



House of Commons
Public Administration
and Constitutional Affairs
Committee

Where Civil Servants Work: Planning for the future of the Government's estates

Eighth Report of Session 2022–23

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 18 July 2023*

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England, which are laid before this House, and matters in connection therewith; to consider matters relating to the quality and standards of administration provided by civil service departments, and other matters relating to the civil service; and to consider constitutional affairs.

Current membership

[William Wragg MP](#) (*Conservative, Hazel Grove*) (Chair)

[Ronnie Cowan MP](#) (*Scottish National Party, Inverclyde*)

[Jo Gideon MP](#) (*Conservative, Stoke-on-Trent Central*)

[David Jones MP](#) (*Conservative, Clwyd West*)

[John McDonnell MP](#) (*Labour, Hayes and Harlington*)

[Damien Moore MP](#) (*Conservative, Southport*)

[Tom Randall MP](#) (*Conservative, Gedling*)

[Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP](#) (*Labour (Co-op), Brighton, Kemptown*)

[Karin Smyth MP](#) (*Labour, Bristol South*)

[John Stevenson MP](#) (*Conservative, Carlisle*)

[Beth Winter MP](#) (*Labour, Cynon Valley*)

Powers

The committee is a select committee, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 146. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2023. This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament Licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright-parliament.

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/pacac and in print by Order of the House.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Gavin Blake (Clerk), Dr Richard Douglas (Committee Specialist), Iwona Hankin (Committee Operations Officer), Gabrielle Hill (Committee Operations Manager), Vanessa Holden (Committee Specialist), Dr Philip Larkin (Committee Specialist), Susanna Smith (Second Clerk), Dr Patrick Thomas (Committee Specialist), and Hennie Ward (Media and Communications Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 3268; the Committee's email address is pacac@parliament.uk.

You can follow the Committee on Twitter using [@CommonsPACAC](https://twitter.com/CommonsPACAC).

Contents

Summary	3
Introduction	5
Terms of reference	6
Learning from the past	7
Inquiry timeline	8
1 Places for Growth: Levelling up the UK through civil service relocation	9
Background to Places to Growth	9
A regional breakdown of the civil service	9
Places for Growth: Rationale and objectives	13
Places for Growth commitments: assessing progress to date	16
Relocating 22,000 civil service posts	16
Rebalancing the proportion of the Senior Civil Service based in London	17
Ministerial presence in regional Hubs	18
Economic impacts of civil service relocation	20
Economic benefits from opening new regional offices	20
Economic impacts of office closures	24
2 Government Property Agency: Managing the office portfolio	28
The Government Property Agency and the office portfolio	28
The GPA's scope of influence	28
Workforce planning, headcount reductions, and demand for office space	30
Charging rent on office properties owned by the Government	33
3 Civil service culture and people: Implications of the relocation agenda	35
Making a success of relocations: the people element	35
Pay and administrative issues	38
Diversifying the culture of the civil service for better policy-making	40
4 Overall conclusions	45
Conclusions and recommendations	47
Formal minutes	53
Witnesses	54
Published written evidence	55
List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	56

Summary

This inquiry has investigated two high-profile policy programmes relating to the offices in which civil servants work, a property portfolio comprising 1,253 buildings, accommodating 337,435 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff, and valued in 2022 at £2.2 billion.

Under the Places for Growth programme, owned by the Cabinet Office, the Government has a target of relocating 22,000 civil service posts away from London by 2030. Under the Government Hubs programme, led by the Government Property Agency (GPA), the Government is opening around 30 regional Hubs, mainly in large cities, while closing older offices in towns and cities around the country. These Hubs are to accommodate not only the 22,000 posts to be relocated under Places for Growth, but also 37,000 posts previously based in the local offices which have been closed.

Places for Growth: Levelling up the UK through civil service relocation

In March 2023, the Government announced it had relocated over 11,000 civil service posts from London, and thus already reached more than 50% of its Places for Growth target. While this indicates good progress, a lack of clear information published by the Cabinet Office makes it difficult to judge how substantial its achievements are for the following reasons:

First, despite being described by the Cabinet Office as a “flagship programme”, Places for Growth did not have a published launch document setting out its objectives and underlying research, and still does not have a dedicated GOV.UK webpage through which the public could assess the progress of the programme.

