be disturbed, although in the modern offices we are building there are more opportunities for people to seek peace and quiet in those buildings. As I say, we definitely want to get the voices of people. We definitely want to relocate roles to other parts of the country that have not always had them, but we do not want to force everyone to work from home all the time.

**Q232 Jo Gideon:** The former Minister for the Cabinet Office and Brexit Opportunities made it clear last year that he expected to see civil servants working from the office more. Is there a Government policy on how often civil servants should come into the office?

**Alex Burghart:** Government is wide, varied and complex. I have just mentioned to you the Passport Office in Peterborough. That new hub is a brand new building, part of a major new development by the river in Peterborough. The money that Government put in meant that other investment came in. A hotel was built and hundreds of apartments. It is a fantastic opportunity for the town.

On the ground floor there you have the Passport Office, but on the floor above you have part of Defra. It is part of Defra that deals with flood analysis for that region. A lot of those people are out of the office quite a lot, because they are going and checking on the countryside. It is an essential part of their job. Sometimes they come back to the office. Sometimes they then go home and work from there. I just use these two examples as a way of illustrating that we cannot have a hard and fast rule.

As Steven said, in a lot of the work that we are doing with reference to the committee hearing today, we are really seeking to provide the office space that our clients—that is other Government Departments—are looking for. It is for them to make those decisions about what they need, what their staff need and how they can get the most for their team, for their work and for the country.

**Q233 Jo Gideon:** Could I unpack that a little more, maybe with Mr Boyd? Does each Government Department define what office space each role within that Department needs? How is it broken down?

**Steven Boyd:** How it works is that we recognise that each Department is different and they will have their different requirements, as the Minister was just saying, comparing the Passport Office with Defra. We have done a lot of research on the relative benefits of working from home and working in office space. We have consulted considerably too with the private sector.



We are clear that there are some things that actually work very well at home. As the Minister was just saying, if you are writing up a detailed project report or something, and it is going to take you all day, that is a good thing you can do at home. There are other things that are much better done in the office. We describe that as four Cs. That is collaboration, creativity, caring and community. Our office spaces are designed for the things that people need to do best in the offices. The balance of working in a defined workspace, alongside colleagues, with homeworking will vary not only Department by Department but team to team within Departments.

To be honest, that is a little bit of a challenge for us, because that means that it is a different breakdown on a building-by-building basis. We try to listen carefully to Departments but also plan on an average working basis, so we can start work, assume that we understand largely where we are going and then fit around the Department's specific needs.

In terms of your question about the design of the workspace, we try to make that as standard as possible. The costs of an office are, simplistically, the cost to get there in the first place and then the cost of making changes throughout the office's life. The cost of making changes throughout the office's life are typically much larger than building it in the first place. Our aim is to minimise those costs of change by making the design of the workplace and of the technology as consistent as possible. That having been said, sometimes Departments have what we call special requirements for things that are particular to them, for instance the handling of passports.

**Q234 Jo Gideon:** The Public Accounts Committee concluded last year that it was "sceptical that the Government hubs programme still represented good value for money". Given the falls in demand for office floorspace and commercial rents, how have you reassessed your strategy in the light of these concerns?

**Steven Boyd:** That is a good point. There have been a number of changes over the last year or so, such as in the hybrid working patterns in Government Departments. Not all Departments have made the same changes, but no doubt there has been a change. The balance of working at home, from our observations, seems to have increased compared to the amount of time in the office. That allows us to do two things. In the case of new buildings, it allows us to build smaller buildings. It also allows us to make a better use of existing space. Sometimes we find that we were planning a large hub and actually we can now build one that is two-thirds of the size.

We might also find, in cases where the population is smaller, we do not need to take a new office, because we can accommodate those people in an existing office space and save the expense of building a new office. We have taken that into account in all places. That has led to us revisiting some projects, which obviously has added a little bit of time, but that is



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the right thing to do in order to make sure we do not spend taxpayers' money unnecessarily.

**Q235 Jo Gideon:** The GPA has already delivered four hubs, but I understand the promise is to deliver 13 new hubs by March 2025, as envisaged at the start of this spending review period. Is that still on course? Is that still the aspiration?

