

# Public Accounts Committee

## Oral evidence: Cross-Government Working, HC 75

Monday 11 December 2023

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Members present: Dame Meg Hillier (Chair); Olivia Blake; Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown; Mr Jonathan Djanogly; Mrs Flick Drummond; Anne Marie Morris.

Gareth Davies, Comptroller and Auditor General, National Audit Office, Sian Jones, National Audit Office, Oliver Lodge, National Audit Office, and David Fairbrother, Treasury Officer of Accounts, were in attendance.

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### Witnesses

**I:** Catherine Hutchinson, Head of the Evaluation Task Force, HMT/CO; Will Garton, Director-General for Levelling-up, DLUHC; Chris Thompson, Director for Net Zero Strategy, DESNZ; Nathan Moores, Director for Shared Services Strategy for Government, Cabinet Office.

**II:** Sir Alex Chisholm, Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Office; Cat Little, Second Permanent Secretary, HM Treasury.



## Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

### Lessons learned: Cross-government working (HC 1659)

#### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Catherine Hutchinson, Will Garton, Chris Thompson and Nathan Moores.

Q1 **Chair:** Welcome to the Public Accounts Committee on Monday 11 December 2023. Today we are looking at how Whitehall works across Government to deliver policies. Increasingly, Departments do need to work together to deal with the wicked issues that are not just siloed into individual Departments.

We know from the best bits we have seen that successful cross-Government working can get Government to deliver more effectively, but weaknesses in it can undermine delivery and value for money. It is also very challenging to deliver. Whitehall is designed to be Department-led. It is very challenging. Everyone strives for joined-up Government but it can be difficult to deliver.

We are delighted to welcome, as one of two panels today, witnesses from Departments and parts of Government that have successfully looked at cross-Government working and delivered on some of these things. We want to get some examples from them about the richness of what can be delivered when this works well.

I am really pleased to welcome Catherine Hutchinson, who is head of the very important Evaluation Task Force, which is joint between the Treasury and the Cabinet Office. This Committee is very keen on evaluation, Ms Hutchinson, so we are very pleased to have you in front of us today.

I am also pleased to welcome Will Garton, who is the director-general for levelling up at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. If ever there were something that ought to be cross-Government, levelling up is it. We are keen to hear how you think that is going.

I also welcome Chris Thompson, who is the director for net zero strategy at the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. Like this Committee, you have looked a lot at net zero with different Departments, including your own. We are keen to hear how you are integrating some of that challenge across Whitehall.

Last but not least, I welcome Nathan Moores, who is the director for shared services strategy for the Government at the Cabinet Office. Again, that is something we have looked at a lot on this Committee.

I will leave you out for the moment, Ms Hutchinson, but I want to kick off by asking the other three of you to give us examples of how you have, in



your policy areas, approached cross-Government working with other Departments. The biggest number of Departments we have seen working together was six on the drugs strategy. You can tell me whether you can top that. What are the particular challenges when you are doing that?

**Chris Thompson:** I will give a couple of examples of the things we do to help ensure we get buy-in and cross-Government collaboration.

I will start with governance, which is absolutely important. We have a structure that has a ministerial committee with DG and official-level support, which is followed by boards looking at particular topics or programmes underneath that. It has been valuable for us to have that commitment from the ministerial level to help manage the agenda and a clear escalation route. If we need to raise or resolve an issue, we feel like we have a clear pathway to do that.

If I can give one more example, another thing that really helps is our very clear objectives. We have statutory objectives, but there are other commitments right across Government. In March we published a delivery plan that went into unprecedented detail about individual policies. Delivering it was a really good exercise for driving cross-Government working, but it was also effectively a commitment from all parts of Government about what they were going to contribute.

**Q2 Chair:** You probably top the number of Departments because net zero applies in every Department, agency and corner of Government. Are there times when you as a Department want to see something and you struggle to get it into the consciousness of another part of Government because they have other priorities?

If you are the Home Office or the Ministry of Defence, for instance, you are dealing with very big issues like risks and security from day to day. Net zero, although crucially important, might sometimes slip down the agenda. Is that ever an issue? You do not necessarily have to name Departments, but is that ever a problem?

**Chris Thompson:** We have invested quite a lot in what we call systems modelling, which is about trying to look at where you need buy-in from other parts of Government to achieve your policy aim. We try to identify those early so we can start that collaboration as early as possible. That is really helpful. It can be a challenge. It is about starting it early and getting that buy-in to an agreed programme. Ultimately, the political commitment really helps, no matter where you are in Government. It is also very important that what you are working on is seen as a priority.

**Will Garton:** Good afternoon. It is not a particularly original thing for somebody from my Department to say, but the best examples of cross-Government working in DLUHC are when we work with places.

Necessarily, as the Committee well knows, public services and economic infrastructure come together in localities. The vast majority of our work is now done by working with places. That might be the English devolution



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agenda, which involves broadening the mayoral combined authorities and deepening them where they exist already. We have a programme called levelling-up partnerships, where we have very detailed partnership working with local authorities, businesses, charities and community groups to get under the skin of a place and see what needs to happen there in order to bring about improvements. Investment zones and free ports are place-based economic policy interventions. We have bespoke interventions in places such as Liverpool and Barrow, depending on the opportunities and risks to those localities.

In doing so, we draw in the full spectrum of Departments. We did not have a lot to do with Defence before we did a bit of work in Barrow quite recently. We had a Cabinet Secretary-led bit of work. The AUKUS deal will mean billions of pounds of extra investment coming into Barrow. As we know, Barrow is one of the poorest places in the country. If Barrow is still the same in 20 years' time as a result of that investment, we have collectively failed. How do we make sure we make the most of it?

Our cross-Government working starts bottom-up and place-based, but we also have a top-down way of looking at it, which is through the missions that the Department monitors and tracks and the Secretary of State's inter-ministerial group. We do it from both ends of the telescope, if you like. The crucial thing that joins them together is getting better and more accurate data and information on what is happening in places. We have a whole programme of work to try to improve that as well.

**Chair:** We will come to data. It is always a knotty issue. I am sure Ms Hutchinson will have something to say about that.

**Nathan Moores:** As the Committee might remember from when we came in January, shared services is the back office functions, such as HR, finance, payroll and inventory management. We are working across 18 Departments for all civil servants and a significant proportion of arm's length bodies as well.

We have been at this for two years since the refreshed launch of the strategy. The NAO knows very well that the shared services strategy has been long in its gestation.

What are the challenges we have found working across the 18 Departments? The first has been about having a clear vision and strategy so there is a unifying force of Permanent Secretaries, DGs, SROs, programme directors and teams—there is a community—delivering the shared services strategy in the Departments and the clusters. It is about setting that clear vision.

We have also built an evidence base, which Catherine will hopefully be reassured about. We started with an evidence base for a small amount of benefit, but, with the Departments and the clusters, we have grown the evidence base for benefits to around £2.4 billion.



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With shared services, we have found that it is really important to do that inspirational piece about winning hearts and minds and building the community up from every level, whether you are a service user, a service consumer, a commissioner or someone delivering the change. It has been very useful to have ministerial support, Permanent Secretary support and leadership support at every level to keep driving through the delivery of the strategy.

**Q3 Chair:** We are getting a very clear impression about the political leadership. In your case, Mr Garton, you have a very high-profile Secretary of State who is very determined on this issue. Net zero covers all Departments. Mr Moores, shared services is perhaps not a manifesto-level policy or public commitment that people are interested in.

I am not making any judgment about any of the current incumbents, but, between you, you have been in Whitehall for a while. Can there be a challenge when you have a change of personnel at the top? How significant is that political leadership in getting it going and then maintaining it? What are the risks when you have changes? How do you persuade someone that this is important?

**Nathan Moores:** Since we have been running this strategy, we have had four Ministers. All Ministers have been active, supported the delivery of the strategy and been willing to work with other Ministers and Permanent Secretaries. With any change of anyone in role, you need to build the relationship, build the trust, build the understanding and, from that understanding, help to build action to deliver the strategy.

**Will Garton:** Clearly, different Ministers have different priorities and so on and so forth. When it comes to the devolution agenda, there have been a lot of changes in political leadership across Departments since the original Greater Manchester deal in 2014. I have been involved in that for the last eight or nine years. It has sometimes gone faster and it has sometimes gone slower, but there is constant momentum now. Indeed, whenever my Secretary of State has changed over the last couple of years, we have kept going. In a way, it becomes self-perpetuating after a point.

**Chris Thompson:** What has helped is that we have the plans so detailed that they are integrated into individual Departments' programmes. A policy may be delivering net zero, but it will also be supporting other objectives. It could be supporting levelling up, for example. It is really helpful to have that level of detail and commitment at official level. It works with Departments' agenda. It is ingrained because we have been working together for a long time on the agenda.

**Q4 Chair:** Ms Hutchinson, your team is doing the evaluation of this. Tell us candidly how it is going. It is the holy grail. Everyone wants to see joined-up working across Government. Are we getting anywhere near to it? Again, it is not about judging the current incumbents because this is a very long process. We are aware of that.



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**Catherine Hutchinson:** We are certainly making progress. There are pockets of good practice. If you looked at the picture a few years ago, it does not look anything like the current picture. I can remember years when it would take such a long time for basic data-sharing agreements. In the last SR, £180 million was spent on getting the Integrated Data Service. Hopefully, when that service goes live, it will unlock a lot of things.