Second, the Cabinet Office has not been clear that, in large part, the 22,000 target is being achieved not by moving officials out of London but by recruiting new starters to vacancies being created in regional offices—meaning it could meet its target even while increasing the number of civil servants based in the capital. In some of its communications, it is adopting a boosterish approach to reporting progress, which is likely to give an exaggerated picture of its achievements.

Thirdly, the Cabinet Office has made high-profile statements about the economic benefits to be delivered by moving posts to new regional offices, without publishing the underlying research to support its estimates. Nor has it attempted to estimate the economic losses resulting from the closure of local offices under the Government Hubs programme, often in smaller towns where the economic impacts are likely to be more acutely felt.

Government Property Agency: managing the office portfolio.

The increase in hybrid working following the Covid-19 pandemic has reduced demand for office space, meaning new regional Hubs are larger than needed. The Government has adjusted by enabling departments to rent out what is now surplus floorspace in those Hubs which were originally built solely for HM Revenue & Customs, rather than in bespoke departmental Hubs. However, in order to do its job effectively going forwards,

the GPA needs robust workforce planning from departments to help it to plan for the right size and location of Hubs that have yet to open. This has been made more difficult by inconsistencies in government policy and communications. High-profile statements from Ministers about going back to the office have been at odds with long-term key policy programmes promoting hybrid working, leading to confusion. Moreover, the Government has made sudden and unclear statements about the size of the civil service, most recently stating both that it had scrapped targets for headcount reductions and that it was still committed to achieving the same scale of cuts—but clarifying neither how this would be achieved nor over what timescale.

Civil service culture and people: Implications of the relocation agenda

Previous governments have implemented similar programmes of civil service relocation, but the Government is doing things differently this time by embracing videoconferencing and seeking to create more senior career pathways outside London. This brings significant potential opportunities. However, there are also a number of risks the Cabinet Office will need to manage in the delivery of these two programmes:

If regional offices mainly comprise new starters who have never worked in Whitehall, there may be a risk of two-tier departmental cultures which do not form a coherent organisation. Co-locating officials from different departments within the same regional Hubs could also cause practical issues where staff seek to move between departments in pursuit of improved pay and conditions. On pay overall, relocation has a role to play in offering financial benefits to those staff who move out of London but should not be seen as a replacement for addressing underlying issues with civil service pay.

Overall, the Government has made ambitious statements about how regional offices will have a positive impact on policy-making, but has yet to clearly explain how these improvements will occur in practice. Unlike the previous system of regional Government Offices (abolished in 2010–11), the new regional Hubs do not attempt to implement policy for the regions they are based in. Without a clearer rationale for why a particular function has been relocated to a particular regional Hub, the Government increases the risks both that its regionalisation programme will fail substantially to influence policy-making and that a future government may reorganise or reverse what it has done due to a lack of ‘bedding in’.

Introduction

1. In August 2022, the Government published a new property strategy.¹ This strategy encompasses the entire central government estate—an extensive array of properties including offices, hospitals, academy schools, courts, prisons, and museums, divided into twelve property portfolios, and with an estimated value of £188.2 billion.² Covering the period 2022–2030, the strategy is built around three missions: to “transform places and services” (by optimising the location and design of buildings and services, in ways that support ‘Levelling Up’), to make the estate “smaller, better, and greener” (by consolidating it into a smaller number of more modern buildings), and to enhance “professional excellence and insight” (by increasing the skills and influence of the Government Property Function, the cross-government profession of property specialists).³

2. In the wake of this new strategy, in October 2022, we launched an inquiry specifically into the Government’s management of its portfolio of office buildings.⁴ As of March 2022, the office portfolio was valued at £2.2 billion, comprised 1,253 buildings, and accommodated 337,435 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff.⁵ We chose this focus, rather than looking at the government estate as a whole, because government offices are of central relevance to our interest in cross-Government public administration and the role of the Cabinet Office in particular. Not only does this portfolio include the office workplaces of the majority of civil servants—i.e. those who develop policy and perform administration, rather than public-facing civil servants (for example in job centres, which have their own portfolio)—but the Cabinet Office has a particular role to play here since strategic responsibility for the office portfolio as a whole lies with the Government Property Agency (GPA), an executive agency of the Cabinet Office.⁶