**Steven Boyd:** It is broadly on course. As I mentioned before, some new things have come in, including Darlington, Wolverhampton, Stoke, as you will know particularly. Looking across the hubs programme in the round, 18 are open now. That is 14 delivered in phase 1, plus four. That has created a network across large parts of the UK. There are eight more in development. When I say "in development", I mean in actual refurbishment or actual construction, with a majority of those being taken forward by GPA.

Within that, there is one building being taken forward by DWP, to your earlier point, which is in Blackpool, and one building being taken forward by HMRC, which is in Newcastle, in both cases to our workplace designs and our property technology standards, to make sure we create a consistent network.

Then there are six other buildings in planning stages. What I mean by "planning stages" is that we are working on options in locations to get to a contract. You will understand that I will not announce those until we have actually signed a piece of paper to say we are going to go ahead.

So 18 are already open. Eight are in actual refurbishment and construction, which brings the total to 26. Then another six are in planning, which may or may not come to pass. You would expect this to bring the total in the reasonably near future to around about 30.

**Q236 Jo Gideon:** Can I just check? Did I hear correctly that Stoke has been designated as a hub? That would be a newsflash.

**Steven Boyd:** It is a comparatively smaller building, as you know. The requirement is around about 600 people. We are currently fitting out Smithfield as an interim facility. The Home Office is committed to Stoke in the longer term. The building will not be one of our larger ones, supporting 600 people, but it will also have a citizen-facing part of the building and therefore will be reasonably large. We are working really closely with Stoke City Council in order to get the right location and the right price.

**Q237 Jo Gideon:** Can I ask a little supplementary on that? My understanding of a hub is that it is more than one Government Department.

**Steven Boyd:** A hub would typically be more than one Government Department. It would also typically have more facilities than a smaller office. In the smaller office, it would not make sense to provide significant meeting room facilities and so on. A hub is primarily defined by the fact



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that it is suitable to be shared by multiple Departments. It is reasonably large and therefore has the facilities for amenities such as meeting rooms, conferencing facilities, etc.

Where you draw the line between, "This is a very big building" and, "This is a smaller building" is one for debate. The important thing for the network of offices, and in this case for Stoke in particular, is that the Home Office is committed to that location and the GPA is working really closely with them to deliver an excellent facility.

**Jo Gideon:** Whether or not it is a hub. Thank you.

Q238 **Beth Winter:** What is the Government Property Agency doing about HMRC renting floor space to other Departments above market rent?

**Steven Boyd:** The way that both HMRC and GPA manage their buildings is to sublet them to Government Departments. We have an agreement with HMRC that we take exactly the same approach, so that there are no perverse behaviours between Departments to choose this building over the other building. Generally, the rent paid by a Department that is subleasing part of that building will be the same or very similar to the rent being paid by HMRC or GPA.

There will be some circumstances, however, where an additional charge is placed on them. For instance, if a Department takes a term that is the whole of the remaining term of that building, which might be, say, 15 years, there is no risk of either HMRC or GPA being faced with vacant space that they need to fill. If a Department wants to take only three years or five years, say, leaving GPA or HMRC faced with a potential void space, the normal activity here would be then to charge rent premium on top of that. The incentive around that is the same that applies in the property industry across the whole of the UK, encouraging people to plan ahead and take the longest sensible lease. If they want to take a shorter-term occupation, they are pushing risk on to another part of Government and that has to be managed in an appropriate way.

Q239 **Beth Winter:** The Public Accounts Committee has expressed concern and actually warned HMRC about the practice. If I can move on to Mr Burghart, do you feel that the Cabinet Office is getting value for money by renting office space from HMRC in Glasgow?

**Alex Burghart:** Yes, absolutely.

Q240 **Beth Winter:** What about the above-market rent that is being paid?

**Alex Burghart:** As Steven has just described, we would only be paying above-market rent if the landlord was taking risk on our behalf. Is that not right, Steven? It is normal market activity.

**Steven Boyd:** That is correct. I go on to say that, when the Cabinet Office decided its location plan and its workforce plan, which included Glasgow, the fact that there was a hub there and that HMRC could make





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space available in that hub saved having to find and fit out a new office. There were considerable savings made by making best use of the existing space.