There are definitely great examples of where data sharing is now happening. The Shared Outcomes Fund funded a programme called Better Outcomes through Linked Data. It is basically through shared data. That is a partnership with MoJ, DWP and DfE. It is great for those sorts of things. It is still a barrier. For that reason, the task force has deliberately chosen in its priority areas shared outcomes such as reducing reoffending, net zero or levelling up. Those are the things we are trying to tackle specifically because we understand that they are very difficult to do.

**Chair:** I am going to come back to that a little later.

Q5 **Mr Djanogly:** I was intrigued by your varying comments on ministerial input to the process. Mr Moores was saying that ministerial leadership is very important and he likes to see it. Mr Garton was saying that Ministers come and go and, as long as we have a strategy in place, it all toddles along, although he did not actually mention setting the course of action. He was talking about when things were running.

I would be interested to hear a little bit more about that. My own view is that it is an important aspect. Maybe Ms Hutchinson is the adjudicator here.

**Chair:** He is handing you the hot potato, Ms Hutchinson.

**Catherine Hutchinson:** The question is about the extent to which I think they are integrated into the process. There are some very useful oversight boards in both of the programmes that include the relevant alternative Departments.

Q6 **Mr Djanogly:** Are you talking about the non-executive boards within Departments?

**Catherine Hutchinson:** No, I am talking about oversight boards.

Q7 **Mr Djanogly:** Are these ministerial oversight boards?

**Catherine Hutchinson:** No, they are at departmental level. When they are deciding programmes—

Q8 **Mr Djanogly:** I am talking about Ministers, Ms Hutchinson. What is the input and importance of Ministers in initiating and then overseeing the process?

**Catherine Hutchinson:** Through the Cabinet Office, there has definitely been a drive for Departments to work together and through the centre to



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achieve shared outcomes. That was seen both in the last SR and through Cabinet discussions. I do not know enough of the detail about the relationship of the Ministers in DLUHC or DESNZ to be able to tell you how that is felt in those individual Departments.

**Q9 Mr Djanogly:** From your eyrie, looking down on other Departments, you do not have a view on this or what it should be. Is this not part of your role?

**Catherine Hutchinson:** There are absolutely structural priorities. Most Departments are vertical. Most accounting officers report directly to their individual Minister. There will always be a pull from that side. The degree to which that outweighs the work that is happening across individual Departments varies greatly depending on the topic. As the Chair pointed out, it has been a structural issue for a while. That varies. It has been difficult. That is why it is currently a topic here.

**Q10 Mr Djanogly:** Does anyone else have a view on this?

**Will Garton:** Can I clarify something? I feel like I need to. Of course, ministerial appetite is absolutely important. If Ministers do not want us to do something, we do not do it, and quite rightly. That is really important.

The point I was trying to make is that it has been almost 10 years since the original Greater Manchester deal. Since then, there have been general elections, changes of Administration and different Ministers in different portfolios, with different views on some things. It was the Coalition Government, when it started. However, the English devolution agenda has maintained progress throughout that period. Clearly and unequivocally, if a set of Ministers came in and said they did not want to do it, it would not happen.

**Q11 Chair:** You would need another powerful local politician to be the champion of it.

**Will Garton:** Yes, that would be how we would—

**Q12 Mr Djanogly:** Thank you. I am looking here at paragraph 1.14 of the NAO Report. It says, "Some of the most commonly identified barriers were structures and bureaucracy hindering planning and delivery; ministerial priorities not being well understood; inconsistent join-up in spending decisions and allocations; a lack of routine data sharing between Departments; and poor arrangements for sharing best practice and learning". That is quite a list.

I have not heard much of that mentioned in anything that anyone has said so far. Do you recognise that? It has come out of the NAO Report. What would be the key to changing the silo mentality to a more co-operative situation?

**Nathan Moores:** With the shared services strategy, we have people working on refining the governance. The accounting officer accountabilities shape our working into Departments and into those arm's



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length bodies. With Matrix, which is one of the five clusters in shared services, we have tried to use accounting officer letters to get them to work more collectively. We have been looking at working within the existing governance structures to deliver across the system. That is on the governance side.

Making decisions across Departments can take time because of the need to go back into Departments and arm's length bodies. Matrix has also created what it calls a joint investment committee, where the accounting officers come together to make decisions and move more rapidly at pace.

On data sharing, in the shared services strategy we have come up with data standards for the whole of Government. They are now in a tool that people can use to adopt them when they build systems. We will continually improve those. We are moving towards gathering data into a system called GRID, which means we can look at where we have staff, where they are located and what skills and competencies they have. That is a tool that is under development, but it can be used at the moment.

There is more to be done on data sharing. Data sharing in the back office is improving. Around the wider architecture of 205 systems, there is a system to bring that together into one place for senior leaders, Ministers and others. Which other points would you like me to cover?

**Q13 Mr Djanogly:** We have covered ministerial arrangements. We have done data. Arrangements for sharing best practice and learning—how about that one?

**Nathan Moores:** When we came to PAC in January there was a strong steer to share best practice and learning. Since January, the team and I, along with the clusters, have been picking up the learning from some of those clusters that are a little bit further ahead, such as Defence and our overseas colleagues—overseas is led by FCDO—about their journey to cloud, their new ERPs and the new service wrapper they have put around that.

We have been sharing that with the clusters and the Departments that are just embarking on that journey. That would be Synergy, which is the big delivery departments, Matrix, which is the policy Departments, and Unity, which is led by HMRC.

**Will Garton:** Paragraph 1.14 is identifying problems in cross-Government working. Those are not really problems I have experienced in terms of the place-based agenda that DLUHC is heavily involved in. We work hand in glove with the Treasury on free ports and investment zones, for example, because they are place-based economic policies. We work extraordinarily closely with the Department of Health, if we are trying to have a particular bespoke health intervention in one of our levelling-up partnerships. The Department for Transport gets how devolution conflict enhance transport services in a mayoral combined authority.





It is not perfect; we are not getting it right all the time. Sometimes things do go wrong.

Q14 **Mr Djanogly:** You do not come across a silo mentality at all.

**Will Garton:** I would not quite characterise it as being as black and white as that. Clearly, sometimes there are trade-offs between a Department's objectives and the objectives of a place. Those things have to be reconciled. That is done through debate, advice and looking at the evidence. There is not a routine silo mentality.

There is sometimes scepticism or debate about the best way to achieve an outcome, but it does not feel to me like it is ingrained. In most of my experience working across Government, policymakers are open to, interested in and up for being challenged.

**Chris Thompson:** How much those factors play a part probably depends on the policy area that we are discussing. That would be my view. On data, I think we are in quite a good place with net zero. For example, when we appraise projects, we started with the Green Book, but we have supplemented that with guidance—we have worked on this with the Treasury—on how to value energy use or greenhouse gas emissions.

My team uses a common template with guidance when we ask for progress information from teams so that we are getting the information back, that it is shared and that it is usually consistent. We work very closely with teams. Personally, data has not been a challenge, or it is one where we have adjusted over time. There are areas that we will keep working on.

One example of a challenge that I have is reviewing our governance, scope and how we engage. I have to do that all the time. As net zero develops over the coming years and decades, we constantly need to consider, as the policies touch on more individuals, businesses and sectors, how we engage and which stakeholders within Government and outside it need to be involved in what way. That is one of the challenges that I have. I need to keep reviewing the governance and the way in which we engage people.

**Catherine Hutchinson:** I feel like I will be the grinch in the corner. I do recognise some of those things. Sharing lessons across Departments has been difficult structurally because there has not been a single place for it. If I work in the Department of Health and I am doing the nurse uplift programme, where would I go? Who should I speak to if I want to find information about the police uplift programme and what learning I could get?

We have been trying to address those. The Evaluation Task Force has set up an evaluation registry. In one place, for the first time, you can look to see what Government have already done in the sector and what other



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Departments are currently planning. Those things exist, but we are trying to do stuff to plug those gaps.

Q15 **Chair:** Do people know about this registry? If I was delivering the nurse uplift programme, would I know to look there? Where do you look?

**Catherine Hutchinson:** That is a good point. We are rolling it out across Departments currently. It will become mandatory from next year. We are very lucky to have support from the Minister for the Cabinet Office, who is going to write to all the Secretaries of State to inform them that it will be mandatory and hopefully to support that roll-out. It is critical for us.

Q16 **Chair:** Just to be clear, what does “that roll-out” mean? If you are running a project, you have to write a little piece about it and put it into the portal.

**Catherine Hutchinson:** In order to support transparency, so that things are published, we are going to ensure that, at the moment an evaluation is planned, the plans are put on the registry so we are aware of what is currently going on and we have a record so that we know when that should be published.

When that evaluation is finished, you should be putting the final report on to that registry. That should be public-facing in March. Members of the public should be able to see it. In April, it should be mandatory for all Departments to comply. Hopefully, that will enable us to see what activity is happening where and share results.

Q17 **Chair:** That is just central Government; it is Whitehall.

**Catherine Hutchinson:** Yes.

Q18 **Chair:** Does it involve agencies?

**Catherine Hutchinson:** I think it is central Government and the Scottish Government. I will have to double-check. The What Works Centres are also going to be included in them.

Q19 **Mr Djanogly:** You say that you hope it will show you what is going on where. What happens then?

**Catherine Hutchinson:** We will let transparency be the light. We should then be able to say, “This is the number of ongoing and planned evaluations in this Department”. It should enable us to ask questions if that number is zero, for example, or we know there is activity going on. The Office for Statistics Regulation has offered to be the enforcer of that for us. If we know a Department is not including an evaluation that we are aware of, they will write openly to enforce that.

Q20 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I am slightly surprised by those members of the panel who have answered positively on data sharing and data collection. In so many of the projects that come before this Committee, one of the big faults is the lack of data. It is either the lack of data or Government IT systems not talking to each other. That may not be



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anybody's particular fault; it may be a legacy programme.