3. A further reason for concentrating on this portfolio is that it is the subject of an ambitious policy programme. One of the Government’s most high-profile policies in this area is the Places for Growth programme, under which it has a target of relocating 22,000 civil service posts away from London by 2030. Overall responsibility for this policy lies with the Office of Government Property (OGP), a unit within the Cabinet Office.⁷ Alongside this, the Government Hubs programme, owned by the Government Property Agency, is relocating staff initially to “around 30 large, state-of-the-art buildings” in cities around the United Kingdom, with a total of up to 50 Hubs planned to be opened by 2030.⁸ These new regional Hubs are planned to accommodate not only the 22,000 posts relocated under Places for Growth, but also 37,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) posts previously based in

1 Government Property Function, [Government Property Strategy 2022–2030](#), August 2022.

2 Cabinet Office, [State of the Estate 2021–22](#), April 2023, p. 7.

3 Government Property Function, [Government Property Strategy 2022–2030](#), August 2022, pp. 7–18.

4 [“Future of Government offices to be examined in new Committee inquiry”](#), Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee press release, 21 October 2022.

5 Cabinet Office, [State of the Estate 2021–22](#), April 2023, p. 26.

6 Comptroller and Auditor General, [Managing central government property](#), HC 571, National Audit Office, July 2022, paragraph 2. The importance of this policy area to the Cabinet Office as a whole is underlined by the fact that, in 2021–22, the GPA accounted for over two-thirds (70%) of the Cabinet Office’s operating income and more than one-third (38%) of its corporate group expenditure: National Audit Office, [Departmental Overview: Cabinet Office, 2021–22](#), January 2023, p. 8

7 National Audit Office, [Departmental Overview: Cabinet Office, 2021–22](#), January 2023, p. 21.

8 Comptroller and Auditor General, [Managing central government property](#), HC 571, National Audit Office, July 2022, paragraph 2.6; Government Property Function, [Government Property Strategy 2022–2030](#), August 2022, p. 10.

smaller offices around the country.⁹ While predating it, these policies form core elements of the 2022 Government Property Strategy, with progress in relocating civil servants from London, and in consolidating offices into new Hub buildings, among the handful of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the strategy as a whole.¹⁰

Terms of reference

4. In launching this inquiry, we identified a number of issues which were particularly worthy of examination:

- **Progress towards targets:** As discussed above, the Government has made high-profile commitments to, by 2030, relocate thousands of civil service posts out of London and consolidate its office estate into dozens of new regional Hubs. One purpose of this inquiry is to provide an early progress check on whether these objectives are on course to be delivered (see paragraphs 19 to 27 regarding Places for Growth, and paragraphs 50 to 63 regarding Government Hubs). In reviewing this progress, we have examined the extent to which the Cabinet Office and Government Property Agency are successfully leading the property and related personnel policies of departments across government.
- **Economic and cultural benefits:** Places for Growth has an important role to play within the Government's 'Levelling Up' agenda. On one level, this concerns an objective to boost regional growth by increasing the availability of civil service jobs in regional Hubs around the United Kingdom (see paragraphs 34 to 49). On another level, this concerns a set of potential cultural impacts on the way in which the civil service designs policy, as a result of locating more policy roles outside London (see paragraphs 84 to 96). Our inquiry has set out to examine the Cabinet Office's evidence towards the achievement of these wider benefits.
- **Managing uncertainty:** To successfully plan for the lease or purchase of regional Hub buildings, the GPA would benefit from good-quality workforce plans from departments, setting out their future staffing needs and demand for office space in different locations. However, this picture has been complicated by two major developments. First, the post-pandemic acceleration of hybrid working has introduced uncertainties as to how often people will be working in the office. Second, departments' workforce plans have been subject to uncertainty following the Government's announcement, in May 2022, of an intention to achieve significant reductions in civil service headcount.¹¹ Our inquiry has examined the impact of these uncertainties on the implementation of Places for Growth, and how the GPA has responded to them in its strategic management of the office portfolio (paragraphs 55 to 63).
- **Policy tensions:** One of the objectives of Places for Growth is to support the 'Levelling Up' agenda by distributing civil service posts around the country. This is potentially in tension with the Government Hubs programme, which seeks to increase the efficiency and environmental performance of government offices by

9 Infrastructure and Projects Authority, [Annual Report on Major Projects 2021–22](#), July 2022, p. 46.

10 Government Property Function, [Government Property Strategy 2022–2030](#), August 2022, pp. 10, 15.

11 Anushka Asthana, ['Cutting civil service by 91,000 will require 'imagination' admits senior Whitehall official](#), ITV News, 13 May 2022.

closing older offices around the country, often in towns, and concentrating posts in a smaller number of modern Hub offices, usually in big cities. Our inquiry has examined the extent to which the Cabinet Office and GPA have recognised these tensions and sought to mitigate them (paragraphs 43 to 49).