Q241 **Chair:** I am sorry to interrupt. This seems an utterly ludicrous policy. If I was a company I would not rent my offices to my own company. This is property owned by Government, rented by one Department to another, which creates a paper trail. They employ people; they have accounting things to do. It just seems an utter waste of money.

**Steven Boyd:** Many large corporates run a similar internal cost system for their business units.

Q242 **Beth Winter:** We are not talking about a corporate. This is public money here. This is not a corporation.

**Steven Boyd:** I am just describing what is a typical thing to do. This is the way that the process works within the UK Government.

**Beth Winter:** We are not a corporation. This is public money. As you have just said, it just does not make sense.

**Alex Burghart:** Prior to the existence of the GPA, no rents were charged for freeholds. Steven has deeper and longer experience of this than I do, but what Government observed were perverse behaviours as a result. If you are a Department, Treasury gives you money for your offices. You then do not have to spend it on your freehold. What happens is that people end up seeing that as a total freebie. They stay in poorly conditioned offices. They do not have an incentive to improve and to rationalise their space.

By entering into rent agreements, which are all agreed by the Treasury—I know it is public money being circulated, but it is all agreed by the Treasury—they have skin in the game. It means that we have been able to work with their collective budgets to do exactly the sort of work that Steven has described. Have I given a fair account?

**Steven Boyd:** You have. This is about creating the right incentives, so the incentives for Departments to occupy only that space that they need and for the GPA to provide the right space, in the right quality, in the right location. That is a system that is working well, particularly in this transition period where some Departments are renting from GPA and, to a smaller extent, from HMRC. They are also renting on the open market.

Q243 **Beth Winter:** I still cannot understand but we will have to come back to that. Mr Burghart has just answered the next question, but can you provide us with the evidence that you just referred to about people taking advantage if they are not charged rent? Can you just supply us with that information, because that is a very stark comment to have made?

**Alex Burghart:** Yes, I am sure we can.

**Steven Boyd:** We can give you some examples from before that process.





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**Beth Winter:** Send them to us if you can, because that is quite a concerning statement to have made that people are taking advantage.

**Alex Burghart:** They are not anymore.

**Beth Winter:** I need to see the evidence for that, because you are not in the commercial sector. You are in the public sector.

**Alex Burghart:** It was all part of the work that was done in 2018, when the GPA was set up, in response to things like the deteriorating condition of large parts of the estate.

**Steven Boyd:** That does not happen anymore. That is one of the reasons why the Treasury mandated the transfer of freehold offices to GPA, which has been in large part completed. It is again about incentives. The incentives need to be set up, as they have been now, to incentivise everyone in the system to do the best thing for the public purse, whereas previously, with Departments believing that freeholds were actually free, that allowed them to make, not always but sometimes, perverse decisions based on what was the lowest-cost option for them as opposed to the lowest-cost option for Government in the round. Getting those incentives right is a really important thing.

**Beth Winter:** Can you provide us with that evidence, please? Incentivisation is not what drives people to work in the public sector, if you look at the research and the evidence. You are using terms and making assumptions, and I need to see that evidence, because I have lots of alarm bells ringing based on what you have just said.

Q244 **Karin Smyth:** We have this particularly around the health service and incentives around NHS Property Services. The question the Chair asked is really about the policy and whether this way of using property, similar to the commercial sector, which is a policy change in the last 10 or so years, is now one that the Government still abide with and that we do not see perverse incentives happening around. For example, around NHS Property Services, I know in my own constituency third-sector organisations cannot use any property. We have a lot of voids.

The issue here is that you talk about long unnegotiated rents for some of those bodies. Others will move out of those buildings more quickly. What control do you have as an organisation to stop that perverse incentive for a Government Department to say, "Actually, this is no longer worth it, because the bottom line suggests we need to go somewhere else"? What is the Government's view about holding all these public bodies together in an area in line with the levelling-up policy, because there is an opportunity for a disincentive happening there?