Let us start with where you have encountered problems with inadequate data having been collected. Any one of you could start, please.

**Chair:** You might need to name someone. We will start with Mr Thompson. He licked his lips at the prospect of that.

**Chris Thompson:** I will be more careful with my lips in future. Private investment and tracking private investment into net zero is an area where we want to improve our data currently. It is the crucial way a lot of our policies will be funded. It is absolutely critical.

There is data out there, but it is not Government-owned. We want to make sure we have the right framework and the metrics that make us understand whether private investment is flowing in the way we intended or whether we need to look at our policies. It is definitely not a perfect area for us. There are gaps. I was really commenting that I felt it would not be at the top of my list in terms of the challenges that I have.

Q21 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Given that the private sector is going to contribute at least half of our 2050 net zero targets, this is surely a pretty important area, is it not?

**Chris Thompson:** Yes, it absolutely is. There is data out there. It is not that we are starting from scratch. It is just an area where I would like to have a greater amount of data.

Q22 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I get that. Thank you for the candour. Would any of you like to comment on where data has been a problem?

**Nathan Moores:** In the landscape of the back office across Government, across the 18 Departments plus arm's length bodies, there are about 205 core systems that run HR, finance and payroll. To compound that problem, there are 655 further systems around those core systems.

The landscape of legacy IT debt, which we have collectively inherited, has served a purpose to get us this far, but these systems are coming to the end of their commercial life and end of support. In other words, they are not being maintained by the suppliers.

The system I talked about before is a temporary system that tries to knit some of those core systems together to be able to get out the essential information. It does not solve the bigger challenge across Government, which is about getting the value of our data out. We want to get our data to a place where we can use it to drive insights and decisions in a timely way.

Part of what we are trying to do in delivering the back office transformation is to use smaller systems that are interoperable so we can have information from across the civil service in the right place to make the right decisions at the right time.



**Q23 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I entirely agree with that. If we are going to get productivity in our public sector up, we are going to increasingly need to use new technology, AI and so on. That is all critically dependent on collecting the best data. Do any of you have any suggestions, apart from updating legacy systems, which is a fairly obvious point, as to how data might be better collected and recorded? It is not just collecting it; it is about making sure it is recorded and accessible to all the systems. Mr Moores, I sense you have an answer.

**Nathan Moores:** I will just jump in and tell you about the work the community has been doing—it is led by Treasury—around data standards. The problem that we have found across the various different systems is that the data in the individual systems is not easy to integrate together because it has been entered in different ways.

**Chair:** There are 13 different ways of recording an address or something.

**Nathan Moores:** Exactly, yes. We have worked across thousands of different ways of gathering data. When I say “we”, teams from Treasury, Cabinet Office and all Departments and from the five clusters have worked together to come up with a set of 500-plus data standards, which will become the way we manage back office data. Remember that this is focused on the back office: HR, finance, procurement, inventory management and fixed assets, which is the built estate.

Those standards will be built into the new systems. We will be able to make those five systems interoperable and get the insights from the data. In addition, using the data is important. The teams have developed the process and service around that as well. There are 620-plus standards for things like record-to-report procurement activities. Standard data and standard processes will give us greater insights.

**Q24 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** How long is it going to take to get it to where you want it to be?

**Nathan Moores:** The Defence cluster is live for civilian and HR at the moment. It needs to expand that service out to finance and to the military. Overseas, which is FCDO-led, went live last November. They have stabilised their service. They are taking their product and starting to grow out the service offering.

By June next year, the Unity cluster, led by HMRC, should be live with both its core ERP and service offering and what we call the business process services organisation around it. The Matrix and Synergy clusters will then start to onboard Departments and arm’s length bodies from 2025-26 onwards. All the activity should be complete by 2027-28.

**Q25 Chair:** Mr Garton, on this subject, you are dealing with not just different Government Departments but different bits of local government and local systems. Data matching must be extraordinarily difficult there.



**Will Garton:** It is a challenge. The trailblazer devolution deals that we did with Greater Manchester and the West Midlands in March this year give significant additional responsibilities and accountability for skills, transport and co-commissioning of employment support programmes, but it is unreasonable to ask those combined authorities to do that job if they do not have the information that central Government have.

We have what we think is quite an exciting bit of work to make sure they get that information and more detail than they have ever had before. We are currently working through the legalities—it is not straightforward—with the Cabinet Office chief data and digital officer. We have made a commitment that, if we are devolving the entirety of the post-18 adult education budget, those authorities must have the means by which to assess progress. We are very much on it.

Q26 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Mr Garton, you have talked several times about these large combined authorities and devolution. I would have thought the problem does not lie there but in the smaller authorities. We know this from a simple thing such as Homes for Ukrainians, for example. You did not have the data you needed to start with anyway. What are you doing about it? In quite a large number of small local authorities, in district councils and so on, this must be a problem, surely.

**Will Garton:** I completely recognise the point that you make. The West Midlands has a number of constituent authorities. Our objective is not just to do skills data for the West Midlands; it is to give you a granular and specific breakdown to the hyper-local level. Ideally, we would want to be able to look at how individual wards or streets perform in order to get a better picture and allow better public policy.

The objective is always to do it at the smallest possible spatial scale. All I meant was that we are trying to give those two combined authorities, as they are the most advanced in terms of the devolution discussion, the keys to all of it for their patch. Absolutely, smaller spatial scales are better, though.

Q27 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** You have partially answered my question. If a lot of these small local authorities really struggle to deliver adult and children's social services in particular, are they going to have resources to put enough people on, first, to update their systems, and, secondly, simply to input the data so that this can be quickly available on the granular level you are talking about.

**Will Garton:** The example I was talking about was about giving access to a DWP database that we currently have but do not share at a hyper-local level. The partnerships with Greater Manchester and the West Midlands, which are the trailblazers, involve central Government giving data to partners in places, to localities. It is not an ask of a small district council to upload data and put more pressure on them. It is the other way around.



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I take your point. If we are asking small councils that are under pressure to do a whole load more, that would not necessarily be reasonable.

Q28 **Chair:** Many years ago, the Magee review looked at data sharing across the criminal justice sector. The chart of what data is available and how it links up was mind-blowingly complicated. That was about the data that was collected, for example, when a prisoner left prison and what would be provided to other sectors. There really was no mapping across. From what you are saying, there has certainly been some progress. Certainly from what Mr Moores was saying, it is beginning to happen.

Ms Hutchinson, how do you work out whether this is working for the consumer? We have talked a lot about Government Departments. A lot of this benefit is for the citizen consumer of the service.

**Catherine Hutchinson:** Yes, absolutely. Essentially, you can have as much data as you want, but it needs to tell you whether something is working. It is essential to be able to get meaningful information out of it so you can make decisions on prioritisation, scaling things up or down or whether an innovation is working or not.

There are not enough analytical experts with the evaluation skills to guide Departments to be able to do that, so we are creating an evaluation academy that trains trainers in each Department to upskill people so we can make sure that the data that Departments have is utilised most effectively.

I would love each Department to have a greater number of shared outcomes. When you are doing an evaluation on the building of single-living accommodation in the MoD, you should be able to look at the net zero outcomes. We are starting to see that. Ultimately, for an individual Department to make those decisions, there needs to be the sharing of information.

Q29 **Chair:** It is interesting. The NAO did a survey on this. Figure 4 on page 17 of the report highlights this rather effectively. 63% of respondents felt that technical issues made it difficult to share data. A couple of them are lower than 50%, but only just. One is at 39%, which was people who identified changing Ministers or ministerial directions as a barrier. We have covered that off a bit. There is a long way to go, it is fair to say. Would you agree, Ms Hutchinson?

**Catherine Hutchinson:** I would love to see it working better, yes.

Q30 **Chair:** Yes. Sir Geoffrey and I were both a bit surprised about the positivity. It is great to be positive in your areas, but there is a lot to do.

I want to ask about evaluation more generally. You have talked about how it is going to be better shared. As a Committee, we are really keen—we have been pushing really hard on this—on getting good evaluation. It is really vital for us to see that in any Government or indeed future Government.



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Are you getting more traction? You have the task force. You have a presence in Whitehall. Do you still find there is a challenge? What are the challenges in getting Departments to agree to good evaluation? Be honest; we are here for candour. You do not need to name a Department.

**Catherine Hutchinson:** We have absolutely had traction.

Q31 **Chair:** It could not have got worse than it was a few years ago. That is not to denigrate Whitehall, but when I joined this Committee it was not always very evident.

**Catherine Hutchinson:** Yes, absolutely. Since the task force has started, we have assessed something like 300 evaluation plans that cover something like £140 billion of spend with really varying degrees of robustness.

The quality and quantity of evaluations is still an issue. The National Audit Office found that only 8% of all Government major projects and programmes had a robust plan. We have been pushing hard on that, but we have not made as much progress as we would like to have made.

We are going to try to take some further steps to keep pushing. We are trying to create demonstrator projects to show areas where there have been persistently fewer evaluations that it is possible. They cannot use the excuse that it has not happened before; we can show them that something has happened. We are trying to create more toolkits and make this a lot more practical. Again, we get a lot of practical resistance. "It is not possible here for particular reasons".

Q32 **Chair:** You have to persuade them. You are hoping that this new registry is going to name and shame people. Is that the next weapon in your armoury?