Learning from the past

5. Another feature of our inquiry has been to examine the extent to which the Cabinet Office is learning from the past in seeking to implement current policy. The relocation of civil service posts and central government functions, away from London and around the country, is a recurrent feature of public administration in the UK. Successive waves of initiatives have been launched, roughly every 10 or 15 years,¹² over a period of decades:

- **National resilience initiatives in the Second World War:** A number of government offices were removed from London in 1940, in anticipation of major bombing raids. Organisations moved to locations such as Bath, Blackpool, and Harrogate. After the war some returned to London, but others remained in their regional locations, notably Ministry of Defence offices in Bath.¹³
- **Flemming Report¹⁴ (1963):** Sir Gilbert Flemming was asked to identify posts which could be relocated from London to generate property and labour savings without any loss to efficiency. He focused on identifying self-contained areas of activity where there was little contact with ministers, and so could be moved away from London with minimal disruption. He recommended the dispersal of 14,000 posts out of London, and 5,500 to the outskirts of London. Between 1963 and 1972 further posts were added to these initiatives, resulting in 22,500 posts being relocated in total. A further total of 9,490 new posts were established outside London.¹⁵
- **Hardman Report (1973):** Sir Henry Hardman's review identified 31,500 London-based posts for relocation. The impetus behind his review was again to achieve lower operating costs, as well as to provide employment in areas the Government wished to support. Hardman's analysis sought to balance the objective of reducing costs with that of minimising the administrative inefficiencies that might arise from conducting policy discussions between geographically remote offices. Ultimately, around 10,000 posts were relocated.¹⁶
- **Ibbs Report (1988):** In March 1988 the Government issued new guidance to departments to review the location of their work, in order to secure cost savings and wider benefits.¹⁷ Also in 1988, a report under the direction of Sir Robin Ibbs (the Ibbs Report) developed the idea of creating executive agencies, to separate

12 It has been argued that this pattern has historically reflected cyclical economic pressures, in which rising property and labour costs in London provide an impetus for the Government to move public sector operations away from the capital. J.N. Marshall, C. Hodgson, and C. Bradley, [Public sector relocation and regional disparities in Britain](#), Environment and Planning: C: Government & policy, vol 23, 2005, p. 885.

13 Sir Henry Hardman, [The Dispersal of Government Work from London](#) (the Hardman Report), June 1973, Cmnd 5322, p. 21.

14 Sir Gilbert Flemming, *The Dispersal of Civil Servants from London* (the Flemming Report), 1963.

15 Hardman Report, p. 22; Sir Michael Lyons, [Well Placed to Deliver: Independent Review of Public Sector Relocation](#) (the Lyons Review), HM Treasury, March 2004, p. 153.

16 Sir Michael Lyons, [Lyons Review](#), p. 153.

17 HC Deb, 31 March 1988, [cols 612–3W](#).

implementation from policy, and thereby improve operational efficiency and professionalism.¹⁸ The creation of executive agencies (originally known as Next Steps Agencies) prompted a new wave of decentralisation, with a number of newly self-contained organisations relocating away from the capital. Between 1989 and 1993, 19,000 posts were relocated or established outside the South East, and a further 6,800 jobs planned for decentralisation, with the opportunity to reduce operational costs again being the main driver.¹⁹

- **Lyons Review (2004):** Sir Michael Lyons was commissioned to re-examine the potential to relocate posts out of London, to achieve both efficiency savings and regional benefits. The Lyons Review identified up to 20,000 posts that could be relocated from London, which it was estimated could lead to savings of more than £2 billion over 15 years.²⁰ The Review also estimated there would be economic benefits to the regions receiving civil service posts, but stressed these would be greater if clustered in a small number of locations, rather than spread thinly across the country. Lyons' target of 20,000 relocations was achieved by 2009, a year ahead of schedule.²¹

Inquiry timeline

6. We took oral evidence between December 2022 and March 2023, from the National Audit Office; Professor Tony Travers, Visiting Professor at the London School of Economics' Department of Government and Director of its LSE London research centre; the Institute for Government (IfG); three civil service unions—the FDA, Prospect, and the Public and Commercial Services Union; and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office, Alex Burghart MP, and officials. In March 2023, we undertook a fact-finding visit to the Cabinet Office's second departmental headquarters in Glasgow. We also received written evidence from a number of parties. We would like to thank all who assisted us in this inquiry.