**Steven Boyd:** I can answer the technical part first before turning to the Minister on the policy point. It is about making sure we have the right incentives. We want Departments to choose the estate of the size that they need for their business outcomes, in the right place, and not worry about whether that is a leasehold, a freehold, or a PFI building, which previously they did and that led to some quite odd decisions. All of that in



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the case of offices is managed behind the scenes. From a Department's point of view, it is paying for space. It is as simple as that.

Q245 **Chair:** Following that point to its logical conclusion, if I am a Department in, say, Darlington, I have a rent offered by HMRC or your Department, and I go along and find a private sector building that is a better nick and they are going to offer it to me for half the price, am I entitled to move to that private sector building?

**Steven Boyd:** They would be entitled to seek to do that. There would be a Cabinet Office control that would manage that, but I would respectfully suggest that they would not get anywhere near as good a deal, because the prices of rent are driven largely by the length of term and Departments typically want short terms.

Q246 **Chair:** That is not necessarily true. If you are private sector, you can do what you like. You might think, "Well, if I have a Government Department here paying for the rent, I have a really good covenant and therefore I am willing to take a lesser rent". Would I be allowed therefore to have a Department do that?

**Steven Boyd:** They would be able to offer a lower rent because of the covenant for that Department. GPA has the same covenant, so there would be no advantage there. Our advantage is that we can purchase freeholds or take longer rents for a larger space, which makes our ability to secure it much better.

Q247 **Chair:** But my point is about whether, if that were on the table, the Government would allow that Department to move into the private commercial property.

**Steven Boyd:** That would be a matter for the Office of Government Property to look at.

Q248 **Chair:** That is a principle—yes or no.

**Steven Boyd:** As a principle, if there is space in existing Government buildings, no, that would not be allowed.

Q249 **Beth Winter:** To move on, because I am very conscious of time, Mr Burghart, what is currently the target of job cuts across Government and what is the timeframe for those job cuts to take place?

**Alex Burghart:** There is no target.

Q250 **Beth Winter:** Earlier in the year, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster told us that, although the Government had abandoned its formal target, it was still committed to reducing departmental budgets, broadly in line with this target. Can you just clarify the target number of job cuts planned across Government and exactly what I just asked?

**Alex Burghart:** Government are absolutely always looking for efficiencies. Those efficiencies come in a plethora of ways. I do not want to give you the impression that we are not seeking to make savings. We



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very much are. Previous Ministers have set a numerical target. We are not doing that.

Q251 **Beth Winter:** There is no target and there are not going to be any job cuts.

**Alex Burghart:** No, those two things are different. We are not saying that there will not be any efficiencies. What we are saying is that we have not set a target for the number of headcount reductions.

Q252 **Beth Winter:** Will a target be set? If so, what would be the timeframe for that?

**Alex Burghart:** I do not believe that there will be a numerical target set. We will look at many and various ways of saving money and creating efficiencies, but we are not saying that we have to reduce headcount by a certain figure.

Q253 **Beth Winter:** My Boyd, what impacts have planned job cuts had? There was an announcement of 91,000 jobs. I know that has now been withdrawn. What impact would that have on the plans for new regional hubs, if any?

**Steven Boyd:** There are some impacts. The first one is that, while there is no target, Departments are looking to how they can be as effective as possible. In some cases, that has led to some assumptions about a smaller number of people, though all Departments are committed to maintaining their Places for Growth targets to move people to the regions. Largely because of the pandemic, the other impact has been one of a little uncertainty about what future workforce plans are. Of course we need to aim for what workforce numbers will be in five or 10 years' time, not what they are this week.

Q254 **Beth Winter:** It is being taken into account.

**Steven Boyd:** It is.

Q255 **Beth Winter:** Mr Chand, finally, if civil servants do relocate to a new city, are they assured that their post will not be made redundant? Is it a guarantee that their post will be retained?

**Ravi Chand:** There are no planned redundancies, just to be clear on that. Each Department has to make its own judgment call. What we are strongly encouraging is that roles that are relocated to a place have a sustainable future. We have set that out very clearly in the expectation of Departments. Of course, there are a whole bunch of other factors that may come into play in terms of Departments and efficiencies, and changes that may take place. I cannot pre-empt what might happen in the future, but, as it stands, no Department has yet come to me and said that the roles it has relocated are at risk of redundancy.