**Catherine Hutchinson:** I am certainly hoping that the transparency will help drive healthy competitive between Departments to achieve the best—

**Chair:** That is very good mandarin language, Ms Hutchinson.

Q33 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** In a sense, I want to ask the same question. You said you would take further steps. We all have our own ideas about which Departments are laggards in all this. I am not going to name them, but I am thinking about one in particular. What can you do? Naming and shaming is one thing, but that is still a fairly blunt weapon. You want outcomes and results. What can you actually do? If there are two or three Ministers on a particular project and one of them is not performing well enough, what can you do other than naming and shaming?

**Catherine Hutchinson:** We are a joint Treasury-Cabinet Office unit. We try to use Treasury levers when we can. At fiscal events, we have tried to impose settlement conditions on particular programmes. You can only



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really do that sparingly because you cannot do that for absolutely every programme in Government.

Where there have been particular programmes—levelling up is one of them—we have had particular settlement conditions to say, “You must have an evaluation plan signed off by the task force before more money is released”. There have been very few occasions when we have been particularly concerned. That is how we have stepped in.

There is a whole hearts and minds thing. We do not want to have to keep forcing people. The task force is 15 specialists. We cannot possibly man-mark every Department in every area. We have been trying to get to a build-up of good behaviours that will eventually become a culture change. Those things are slower steps.

It is a mixture of very hard-end stuff, where we can use our Treasury levers. Sometimes our Ministers will write to other Ministers to say, “It is not acceptable not to evaluate in this particular area”. We have been pleased with the support we have had in that. Ultimately, to change the culture in Government, you need something that is much more—what is the word?

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Fundamental.

**Catherine Hutchinson:** Yes.

Q34 **Chair:** One of the things that has occurred to me is that it is fundamental for politicians too. We can perhaps work on that.

You talked about better sharing through the registry, Ms Hutchinson. What other ways can we share? You are relying on the registry when it comes; you are relying on Ministers to write strong letters; you are relying on Permanent Secretaries and director-generals to think this is a good thing.

We have seen changes in other functions across Whitehall, such as the finance function or the procurement function. It has been quite slow. When I joined this Committee, lots of those were not in place. That was 2011. It takes a while for these to come through. How fast are you going to be able to deliver better evaluation to prove that cross-Government working is going to deliver anything?

**Catherine Hutchinson:** My goal is to see system change. We have very good and strong support from the two Permanent Secretaries you will hear from later, Alex Chisholm and Cat Little. That has been great in terms of setting direction and ensuring that Departments can hear from the very top of Government that this is what they want.

My goal, though, is to get into the systems, the approvals processes and the internal mechanisms, where a business case is submitted internally in a Department and at that point it cannot get through, for example





through the Treasury's approval process and all of those individual mechanisms within Departments where they make those choices.

I have encouraged my own Department, the Cabinet Office, to get the Cabinet Office approvals board to insert a line saying, "Is there an evaluation?" Those sorts of routine things happening over and over again will ultimately make a difference. They will drive up some of the change.

**Q35 Chair:** As Sir Geoffrey was touching on, one of the problems of cross-Government working is that one Department may make a change and another Department may benefit financially or otherwise. Can the Evaluation Task Force do anything about that?

**Catherine Hutchinson:** We are encouraging Departments to consider the outcomes that may affect other Departments when they are considering their evaluations. We are trying to encourage Departments to share learning, where it is possible. In the example I started with, which was the nurse uplift programme and the police uplift programme, we encourage them to speak to each other.

There are systems things that we are doing, such as the registry. There are process things that we are doing with the Cross-Government Evaluation Group, where we are trying to encourage sharing. There are also individual case studies. The Evaluation Task Force is not going to change the structural processes that lead to that, but, ultimately, if you can get a good evaluation that shows the impact and quantifies it, if you then link that into a spending review and put it into a business case, then you are talking.

**Chair:** Basically, you have to influence the Treasury and then it will all be fine. I can see the Second Permanent Secretary possibly agreeing with that from a distance. She will tell us in her own words later.

**Q36 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I am going to throw this one at you, please, Mr Garton. I do not know whether you have seen the evidence from Professor Sarah Ayres. You may in due course, if you have not. On enabling cross-Government Department initiatives, she says, "A persistent obstacle to this empowerment of devolved areas to set a co-ordinated holistic agenda across past iterations of English devolution has been the siloed nature"—we have asked about this already in this session—"of much of UK policy-setting, where individual Whitehall Departments defined outcome measures and funding criteria centrally, sometimes in ways that are at odds with the goals of others".

We have covered the siloed mentality, but what are you doing to break down these silos?

**Will Garton:** Could I give you one powerful example of where that is happening? I am sorry to keep coming back to it, but it is the best practice. As part of the trailblazer settlements with these two combined authorities—I acknowledge it is only two—we announced jointly with the Treasury that we would do a thing called a single settlement, which



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allows those two mayoral combined authorities to have a single allocated fund across housing, regeneration—all of DLUHC's budgets—retrofit funding, all of transport and adult skills.

There are local growth funds. The Mayor of Greater Manchester or the West Midlands could choose to use that money in the next spending review period on retrofit. Equally, they could use the retrofit money for local growth funds or for transport or housing.

To me, one of the most powerful ways to get cross-Government working is by pooling budgets. We have taken really quite a bold step on this. The other thing we have done is we have made it not just for those two places. We announced, if you will pardon the jargon, the level 4 devolution framework at the Autumn Statement. More mayoral combined authorities can start to pilot this way of working.

If the money is pooled, you start to get better outcomes for citizens and better value for money. As MPs, you know better than we do that the road is linked to the housing estate, the regeneration project and the adult education college. You take a holistic view. By starting to think about pooled budgets, you get a more complete picture of what is happening in a particular place. That is one of the ways we achieve it.

It is not without risk. The Government will rightly want to achieve an outcomes framework with those places in return for the flexibility. There needs to be accountability that comes with it. We are completely clear about that. Those will be stretching targets for all to see. We want to encourage the combined authorities to feel the scrutiny over public money that we feel in Government, but we believe they can do that because, by and large, £60 billion goes into the local government finance settlement and there is a good accountability system there, which works and which we can build on.

**Q37 Chair:** We would love to go into more detail on all this, but we do cover this in some of our other hearings, I should say to anyone who is watching. If you could change one or two things that would make cross-Government working easier, what would they be? Some of you have been really at the coal-face of this. Ms Hutchinson is watching, evaluating and helping you evaluate better what is going on. What needs to change?

We have covered off data, so let us park that one for now. We know from all our work on this Committee, as Sir Geoffrey has said, that it is a big issue. We have touched on evaluation, but we will perhaps go into that more. I will start with Mr Moores. What would make a difference? What would make this easier?

**Nathan Moores:** We need to maintain the accounting officer's status but build, foster and encourage more cross-Government working and collaboration across Departments.

**Q38 Chair:** What would incentivise that? At the moment, accounting officers do not necessarily get brownie points for giving away power and money



to other Departments, if I can put it in brutal terms.

**Nathan Moores:** We need a commitment to shared outcomes. Those should genuinely be outcomes rather than outputs.

**Chair:** That is very clear.

**Will Garton:** It is standard departmental policy—it is not very original—but we need to think about place first.

**Chair:** You are really sold on devolution.

**Will Garton:** Yes. It is right. If you think about place and how public services come together in a place, you can incentivise change.

**Chair:** We can tell that you are passionate about devolution. Mr Garton, you have got the message across.

**Chris Thompson:** We got funding from the Shared Outcomes Fund to map the interdependencies so we understood some of the challenges and trade-offs that were coming up. We need to do more of that. It could also be very useful to mainstream a bit of that funding so that it happens across more programmes.

**Catherine Hutchinson:** You cannot know whether you are successful unless you know what you are going for. I would like very clear strategic outcomes that are shared visions with very clear outcome measures shared between Departments.

Q39 **Chair:** It is interesting. One former Minister told me that when they were in ministerial office they looked at every policy and thought about their two priorities. I cannot remember what they were, but let us say it was social justice and the cost of living. They would ask, “Does this policy help either of these two priorities of the Government that I serve?” It does not really matter which party. They would make decisions that way. Is that what you are hinting at there? We need to make it really clear what the aims are.

**Catherine Hutchinson:** Yes. Linked to that, when you know the policy problem you are trying to solve, you can work out the correct place in the puzzle to solve it. It might be that you need to give more money to health to intervene earlier, but that at least needs to be an informed choice. You will know where that marginal pound should be spent because you know what the ultimate goal is. Each Government need to have a very clear, joined-up decision-making process about what they are attempting to achieve.

**Chair:** It is really interesting. We are only cutting you short because we have two of the people who are also trying to deliver on this, with whom we also need to have a conversation. Thank you very much indeed, Mr Moores, Mr Garton, Mr Thompson and Ms Hutchinson. The transcript of this session will be on the website.



You are welcome to stay and hear your colleagues, if you wish. If not, thank you very much indeed.

## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Sir Alex Chisholm and Cat Little.

Q40 **Chair:** Welcome back to the Public Accounts Committee on Monday 11 December. We are looking at cross-Government working. I am really pleased to welcome, from the Cabinet Office, Alex Chisholm, who is the Permanent Secretary there, and, from His Majesty's Treasury, Cat Little, who is one of the Second Permanent Secretaries at that Department.

Both have key strategic roles in identifying where cross-Government working would help to deliver the objectives of whichever Government of the day is in place. These two Departments really help support all the other Departments in delivering this. It is a holy grail to deliver on cross-Government working.