18 Kate Jenkins, Karen Caines, and Andrew Jackson, [Improving Management in Government: The Next Steps \(the Ibbs Report\)](#), Efficiency Unit, 1988.

19 Sir Michael Lyons, [Lyons Review](#), p. 154.

20 Sir Michael Lyons, [Lyons Review](#), p. 1.

21 Ian R. Smith, [Relocation: Transforming where and how government works](#), HM Treasury, March 2010, p. 6.

1 Places for Growth: Levelling up the UK through civil service relocation

Background to Places to Growth

A regional breakdown of the civil service

7. The regional distribution of civil service jobs—and in particular a concern that the civil service is overly concentrated in London—has long been a focus of British public administration. It remains an issue because the regional distribution of the civil service continues to be dominated by London. In 2022, out of a total headcount of 510,180, some 104,830 civil servants, or over a fifth of the national total (21%), were based in the capital. The region with the next highest number of civil servants was the North West of England, with 64,300 (13%).²²

8. In recent years this concentration in London has been intensifying, with the civil service increasing its presence in the capital in both absolute and relative terms. The number of civil servants based in London rose from 86,529 in 2010 to 104,830 in 2022, an increase in headcount of 18,301, or 21%. Only two other regions or nations of the UK registered a rise in number of civil servants during this period;²³ all other regions saw a fall in numbers, with the East of England losing a quarter (25%) of its civil servants (see Figures 1 and 2).²⁴

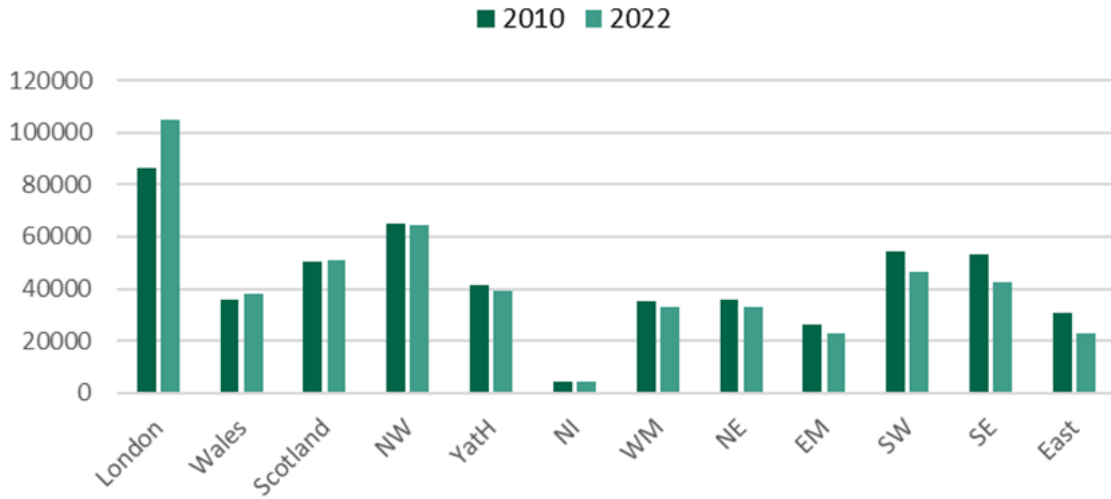
22 Cabinet Office, [Statistical bulletin - Civil Service Statistics: 2022](#), 2 March 2023. By contrast, in mid-2021 the total population of London made up 13% of the population of the United Kingdom.

23 Between 2010 and 2022 there was a 7% rise in the number of civil servants based in Wales, and a 1% rise in Scotland.

24 Office for National Statistics, [Civil Service Statistics 2010](#), 2010, Table 10; Cabinet Office, [Statistical Tables - Civil Service Statistics 2022](#), March 2023, Table 10.