Q256 **Karin Smyth:** Slightly revisiting our previous discussion, what happens to a Department's regional hub or secondary headquarters, in the event



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of machinery of Government changes? Perhaps that Department then takes out some of its functions that are not part of that hub.

**Steven Boyd:** In the case of the recent machinery of Government—MOG—changes, it is largely simplifying. Largely we have seen BEIS split into three Departments. In the case of the element that has gone into the Department for Business and Trade, that is reasonably straightforward. That is a joined-up organisation. For the two new Departments, however, that is a new thing. They need to work out what their workforce strategies and location strategies are. That is something that clearly neither of them has quite got to yet, because they were formed only very recently. As you point out, they will be building on people who are already based in all parts of the UK.

Once we get to the end of the discussion with them about how they want to base themselves, largely the existing occupancy agreement between BEIS and us will transfer to an agreement between us and one or more of those new Departments. It is a reasonably straightforward thing, once they have decided and we have helped them with what their new workforce plans are.

**Q257 Karin Smyth:** The Department hubs presumably have break clauses. You talked earlier about longer rental agreements. Do they have standard break clauses?

**Steven Boyd:** They do have clauses that allow them to leave at some point, with the necessary notice. We would transfer those to the new Departments. We would just transfer that on a level, because effectively it is the same people doing the same jobs.

**Q258 Karin Smyth:** We are interested in this issue about Departments being separate employers. We had a long discussion with the trade unions particularly about that. Government Departments now have different pay scales and terms and conditions for their staff for the same grades, which came as a bit of a shock to some of us. As more people move within different Departments, and then find themselves co-located in the same city and then the same building, this leads to a problem of unfairness and perhaps of moving people round. What is the Government's view about how we manage that?

**Alex Burghart:** This is actually quite a longstanding practice. It goes back to 1996. Any such friction that you might describe would have been experienced in Whitehall already. It is not a new thing.

**Q259 Karin Smyth:** We are now moving out, as a deliberate policy, into hubs where you have different Departments in the same building, with the same talent pool working in the same city.

**Alex Burghart:** The point I am making is that you have buildings in the London estate where large numbers of Departments and agencies are working cheek by jowl and sharing communal spaces. This is not a new



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thing and most people who work in the Civil Service understand that this is the case. We do not envisage it creating any new frictions at all.

Q260 **Karin Smyth:** The Government do not think that, when you have a smaller travel-to-work population and when demands for skills are very great at the moment, jumping ship and moving round in these new areas is a problem.

**Alex Burghart:** No, one of the reasons we are creating hubs is so that you can have a range of Government bodies that can fish for talent in an area that we see has potential.

Q261 **Karin Smyth:** They are stealing each other's fish. I am not a fisherperson, so I know that is not the right analogy.

**Alex Burghart:** I am neither a fisher nor an angler myself. To stretch the analogy, the places that we have chosen have a lot of fish. Actually, they have some big fish that have not previously been caught because nobody has been fishing there.

Q262 **Tom Randall:** Minister, we have the establishment of the regional offices. Do you think that changes any of the advice that you see from officials or the policy decisions that you as a Minister take?

**Alex Burghart:** That is a very good question. I have thought about this myself. It is quite difficult to know, in that you ask yourself how many of the views one takes, or the policy papers one has written in the past, are determined by where one is and where one has grown up. Obviously, there is an influence there, but it is quite hard to immediately identify in all circumstances. It is certainly true that we are seeing people come into the Civil Service who had not previously considered a role there. That is bound to offer additional perspectives, which we believe will be useful to us across Government.

Earlier this week or last week, I was talking to a team in Darlington who said just this. They know, because they had spoken to their new recruits, that there are people there who had never thought about working for the Government until the opportunity arose close to home. That goes very much to the original intention we set out in the 2017 manifesto. We want the voices, experiences and skills of people across the United Kingdom to be involved in the Civil Service and the running of the country. We are starting to see that.