Before we go into the main session, Cat Little, I did want to ask you about something as Second Permanent Secretary at the Treasury. Earlier, we had the Permanent Secretary from the Home Office in talking about the Rwanda policy. We will not go into the detail, but we were focusing on the numbers and the money. It was clear that, aside from the money that has been agreed to go to Rwanda already, any money spent on individuals going is coming through the supplementary estimate. He indicated that it was not capped. We pushed him on whether this was a blank cheque. It is not that either. Thankfully, the Treasury Officer of Accounts was very happy to clarify that, as you will be glad to know, in the room.

Can you just explain to us the basis on which the Treasury agreed with the Home Office that the money would go through the supplementary estimate? It is a slightly unusual approach to a mainstream Government policy.

**Cat Little:** Good afternoon. The main reason why we use the supplementary estimates is where we have uncertainty. It does not make sense to provide specific budget cover because I genuinely would not know what number to provide. That ties up precious resources that could be spent elsewhere. That is mainly why we use the supplementary estimate as the mechanism for funding.

It is not a blank cheque. Every payment for something that is novel, contentious or potentially repercussive, such as this one, will come through the Treasury. The Home Office has worked very closely with us on all aspects of the payments of this scheme.

Q41 **Chair:** You are keeping a close eye on it. We are still battling to get figures on this, but the Treasury will have full sight of every figure that



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has been paid to Rwanda so far, every figure that has been scheduled to be sent to Rwanda and any of these uncertain costs that you cannot yet crystallise.

**Cat Little:** Yes, that is correct. It falls under it being a novel and contentious arrangement. There is a value for money direction, as this Committee knows, so the Home Office is required to come to us with all information on a timely basis.

Q42 **Chair:** You must have a team that meets them regularly. How often is that happening?

**Cat Little:** At the moment our teams are talking almost daily. That team does not just do spending control. They do policy development; they work on accountability. It is the home and legal team within my spending part of the Department.

Q43 **Chair:** There is very close scrutiny.

**Cat Little:** There is very close working.

Q44 **Chair:** Given that we do not yet have the information, we are heartened that at least something is happening. We will be working with the Home Office to get better oversight of the figures and working with our sister Committee, the Home Affairs Select Committee. I am sure the Treasury Officer of Accounts will give you a read-out and will involve the Treasury as and when necessary.

Moving on to the knotty issue of cross-Government working, as I say, since I joined this Committee in 2011, this issue has been often talked about but not always delivered on. We are seeing some progress now.

What are the main priorities that you are supporting Government to deliver from the Cabinet Office and the Treasury? I will go to Sir Alex Chisholm first of all as Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** First of all, can I say I very much welcome the NAO Report into this important area? We agree with the good practice guide. I really appreciate the continued focus of the PAC on this issue over many years.

As you say, it is really a holy grail because cross-Government working is so important. In a way, the most important things that the Government do require cross-Government working. You have just heard a good cross-section of those with the work on net zero and climate and levelling up. We also put a lot of effort into trying to make sure the business of Government, whether it be shared services or evaluation, is done on a cross-Government basis. We are pushing both at the front and back end of that.

I can talk further about the different roles that the Cabinet Office tries to perform, if that is helpful.

**Chair:** Yes, please do.



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**Sir Alex Chisholm:** Just briefly, there is the classic Cabinet Office role of convening across Government and achieving Cabinet collective responsibility. We also do a lot to try to drive best practice as a corporate HQ through the work of the functions.

**Chair:** Of course, the Evaluation Task Force is based in the Cabinet Office.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** Yes, that is absolutely part of that. We try to facilitate cross-Government working. That might be through common standards or services. In some cases, where we see a gap or where it is necessary, we try to lead that work ourselves. We still do that for the Integrated Review into national security, borders and Places for Growth. At one stage we did it for Covid, though happily not now. Those are examples of the different roles that the Cabinet Office performs.

**Chair:** We will come back to some of those in a minute.

**Cat Little:** Likewise, we very warmly welcome the work of the NAO and value the support that it has given to us on this. The Treasury role is slightly different. We are there to control expenditure. We allocate money through SRs, where joint working plays a really important part.

We provide a lot of the guidance and the frameworks, such as the *Public Value Framework* and *Managing Public Money*. This year, we published the *Government Efficiency Framework*, which is an important step forward in benefits realisation. We also do the programme business case approvals and we oversee cross-cutting strategy and the Shared Outcomes Fund.

I could not emphasise enough the joint work that we do across the Treasury and the Cabinet Office. The outcome delivery plans in the *Public Value Framework* are a joint endeavour. We also work on evaluation, as you have just heard, planning and performance, the Government Major Projects Portfolio, performance management, strategic planning and all the work we do on functions, just to name a few. I missed out public bodies. That is obviously an important one.

I should just take this opportunity to talk about leadership and culture. Alex has set a particularly important tone since taking over as the Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary and COO. I pay credit to his support on joint working over the last few years.

**Chair:** You have not quite gone yet, Sir Alex. You are still getting the eulogies.

**Cat Little:** We still have time.

Q45 **Chair:** We have talked about this quite a bit on this Committee and in other arenas. Sir Alex, you mentioned some of those more challenging roles where you have had to go in. What cultural resistance have you encountered? If you are a Permanent Secretary in a big spending



Department, it is your domain and you do not really get credit for giving away money and power. How have you practically helped Departments? Can you give us any examples of where you have helped Departments to work more collaboratively?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** I can. The NAO Report is helpful there: it begins with a shared vision. That is exactly the right place to start the conversation. Sometimes that does not arrive ready-made; you have to breathe it into existence, as it were.

To give a couple of examples, if you look back over the work on climate, there was a long and sustained process of getting people up to speed in terms of understanding the impact of climate change on so many different areas of Government policy. That was a necessary backdrop to people understanding why net zero is now in legislation and why the commitment is there.

Q46 **Chair:** Did the legislation help drive that?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** Yes, indeed. The Climate Change Act 2008 was supported by all but three MPs at the time. It was very clear that it had massive political support. It was sustained by a series of Ministers. There was a high level of reinforcement through things like the Climate Change Committee and the international obligations through COP, et cetera. To your point, people understood that it was a worthwhile and necessary goal and what their part within it was. It did not matter which Department or public body they were in. It is something that has very much become a part of our system.

We are moving in that direction on levelling up. It probably started slightly later and it does take some time. You do not have to educate people about national security, but, in terms of finding a framework with which people can understand what the requirements are, the Integrated Review has been helpful.

We have tried to apply that same way of creating a common vision to other work. You said, delicately, that shared services was not manifesto-worthy. That also requires us to build a vision of where we want to get to when we talk about cloud-based services, services that are easy to change, services that are low cost and services that take out some of the administrative overload from people's day-to-day lives. Those are also worthwhile visions, but you have to get people to understand and appreciate them.

With that, when there is a common goal, it helps to have something that is also high-value. Climate change you might say has the highest possible value, but there are other things. For example, we are co-ordinating movements around the London estate. The overall programme of work there is worth over £1 billion. People can say, "Gosh, do I have to move here? That is a bit of a nuisance", but, actually, that is of very high public value.



Q47 **Chair:** Money still talks.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** Yes, money is important there. Also a degree of recognition and appreciation is important to the culture. One of the things that we try to do—I say “we”; I am speaking for the centre here, Cabinet Office and Treasury—is to try to give as much authority and credit to other Departments and public bodies for their work within that, because people do respond to that. If it is their Secretary of State or their Permanent Secretary or their head of team who is both accountable for something but also gets the credit for something, that does help.

Q48 **Chair:** We heard from others earlier—I know Mrs Drummond will come on in this—that structures and system modelling are important, as well as political commitment. There was a lot about place, delivery and data but, in terms of political commitment, as I said, when people write manifestos, usually they are not saying, “How exciting is this? We are going to do this thing across Government Departments.” There are often much more retail offers. How hard has it been for you to change the political landscape on this, over Governments of all political colours?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** Again, I will give a couple of examples, one from an external deliverable. From previous outings before this Committee, we talked about getting ready for changes to the border three times and that required co-ordination between six different Departments. There, the political commitment for this Administration was very clear. If we were not ready, it was going to be very public and that was something that the Government attached great importance to. There was little need to reinforce that on a daily basis. It was more about getting it done to a specific timeframe.

There are some other things where it is a little bit more ambiguous. It is useful to go back to the well sometimes and check the level of political agreement. An example there is Places for Growth, which, as you know, is a successful programme of relocating roles currently based in London to other parts of the UK. We are actually ahead of our target there, which was to get to 15,000 roles by the middle of 2025. There have been at least three Cabinet-level discussions about that in my time in the Cabinet Office. There was an inter-ministerial group that met a number of times like that.

To my previous point, when announcements were made in particular locations, second headquarters, the Secretaries of State made those announcements themselves in those places. There was terrific reinforcement at various points in time about the strength—

**Chair:** The structures are important. That Cabinet-level discussion is quite an important part of the structure. That is very helpful.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** Yes.

Q49 **Mrs Drummond:** Following on from that, do you know what proportion of the cross-Government working is accounted for by each of the six





formal models set out in the good practice guide? Does each model get reviewed as the relative importance changes?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** That is Treasury guidance.

**Cat Little:** That is probably for me. We had a go this year—it was partly in response to previous recommendations from this Committee—at updating *Managing Public Money* and setting out the different models available to drive and incentivise good, collaborative working across Government. The six models, as you say, are set out for the first time in *Managing Public Money*. We have not yet undertaken an understanding of which models are used where, although it is an interesting thing and certainly something we would take away to have a look at.

Q50 **Mrs Drummond:** As Departments keep changing and leadership keeps changing as well, how much delay does that actually put on these cross-Government projects moving forward?