Figure 1: Change in numbers of civil servants by region

London stands out for its significant growth in civil servants since 2010



Notes:

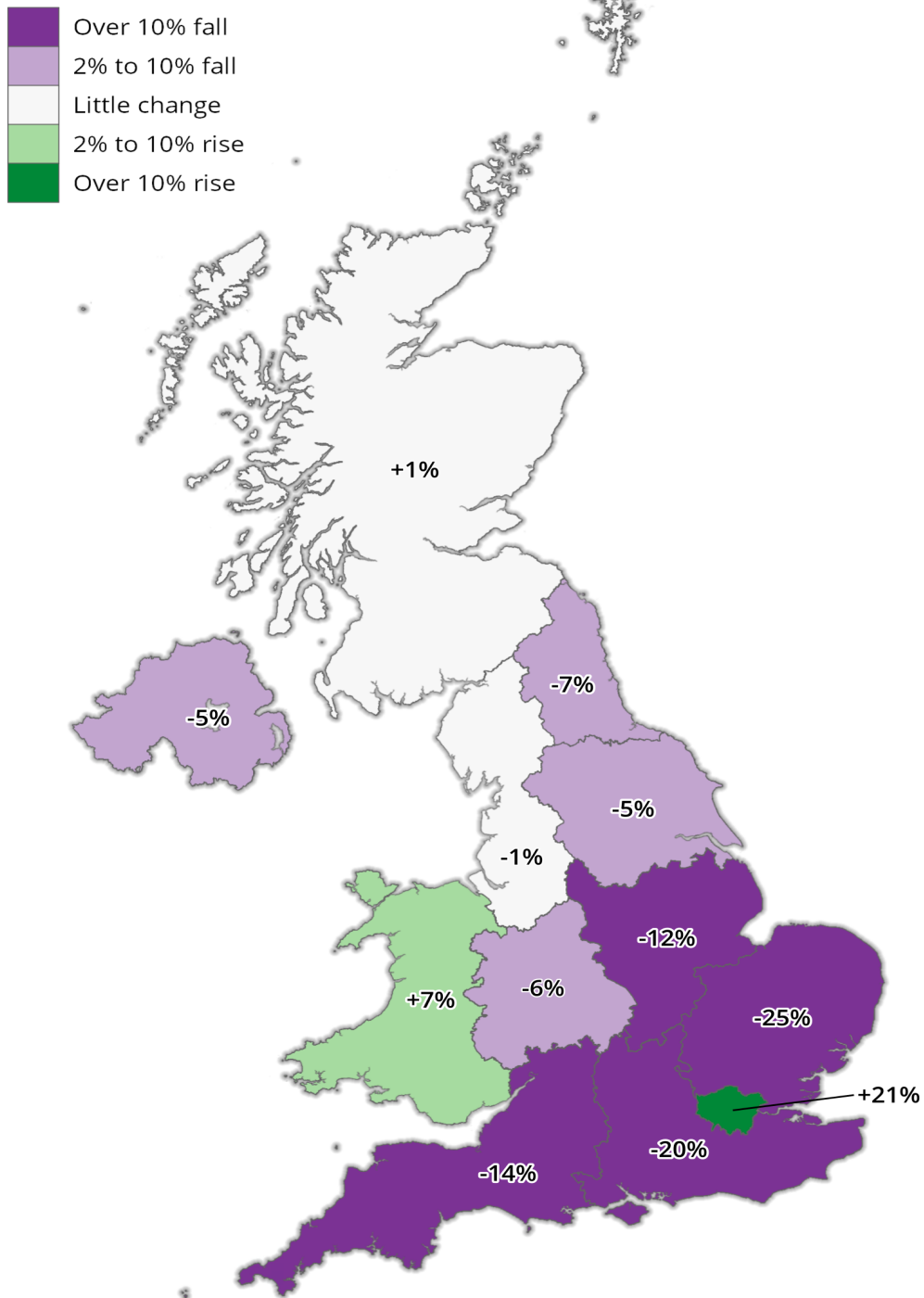
1. Figures are for headcount, not full-time equivalents (FTEs).
2. NW=North West, Yath=Yorkshire and the Humber, NI=Northern Ireland, WM=West Midlands, NE=North East, EM=East Midlands, SW=South West, SE=South East, East=East of England.

Source: Committee analysis of Office for National Statistics, [Civil Service Statistics 2010](#), 2010, Table 10; Cabinet Office, [Statistical Tables - Civil Service Statistics 2022](#), March 2023, Table 10.