Q263 **Tom Randall:** Are those new people who are starting their careers and might have gone into a private sector role, or is it people who have moved across having already had experience?

**Alex Burghart:** It is all of the above. We are seeing young people come in. We are also seeing people transfer out of the public sector. We are also creating interesting routes through apprenticeships to ensure that people with different educational qualifications have pathways into working in the Civil Service that they perhaps have not had in the past.



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Q264 **Tom Randall:** One thing that was heard on the recent Committee trip to Glasgow, which was not a visit I was on, was that some of the officials in the Government hubs are engaging with local authorities, businesses and the third sector, but the officials are not actually devoted to making policy for that region where they are based. What is the purpose of that engagement?

**Alex Burghart:** Obviously, there are multiple purposes. First is general community enrichment. Part of that might be recruiting local people, so going to career fairs, talking to third-sector or other employers about what skills are in the area and what your pipelines might be, recruiting from local universities and so on. It is also about having guest lecturers come in and talk to officials about their experiences. For example, in Glasgow, the Scottish Government take care of a lot that goes on up there, but the economy is still the economy, so, to a certain extent, the experiences of local businesspeople are of great relevance to us. No, we are not just building buildings. We are putting something in that is intended to be part of the community.

Q265 **Tom Randall:** There is no danger of blurred lines and saying the Cabinet Office in Glasgow is doing something that the Scotland Office or another Department ought to be doing.

**Alex Burghart:** No, certainly not. Government work seamlessly.

**Ravi Chand:** One of the things that we have found in the feedback is staff engaging in volunteering activities. In Glasgow, there are 12 events where staff have been engaged in activities and just playing a part in the local community. That really adds huge value. It promotes what the Civil Service is. One thing we have learned is that, in some of these places, some have never heard of the Civil Service, what it does and what it exists for, let alone Parliament or anything else. It is a really good opportunity for people to engage in what is happening in politics, Government and what it does. It is a great way of promoting.

It has also led to making it much easier, as part of our Closer to Home campaign for recruitment that we are running, to create awareness about why they might want to apply for a job and work for us. Bear in mind, we are still putting quite a number of jobs in places like Glasgow. It is important that we raise awareness. On those issues, it is great.

I appreciate on devolved matters we are not involved, but on reserved matters we are. On those issues Government will continue to be able to provide advice. We have HR, legal, project delivery and commercial based in the Glasgow office. They advise across UK-wide issues. It is great to have the perspective of someone who lives and works in Glasgow and can give a view on national Government policy. Again, it is of great value to the Civil Service as a whole.

Q266 **Tom Randall:** Mr Chand, Government are going to create these 22,000 new posts in the regions. Is it not the case that a lot of those posts are





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going to be new or newish recruits who have gone straight into the regional hubs? Is there a danger that you end up with “them and us”, in that you have the people in Whitehall in London who have the experience of dealing with Ministers and that Whitehall culture, and then the people who have been recruited directly into the regions, who do not have that experience?

**Ravi Chand:** We strongly encourage Departments to relocate a range of roles, and actually more senior grade roles. That is really important. Across all the parts of the UK and the offices I have visited, I found feedback from staff saying, “I have got to a certain grade. I have hit my ceiling. Actually, the next chance I will get for promotion is when Muggins dies, because that is the only way I get promoted”. Actually, we are creating roles now at that level where they can get promoted. It is really important that we continue to recruit and develop our people in those places.

Statistics have previously shown that four in five roles within the Civil Service are recruited for across the UK. We are developing people, growing them and now providing senior opportunity. Because we are recruiting across the wider spectrum, from apprentices all the way to graduates, into the Civil Service, as well as attracting individuals from the private sector who may have transferrable skills, I am not seeing the evidence of “them and us”. With modern technology and an ability to engage, meetings are all done in a hybrid way online, so actually there is not “them and us”. There is a sense of team across the UK in a way we probably have not seen. It has opened up more doors and more opportunities for engagement than we had before.