**Cat Little:** It is hard to quantify. The NAO has done a bit of surveying on this. We have undertaken our own survey within the Treasury. It really does depend on the type of programme and the type of project and the type of Ministers involved and how high-profile things are, but there is no denying that it does have an impact, as do changes of officials.

Q51 **Mrs Drummond:** A recurring theme is a lack of institutional memory as people get moved around. Civil servants get moved around from Department to Department. Does that help with cross-Government working, or does it hinder it because the institutional memory has moved on to another Department?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** It goes both ways. When I think of the Cabinet Office, it is a positive feature that we have over 20% of people coming in and out of the Cabinet Office each year because it means that we do not get too ivory towered. We do not get too involved in commissioning and mandating and drawing up. We have people who come with frontline experience and bring a departmental perspective or one from a public body. That is definitely a good thing.

It is also the case, though, that you want to have people stay for a period of time, to build up expertise and to see things through. You probably got a sense of the passion of some of the people in front of you before for shared services, for evaluation, for levelling up and for climate. All four of those officials have been at that for quite a while and that does not just feed their passion but also builds their expertise. There has to be a balance that is struck there.

Could I just add something on your previous point about the extent to which the machinery of Government changes can sometimes interrupt? If you think about the machinery of Government changes we made earlier this year, relatively speaking, entire DG-led groups were lifted and shifted into new Departments. That did make it a bit easier to not skip a beat on important cross-Government programmes, such as the work on climate



or the work on artificial intelligence and other things like that. Then, at the back end of it, all this important and occasionally unexciting work on back office interoperability makes it easier to change the front-end responsibilities at low cost, because people are working on compatible systems.

**Q52 Mrs Drummond:** These Departments are all changing as well. Some of them are becoming bigger. Some of them are becoming smaller and the policy spans longer in some rather than the other, particularly if they are changing. Is there a risk that smaller Departments struggle to get a hearing, if they have concerns about a project, particularly if they have been moved around a bit?

**Cat Little:** No, not in my experience, but if I think about the wonderful DCMS, which is a relatively small Department, we are talking to it as frequently as we are to DESNZ or any of the other large Departments.

The one thing I would add to what Sir Alex said is there is something about the importance of having stability in certain roles. In SRO roles and programme roles in particular, it is desirable to have longevity over a cycle of change. Certainly, when it comes to programmes, you would expect for an SRO to be in place for longer than a policy role.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** It is also in particular in relation to policymaking that a very high level of co-ordination is needed. Some Departments are small but have a high proportion of policy work, whereas other Departments, such as the MoJ or HMRC or DWP, have a relatively high proportion of delivery stuff.

**Q53 Mrs Drummond:** Figure 4 in the Report suggests that there is a lack of total confidence in cross-Government working. Are civil servants really keen to embrace it? Is it just seen as a prestige project or something that they should be a bit wary of?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** More and more prestige, because they are the biggest and hardest things that Government is trying to do. We have also focused a lot so far in our discussion about delivering on policy goals, but I am also very conscious that, if you take a citizen focus, then they require very joined-up Government. You cannot really get good-quality public services unless Government are joined up as well. That is another very powerful force. A lot of the work around integration of data is around trying to make sure that people get the services they need when they need them, however Government are organised on the supply side.

**Q54 Mrs Drummond:** Is that part of the training, then, to train up staff specifically on cross-Government working? Going back to my previous one about them being moved around, is that part of how they need to look at the future of the civil service?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** Yes, and also it really helps to get people's different perspectives. If you have been working on an exciting new policy and you think it must be perfectly straightforward, actually going to follow your



money, so to speak, and trying to deliver that in a particular Department is really good for understanding the end-to-end requirements. Although we can be super rational and very system-driven, just as a human activity we are very sociable creatures. If you identify better with people where you understand what they are trying to work on, it does make it a bit easier at the margins to be creative to solve for each other's problems.

**Q55 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Good afternoon, Sir Alex. You will not be surprised that I am coming in on data. It seems to me that, as well as cross-Government working, productivity in the public sector will be improved by better data, better gathering of data and better data systems, which talk to each other and are not legacy systems and so on and so forth. What are you, in your individual Departments, doing to ensure that that data is collected better and that it can talk to each other across the whole of Government?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** This is a huge topic and one I know that you have been very passionate about—rightly—and I try to match you in my own enthusiasm for the topic. I will go into some of the ways, just to illustrate a little bit, because I know that time is not infinite this evening. One example is the work of the Central Digital and Data Office and the Data Standards Authority, which is part of that. They have been pushing a lot of the work on data standards, data governance, data maturity assessments and data skills.

We have just had something called One Big Thing. You have probably heard about it. We have been promoting it through the whole of the Civil Service. 40% of the Civil Service have signed up for data training as part of that. We have really been pushing that very hard, including data sharing networks, et cetera. All of that is really around the standards and policy area of data.

Data systems are incredibly important as well. There, I make a big distinction between two types of data. There is data to support delivery of public services, so called operational data, where we have things like a data marketplace, which is going through alpha at the moment and coming into beta in the spring. There is one log-in, which enables you to match up people's consumption of different services through the digital identity system there.

Those are operational, customer-facing systems, which are different from analytical or research-based programmes. There, the biggest relevant programme is probably the interactive data services programme that is run by our sister organisation, the Office for National Statistics. That is enabling data people and research people, not just in the public sector but in academia as well, to be able to identify patterns and things that will enable us to deliver better policies in the future. Those would be some of the things.

**Q56 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Thank you for that answer. I will perhaps



come to you, Ms Little. When a Department prepares its yearly financial plan, it will allocate a certain amount of money for improving its IT systems. How do you treat that as a priority within each Department and how do you make sure that they are actually doing what they say they will do? This is what we have heard before: you have allocated the money and they have not actually performed.

**Cat Little:** Yes, indeed. The first thing is in SR21 we took a completely different approach to legacy IT. It is one of those areas that suffers from not being that interesting or that retail. We felt we needed to do a more integrated risk-based approach to what the legacy IT of the whole of Government looked like, in order to help us with allocations. That is the first thing. The second thing is, of the money that we allocated, we had very specific outcomes and very specific projects that we set out as part of the departmental conditions. Part of the job of the Treasury is to follow up and check that conditions have been met. Just to assure you, we are regularly going back and checking that people have met their conditions and, if not, holding them to account.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** I can add a couple of words to that. That was a breakthrough approach and it was done jointly between the Cabinet Office and the Treasury, as another example of joint working. It was really with dissatisfaction on our part that we looked back and saw that previously funded programmes to overcome legacy systems had not produced the results that were expected. In addition to what Cat said there, all 160 top legacy systems across Government are in a common stack.

We evaluated each of them according to their priority, how much resource they needed, what level of risk we were experiencing from their antiquity and certainly the top 22 most highly rated of those all have fully funded programmes to resolve that. All are in this SR apart from two in the Home Office, which take two years after that. We are very confident about that because we have been looking every quarter at the progress against that, and that money is ringfenced so it cannot be used for other purposes.

We have reported to you last year. You will be getting another report shortly with our progress in evaluating and resolving those legacy systems. That has been a pretty good approach and, as Cat said, reflects both our analysis of risk, because legacy systems do have a lot of risk associated with them, but also opportunities, speaking to productivity. It is very hard to get big improvements in productivity if you have antiquated systems.

Q57 **Mrs Drummond:** We have had evidence sent in about the fact that MS Teams makes it very difficult to communicate between Departments. We have also had one submission that, if there are no secure, accessible communications, it creates the risk of people freelancing their own insecure solutions. Do you understand that risk and how much difficulty is there in sharing information technology? How much is cultural?



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**Sir Alex Chisholm:** It has become so many times easier than it used to be to quickly get hold of a lot of people across Government to join on to a call. That used to require, back in the day when I first joined Whitehall—I would not like to give you the dates, as it was too long ago—messengers delivering written communications. In comparison, now, if I wanted to have a call with heads of Department, I could do that with an hour’s notice and probably get everyone on to that call. That is an absolutely revolutionary improvement.

You mentioned one of the platforms we use and certainly that is a common one, but we use other ones as well. Those companies are in the business of competing with each other to provide both a high level of convenience but also a high level of security.

Q58 **Mrs Drummond:** Are all Departments using the same thing? This indicates that they are not. For instance, they said that DWP or ONS cannot function alongside Defra and DESNZ.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** I am not sure about those examples. Certainly, it is true that a lot of Departments use MS Teams. In some cases, that is embedded with the Microsoft 365 platform. Other Departments do not have Microsoft 365 and have to use a different version of Teams, because their core operating platform is different. That is actually true for the Cabinet Office. We are on Google, but I still have a lot of Teams calls. It is perfectly possible and easy to do that on a compatibility basis.

Q59 **Mrs Drummond:** People seem to be quite frustrated that it is not working across the Government, but you say it is.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** It is mainly working extremely well and if there are pockets of people still feeling frustration that they cannot quickly get hold of other people, to be able to organise that, that is eminently resolvable in this day and age.

Q60 **Chair:** We were talking to Ms Hutchinson about the evaluation and it is heartening to see a bit more of it, but we would all agree it is quite a slow process over the last decade. You have made a very good fist of what they are achieving there, but there is still more to do. What are the next plans for evaluation? When we had the Permanent Secretary for Education in front of us, we were talking about the cost of it and she pointed out that basically it is a rounding error in most projects.

I sense there may well still be resistance within Departments that have tight funding settlements to spending money on something that does not deliver immediately on a priority today, even though it is something that is useful for the future. How are you future-proofing that kind of evaluation? Perhaps I will start with you, Ms Little, because it is spend to save, one would think, but it is not something the Treasury usually embraces so readily.