Figure 2: Percentage change in numbers of civil servants in 2022 compared to 2010, by region

Most regions have seen appreciable decreases in civil servants, but London has seen a significant increase

Change in civil service staff since 2010



Notes: Calculations are based on headcount, not full-time equivalents (FTEs).

Source: Committee analysis of Office for National Statistics, [Civil Service Statistics 2010](#), 2010, Table 10; Cabinet Office, [Statistical Tables - Civil Service Statistics 2022](#), March 2023, Table 10.

9. We asked the Cabinet Office to explain the increasing concentration of civil service posts in London. Ravi Chand, Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) of the Cabinet Office's Places for Growth programme, conceded that numbers of civil servants in London had risen in recent years. He implied this was largely due to factors that were beyond the Government's power to anticipate, pointing to the need to rapidly increase staff in order to prepare for leaving the EU after the 2016 referendum, and again in 2020 in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. He suggested that: "More recent numbers have shown that this [the concentration of civil servants in London] is beginning to drop or we anticipate it dropping". He further referred to a "Plan for London", for which he was also SRO, under which the Cabinet Office is planning to reduce the number of officials based in London by around a quarter, from around 100,000 to around 75,000, by 2030.²⁵ This was a striking announcement, as despite the scale of headcount reductions under consideration, the Cabinet Office has not published any details of this Plan for London and did not refer to it in its written evidence to this inquiry.²⁶ Nor did it feature in the evidence from the three main civil service unions, suggesting it had not been discussed with them.

10. As written evidence from the Onward think tank pointed out, looking deeper into the civil service statistics reveals that the growth in civil service numbers in London is still ongoing.²⁷ In the latest figures available while the overall proportion of all civil servants based in London did decline slightly, from 21.2% in 2021 to 20.7% in 2022, the absolute number of civil servants based in London rose again by 2.8% over the total in 2021; the reason the proportion based in London went down was because the civil service grew even more rapidly outside the capital in that year.²⁸ Additionally, while there has indeed been rapid recruitment to the civil service following the 2016 EU referendum, the proportion of all civil servants based in London was growing even before then. This was due to the fact that while the Government cut the number of civil servants in London during the period of austerity after 2010, from 2013 onwards it generally cut headcount even more steeply in areas outside London. Alex Thomas of the IfG has suggested this was a result of the Government's cutting jobs more heavily during the austerity years in HM Revenue & Customs and the Department for Work & Pensions, which were based more widely across the country, rather than policy roles which were based disproportionately in London.²⁹ As a result, the proportion of civil servants based in London has been on a general rising trend since 2010, including year on year increases between 2012 and 2016, and again between 2017 and 2021 (Figure 3).

25 [Q172](#).

26 A search of GOV.UK for "Plan for London", as of 13 June 2023, revealed only one relevant published reference. It states simply: "A new Plan for London is being developed aiming to consolidate further with only 16 buildings to remain in and around Whitehall." Government Property Function, [Government Property Strategy 2022–2030](#), August 2022, p. 13.

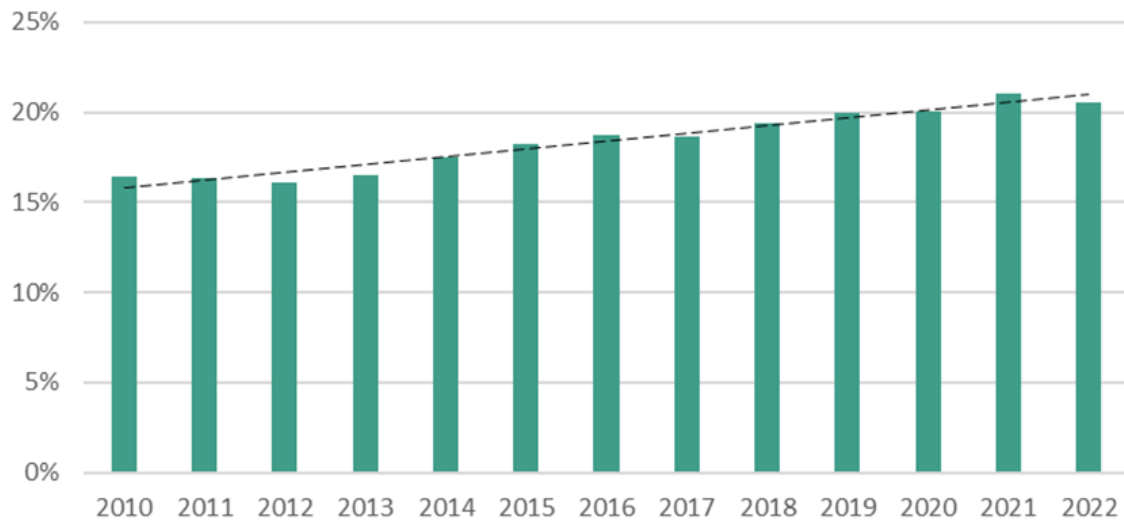
27 UK Onward ([FGE0005](#)).