Q267 **Tom Randall:** When Michael Gove was Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, he gave the Ditchley lecture and he said that he wants Government to be less southern, less middle class. “How can we be less anywhere and more somewhere?” You read out the list of cities earlier, the potential places or actual places to build hubs. They were mainly the big university cities. Would it be the case that the majority of staff who are working in these hubs will be university graduates living in big cities? Once this process is complete, will the Places for Growth programme actually lead to any change in social attitudes of civil servants or the approach to policy?

**Ravi Chand:** Looking at some of the early analysis on the places, we have seen a very broad mix. We have seen some evidence. If I take Wolverhampton, really we have seen a broader mix of socioeconomic backgrounds into recruitment and bringing in apprentices. In some discussions I have had with the universities, they have said students go, study at university, but then cannot find a job in those places. They are drawn into London. We have to do something about that. Take my own kids; they do not want to come back home now to be with me. They want to go and live where they studied. That is not great for me but great for them. That is what universities are trying to do.





Places for Growth enables that to happen. It allows us to put out these roles and keep students in places. If they have studied there, they can get a real job working for Government. For some of these individuals, this is an opportunity to develop a career for life. They can come here, develop skills and move on to other organisations, which often people do. They have five, six, seven, 10 careers now over their lifetime. This will mean they can come in, develop skills with us, in a place, but then contribute to the place in other organisations, public, private or third sector, in a way they have not been able to do before.

Moving senior roles has allowed us to mobilise careers in different parts of the UK, in the UK Civil Service, in a way we had not been able to before.

**Q268 Damien Moore:** Minister, where Ministers and officials have experienced travel problems between London and one of the hubs, has this had an impact on transport infrastructure policy? I put that in the context of 13 March. For those Committee members and officials who were on that visit, it will remain etched in our minds as we tried to make our way back from Glasgow, having had our flight cancelled. We did try and scramble around to get others and some of us managed to get back. Some of us did not get back until the next day, including the Cabinet Secretary himself. We could not get the train, of course, because they were on strike.

This highlights that distance is not an object when everything is running properly, but when it is not it is pretty difficult. What impact are we are going to see on our transport infrastructure if these problems occur around the country at these regional hubs?

**Alex Burghart:** I am sorry to hear the Committee had a difficult time getting back. The truth is that most of these locations, as we said earlier, were chosen because they had good connections, both to big cities and to the surrounding areas. There are good reasons for that. I am afraid occasionally flights will get cancelled and trains will not run on time. Misfortune strikes, but on a normal day these places are well connected so that we can make the most of them and they can make the most of us. The work we are seeing done in all these places is starting to reflect that.

**Q269 Damien Moore:** Mr Boyd, what are the impacts of the Government hubs and Places for Growth programmes on the distance that people are traveling to the office? To what extent does it mean that people are having to use their cars? Obviously, London is very well catered for, but in other areas transport is not as well catered for.

**Steven Boyd:** When identifying a building location, we think very carefully about the transport that allows people to get to that location. That includes working closely with the local authority in those areas.

Simplistically, we try to get near to the main railway station and, if that is not possible, then close to a bus station. We also work with the local



authority on access for cycles, making sure that there are green travel routes. Generally, we do not provide a lot of parking. We provide parking only for fleet vehicles and an allowance for those people who have some mobility issue that means they need to travel by car. We are using best use of public transport in all of our locations, which is reducing the need for parking in city centres and helping us overall reduce the carbon emissions into the atmosphere.

**Q270 Damien Moore:** In terms of moving into towns, which might not have a lot of that, does that mean they are going to be excluded? We need to be providing better transport infrastructure really to everywhere. We would not want to exclude places based on that. Would you potentially then write to the Department for Transport saying, "We have identified areas that could be used as a hub, but realistically the transport links are not sufficient to make that viable for us"?

**Steven Boyd:** There is absolutely no intention to exclude anywhere. Working with local authorities, you are right that there is a different conversation, for instance, in the centre of Manchester than there is in a smaller town. We balance that, and sometimes that will mean there are considerations about parking in those smaller towns to make sure that people can access their place of work.

**Chair:** Can I thank all our witnesses for coming along today? You kindly agreed to give us some further information, so I would be grateful if you could write to the Committee in a timely manner with regards to that, but I appreciate your coming along today. This concludes this morning's evidence session.