**Cat Little:** I am very fond of invest-to-save measures. We are trying to do more funding specifically for evaluations. In the fund we recently had



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for labour markets, which was £37.5 million, we set out to make sure that all of the labour market policies were evaluated as an important step in the right direction.

The other thing that we are doing is really embedding it in everything that we do, from approvals to business cases. Certainly, for the next spending review I expect to see even more use of the Evaluation Task Force, because the one thing I would add to what Ms Hutchinson said earlier is that it is a big incentive, when people know that the Evaluation Task Force is going to come along and say whether or not it thinks we should invest in a policy proposal or a programme. There will be more of that and more open evaluation in allocation of money.

**Q61 Chair:** It will be a requirement going forward, for the Treasury to see that there has been evaluation and that it is showing up the right results.

**Cat Little:** It certainly will be for policies and programmes under way. As you know, the Shared Outcomes Fund is a really good example of continuous improvement in using evaluation to drive further investment in prevention policy.

**Q62 Chair:** Sometimes it is a weakness of Government, which we see on this Committee a lot. Sometimes something is not working and yet it is allowed to carry on, because there is not really a proper evaluation. We learn later that it had not worked, but we did not perhaps know enough at the time.

**Cat Little:** We are using every single lever available because we agree with you. It is quite frustrating when you are constantly trying to chase evaluation, get it published and try to learn lessons to help us stop or continue programmes. It is now a funding condition for most approvals that we undertake. It is in all of the gateway reviews that the IPA undertakes for the major projects review group. Embedding it and sustaining it is a really important part of the framework going forwards.

**Q63 Chair:** We talked about the structures involved. We have things like the IPA. There are other bodies across Government—there is quite a list, actually—that look at how projects work. Which ones would you rate as the most important and are there any other structural things that need to be brought in, or do you think that we are getting to the point where it is just now bringing people on board?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** I agree with Cat that money talks and that is really the most important thing, I am afraid to say. As it becomes more and more standard that you cannot really expect to get your project funded without prior evidence of evaluation, which is now built into this IPA process as you go through different gateways, and as you make your bids in the spending round and find that they are sent back by the Treasury because there is no evaluation evidence that you are going to achieve the outcomes that you want, that will make a big difference.



Also, there is a little bit of a business-as-usual status quo bias at work in the business of Government, all Governments. That bias is going to be challenged by the financial pressures that are bearing on all mature democracies at the moment, with more and more demand for services without an infinite expansion of either tax or debt. That will cause people to think, "If I want to continue to provide that service in future to a higher or better standard, I am going to need to innovate", and innovation requires organised trial of different alternative approaches being properly, robustly evaluated.

Q64 **Chair:** The previous witnesses we had in front of us—I suppose Mr Garton's area was the bit where possibly health came into it more—indicated that over 40% of day-to-day spending from Whitehall Departments is spent on health at the moment. That is expensive and we know there are productivity challenges, which we have looked at on this Committee, in the NHS in particular, because it is the delivery arm of care.

Just using that as an example, as we are talking about invest to save, what current cross-Government working is there to try to reduce those health issues that result in urgent acute care? There is a lot of evidence to show what needs to be done, but there is a big challenge about delivering it across Government. I will start with you, Ms Little, because there is obviously big money attached to this and there is a point at which it will become unaffordable if we do not resolve it down the line.

**Cat Little:** Yes, absolutely. I will mention a couple of things. First, improving health outcomes for UK citizens is a 2022-23 shared outcome across the whole of Government. You will have seen, hopefully, that a number of Departments are working together towards improving these outcomes.

One of the big strands of our public services productivity review is looking at prevention policy and early intervention. For example, we will work very closely on obesity, on how we can think about demographic factors that influence the way in which we are increasing demand—an ageing population, gender balance and regional factors. These are all part of the work that we are now thinking about as we look at the public services productivity review. The best way to drive the early intervention we need to reduce the size of the state is to go as far upstream as we can.

Q65 **Chair:** That is hard, is it not, in terms of funding? You have the here and the now. You have to fund today.

**Cat Little:** Indeed, yes.

Q66 **Chair:** You also have to spend to try to prevent. That is very difficult for the Treasury to grapple with.

**Cat Little:** It is, but it is all about risk appetite. Increasingly, we are doing more and more. I know this is one of the big criticisms we get, as you alluded to earlier: why should an accounting officer invest if the



benefits are felt elsewhere? We have four different models that we currently use. There is top-down prevention policy. A good example of that recently is the long-term smoking policy changes that we have made. The Treasury did not score or try to quantify the benefits of that. We have faith that that will inevitably help, because it is a good policy.

Q67 **Chair:** It is not necessarily an expensive policy, is it, for the taxpayer?

**Cat Little:** Not immediately, no, but we are still talking hundreds of millions of pounds. It is not in the billions, but that is a significant quantum overall. We have the Shared Outcomes Fund, as I alluded to earlier, with nearly £600 million over 60 projects. The idea with that is to test and scale to see if we can find ways to do better benefits realisation for early intervention policy.

We have SR joint bids, such as the Home Office beating crime plan and the drug strategy. These are examples where we have said, "Pool your money or come together to do a joint bid, so that we can generate benefits and share the benefits amongst the Departments that take part". We are trying lots of different things and, most importantly, we are trying to share the best practice and tell people about the benefits of doing this on a joint basis.

Q68 **Chair:** When we have looked at joint bids for the spending reviews, there have not been that many. You can share the benefits, but it is still quite often simpler for a Department just to speak to its own people. Of all the levers we have listed—structures, political leadership and so on—what do you think is going to make the big difference for people to join together?

**Cat Little:** You are right. It is really disappointing that we do not have that many. We only had 28 in SR21, and that is despite us doing more guidance and top-down training. We trained over 1,000 finance and policy officials in how to do a joint bid. We are going to have to do even more going into the next spending review to extol the benefits. *Managing Public Money* now sets out quite categorically the benefits and why we think it is important, but we cannot communicate it enough.

The Government also have to do more top-down requests for bids. When we are setting out the cross-cutting, shared outcomes we are looking to achieve, what we did at SR21 is we said to the Departments that we thought were most involved, "We are expecting a joint bid from you and we expect you to lead it, convene it and come together with other Departments".

Q69 **Chair:** There is still quite a lot of work to do.

**Cat Little:** There is still a lot of work to do.

Q70 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Can I come in on this? In terms of the Shared Outcomes Fund, you only have 44 pilots. You heard what Mr Garton said about pooling money. When considering those yearly financial plans for each Department, have you thought about incentivising





them by saying, for example, "If you want money for this, you have to participate in and across Government Departments to deliver it"? Have you thought about incentivising cross-Government working in that way?

**Cat Little:** Yes. That is a good question. We have and we do set it out as one of the models that we encourage and think is a sensible thing to consider when you are working across Government, but it is not used as often as we would like or expect. The other thing we would encourage is pooling of resources. It is not just about money. It is also about people and skills and multi-disciplinary policy working. There is still more to do to extol the benefits of it.

**Q71 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** It is particularly, as the Chair says, in the health and social area, where it is very difficult to get this across Government Departments. It might involve health. It might involve education. It might involve levelling up. There must be a huge amount that can be done in those areas that is not yet being done.

**Cat Little:** That is right. We ask a lot of the Department of Health, especially as they are still recovering from the pandemic. They have big priorities on the elective waiting lists, but they do have shared outcomes. They do have shared funds. A really good example you had evidence on a couple of weeks ago is the work they are doing with the Home Office on tackling drugs. That has been a major cross-Government effort that health has been right at the heart of. There is plenty happening and we just need to make sure we scale and invest further and set up sustainable governance going forwards, with evaluation in due course.

**Q72 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** You heard Mr Garton in the last session say that one of the weaknesses of the efforts on climate change was the data on how the private sector is integrating with the public sector. I am wondering, given that so much of what the Government want to deliver has to be delivered by the private sector, whether there is more you can do to have shared projects across Departments with the private sector delivering a significant portion of it.

**Cat Little:** That is definitely right and, of course, there are very few things we do in Government that do not have private sector partners or supply chains. We talk very regularly about the importance of openness, transparency and sharing data. Quite often, it is subject to commercial arrangements where it is required, for both performance and investment reasons, but there is still more we can do.

**Q73 Mrs Drummond:** That brings me on to a very quick point before my other point, which is that there is no champion at the moment for fraud prevention and economic crime and looking at it across Government. Are you expecting to appoint one shortly? I assume it is either security and comes under the Security Minister or I assume it comes under the Treasury.



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**Cat Little:** Economic crime is led by the Home Office with quite a lot of input from the Treasury and the Cabinet Office. I do not actually know the answer to that question.

**Mrs Drummond:** It was brought up to me today by the Lloyds Banking Group.

**Cat Little:** I am happy to take that away and come back to you.

Q74 **Mrs Drummond:** The last thing I want to ask you is about the outcome delivery plans. You say there will be internal ODPs for 2023-24, but what about cross-Government outcome delivery plans? How do we measure those and where are those? How do Departments feed into them?

**Cat Little:** On the cross-cutting shared outcomes, we expect for every lead Department to have the right governance and accountability. There is regular reporting within Government and across Government Departments and then, in annual reports, we ask that Departments and lead Departments set out the performance against those outcomes.

Q75 **Mrs Drummond:** It says here that, "As Departments work together to deliver the priorities, we have decided that Departments will only be required to produce internal ODPs for 2023-24. This will enable Departments to focus on delivering the Prime Minister's five priorities whilst satisfying the broader delivery metrics that ODPs track".

**Cat Little:** That is correct. The one thing we are saying to Departments, and we have given guidance on, is about reporting in the annual report and accounts, because we believe greatly that there should be some transparency about the performance of how Government Departments are doing against their outcome delivery plans. That is a requirement for this financial year.

Q76 **Mrs Drummond:** But there is no requirement to do it for the cross-Government projects.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** It is the word "internal". It is still cross-cutting, but it is not external in the sense of being published.

Q77 **Chair:** Why?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** That was the decision of Ministers.

Q78 **Chair:** It seems to me that, if cross-Government working is the holy grail and we want to see the wicked issues dealt with, why are the individual departmental ODPs published but not the cross-Government ones?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** Individual ones, when they have been published, do embed cross-cutting obligations and—

Q79 **Chair:** That is very hard to piece together, is it not?

**Mrs Drummond:** Yes, exactly. I was going to say, it is very difficult then to—



**Q80 Chair:** Even on the Public Accounts Committee—we are nerdily interested in this, let us be honest—we would find it hard to track that through, although, with our friends at the National Audit Office, we have some help. If you are an average citizen looking up to see how obesity or drugs is being dealt with and you have an outcome delivery plan that is internal, that is not really helping the individuals who might want to know about that. You say Ministers. Is it a ministerial decision? I would have thought it would be something that, Sir Alex, would be right in your bag as the accounting officer for the Department.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** No. The decision of whether to publish them across Government was one for Ministers. We have written before to this Committee about the methodology for producing outcome delivery plans and we continue to work on those and refine them every year. We also do use them internally as a reference point for progress and for stocktakes of Departments and so on, but the decision about whether it would be helpful or not to publish is one for—

**Q81 Chair:** Even the public version of the predecessor, the single departmental plans, was quite a useful document. We sometimes saw as a Committee the private version and that was particularly granularly useful. If I was a Minister going into a Department, I would want to see that document because it gives you a real warts-and-all account. There are bits and corners of everything that are commercially sensitive or there will be reasons, but it was useful.

Let me just go back to this issue about what incentivises people to put in these joint bids. It is a bit sad. I remember a figure of only a handful before. You have told us 28. I am surprised that it has risen that high, but clearly we share a disappointment that it is only 28. What other incentives can you do to make Departments or encourage Departments? At the moment, they do not win out if there is a delivery across Departments.

We have talked about the money. That is one incentive but, in terms of personal, professional development and promotion, which Permanent Secretary is going to get kudos because they helped deliver an outcome across multiple Departments? At the moment, is that not a barrier to them buying into it?

**Cat Little:** There is a whole range of things, as you have touched on. Certainly, there are leadership, culture, performance management and money benefits—making sure that, if people invest time and energy, they are rewarded and recognised for it and that they get the benefits if there are cashable savings ultimately. All of these things play a part and we have to use every lever available to try to change it.

Politicians also have quite an important role to play because, in my experience, we serve the Government, ultimately, and if the Government say, “We want this cross-cutting outcome and we want it to be a priority”, then, of course, that is what is incentivising senior officials to deliver.



**Q82 Chair:** That is interesting. I do not want to take you into politics, but we have seen different iterations in different No. 10s under different political leadership, including coalitions, of delivery and how you deliver on that delivery. In your experience, straying as far as you can, does the attitude and approach to delivery in No. 10 make a difference?

We have had delivery units with different names at different times. Sometimes they are abolished. Sometimes they are put back in place. Does that make a difference to trying to deliver cross-cutting policy across Government? Is the heft from No. 10 or indeed the Cabinet Office critical to this? Sir Alex, Lord Maude was there for five years. That was a rare consistency in office that has only occasionally been replicated in other Departments.

**Cat Little:** I am sure Sir Alex will want to add to this but, in my experience, it is not so much No. 10. It is having senior political collective agreement on priorities. That makes a really big difference.

**Chair:** It is collective agreement rather than one—

**Cat Little:** That is generally the model and certainly at spending reviews—

**Chair:** Good old-fashioned Cabinet Government—who would have thought it?

**Cat Little:** At spending reviews, what we try to do is build a collective agreement about priorities so that we spend the money in the best way possible. What is challenging is when those priorities shift about and we need to make sure that we have processes to ensure we understand the latest priorities at any given time.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** I would agree with that, of course. You hinted at it in your question, Chair: consistency over time is easier if you have people in post for a year or two years or three years or four years.

**Chair:** A year sounds a long time. This is how desperate things have got.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** That can certainly make a difference, and that is as true for officials as it is for Ministers, of course. As well, when you are working on long-term, very complex and difficult tasks such as the ones you were looking at before in relation to climate and levelling up, it is good to have a degree of public accountability for that, where people understand that changing some of those core facts on the ground will take place over multiple Administrations. It will require very sustained effort. Some of the techniques around cross-party involvement and things like that are quite relevant. I mentioned the Climate Change Commission and things like that can be helpful.

**Q83 Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Culturally, a lot of these cross-Government efforts come from the top down. The level of you two and downwards. Have you tried saying to two, three or half a dozen people at director



levels across Departments, "This is a germ of an idea. Get together and just see how you would make this work?" and, "By the way, if you do get it to work, it will enhance your promotion prospects".

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** Yes, in short, and I will give you a specific example on your favourite topic, which is data. Sorry, I will not say it is your favourite; it is a popular topic. I do not know what your favourite is, so I will correct that. The last two years running we have run this competition for data excellence across Government, where we have invited teams to form and give their ideas for using and sharing data better. We had over 100 entries in the first year and about 80 last year. It does not get you promoted, but at the end of it, the last eight get support in developing their scheme.

They then go through a quarter final and so on. There is all kinds of razzmatazz about the winners and then, not only is the winning one funded to become a successful project, but all of the quarter finalists' Secretaries of State said that they would support those projects as well. That was a way of trying to generate ideas that we might not have otherwise been able to hear about, but also some of the professional support did involve bringing people together from different Departments, bringing in academics—

Q84 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Has that actually worked? Did it produce some ideas that are now being used?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** Yes, fantastic ideas, which were really good, They were not just ideas, but projects. I can mention, for example, one that came out of Defra more than anywhere else. It was to do with a well-known problem in climate CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, a lot of which come from peatlands that have been drying out because of the trenches dug, many hundreds of years ago, in many cases—

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** Drainage trenches.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** Drainage trenches, exactly. You may say, "What is the innovation here?" The innovation here was that Natural England used to send teams of people out to try to find where these blocked drains were, to unblock them. The data innovation was using flyovers, which are done by the Ordnance Survey, to see irregularities in the landscape. They then developed an adversarial AI tool to be able to test which of those are most likely to generate things like that and, from that, they are able to say, "This is where there is a blockage. This is one that we will be able to unblock at low cost. This is the nearest team to do that". That has absolutely transformed the efficiency of that operation.

Sorry to use a slightly long example, but I mention that because you can see the elements there of working between different Government Departments, using external experts and encouraging initiative that came from the people having the long, wet walks to try to find these things. It is a nice example.



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**Chair:** Sometimes it is not just down to Permanent Secretaries then. There is a revelation.

Q85 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I was very impressed with your 40% of Government employees that have been on these professional data training courses. Do you have a similar thing to train people in cross-Government working? Can you say something about that and how that is going?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** I would say One Big Thing, as we call it, encourages people to understand the potential of using data and that itself is an enabler to cross-Government working. You will have seen from the reports and things that data sharing has been one of the obstacles. We are trying to promote cross-Government working not by saying, "It is a great thing", which people should understand, but by removing one of the identified obstacles to that.

Q86 **Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** In terms of the training aspect of it, not just data, you have specific courses and training for cross-Government working, do you not?

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** I cannot think of ones that are specifically on that. We certainly encourage the collaborative, multi-disciplinary teams as an essential skill for civil servants today, and you might have some more specific training courses on some things that require cross-Government working. I cannot think myself of one that is for cross-Government working.

**Chair:** I recently engaged with the policy profession, and Susan Acland-Hood, the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Education, gave a speech about how good policy is made, which involves different parts of the system and cross-Government working, in effect, and developing a policy to help drive good policy but also some of what you are talking about.

**Cat Little:** There are two things I am aware of. There is the joint bid training that we undertake in the Treasury and the policy excellence hub, which is the online tool where policy professionals come together. That has a cross-collaboration, joint working section, and it sets out all of the benefits, how you can go about finding people, what tools, frameworks and guidance there is to support people on better joint working. I am aware that that is something that is quite active in the policy profession.

**Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I am a great believer in putting round pegs in round holes. If you could find certain people in certain Departments that were keen on using cross-Government working, you could put them into a project and say, "See how you could give a bit of advice to improve that", and then move on to the next one.

Q87 **Chair:** I have just been reminded that the Chair of our sister Committee, William Wragg of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, often referred to as PACAC, wrote to your former Minister, Sir



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Alex Chisholm, about why you are not publishing the ODPs. We will revisit this with our sister Committee and you might get a further request from us about this issue.

**Sir Alex Chisholm:** I did see that correspondence last summer, yes.

**Chair:** We will pick up on that. Can I thank you both very much indeed for your time? This is a knotty issue, but it is helpful that the National Audit Office is doing these lessons learned exercises and these examples, because there are opportunities there for us to engage with the subjects in a different way. We challenge the Government on spending, but we also, as a Committee, constitutionally and individually and collectively, feel that it is very important to push to improve how Government work. I know that you both have that very much at heart.

Can I thank you very much indeed for your time? The transcript of this session, as ever, will be on the website uncorrected in the next couple of days and we will be considering a Report to publish in 2024. Thank you very much and have a happy Christmas and good new year.