28 Cabinet Office, [Statistical bulletin - Civil Service Statistics: 2022](#), 2 March 2023.

29 Institute for Government ([FGE0007](#)); Jim Pickard, ["Civil service grows fastest in London despite 'levelling up' pledges"](#), Financial Times, 1 October 2021.

Figure 3: Proportion of civil servants based in London, 2010 to 2022

The proportion of civil servants in London has been rising since 2012



Notes:

1. Calculations are based on headcount, not full time equivalents (FTEs).
2. Graph does not depict the proportion of civil servants based in other regions and nations. If it did it would emphasise the fact that, while London is the region with the highest proportion of civil servants, overall around four-fifths (79%) of civil servants in 2022 were based outside the capital.

Source: Committee analysis (including trendline) of Office for National Statistics, [Civil Service Statistics 2010](#), 2010, Table 10; Cabinet Office, [Statistical Tables - Civil Service Statistics 2022](#), March 2023, Table 10.

Places for Growth: Rationale and objectives

11. The Government's current commitment to relocating large numbers of civil service posts out of London dates back to the Conservative Party's 2017 general election manifesto.³⁰ While not specifying how many posts would be relocated or by when, the manifesto made a commitment to move "significant numbers of UK Government civil servants and other public servants out of London and the south-east to cities around the UK". It further stated: "We will ensure that senior posts move too, so that operational headquarters as well as administrative functions are centred not in London but around Britain".³¹

12. In its 2018 Estate Strategy (the predecessor to the 2022 Government Property Strategy), the Government expanded on this commitment, promising "a major, long-term programme which will move many organisations and thousands of jobs, including a full range of professions and senior grades, over the next twelve years".³² In the 2020 Budget, the then Chancellor, the Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, translated this commitment into the specific target to move "22,000 civil service roles out of central London by the end of this decade [i.e. 2030]".³³ In its 2021 Declaration on Government Reform, the Government added the specification that this commitment to move 22,000 posts by 2030 would include "50% of

30 [PQ 191911](#) [Places for Growth programme], 23 November 2018; [Q175](#).

31 Conservative Party, [Forward, Together: Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Future](#), 2017, pp. 34–35.

32 Cabinet Office, [Government Estate Strategy: Better Estate, Better Services, Better Government](#), July 2018, p. 10.

33 HM Treasury, [Budget 2020: Delivering on Our Promises to the British People](#), HC 121, March 2020, p. 49.

Senior Civil Service (SCS) roles”.³⁴ In the 2022 Levelling Up White Paper, the Government further stated that the 22,000 posts would be moved out of “Greater London”, and that the first 15,000 of these would be relocated by 2025. It also refined the SCS target to refer to UK-based roles only, excluding those based overseas.³⁵

13. As these references indicate, key details of Places for Growth have been announced in a somewhat piecemeal fashion over a number of years. Similar programmes of civil service relocation implemented by past governments (for example, the 2004 Lyons Review or the 1973 Hardman Review) were launched with substantial published reports, setting out the programme’s rationale and targets, research on costs and benefits of relocation, and methods to help determine which posts should be moved to which locations.³⁶ By contrast, Places for Growth did not have a launch document, and at time of publication, still does not have a dedicated GOV.UK webpage (i.e. setting out details of its rationale, objectives, and progress) through which the public could assess the progress of the programme.³⁷

14. In the absence of a clear published overview, we asked witnesses from the Cabinet Office for a statement of the main rationale and objectives of Places for Growth. Ravi Chand, the programme’s SRO, confirmed that there were two “primary aims”: “to save money and to relocate to different regions under the ‘Levelling Up’ agenda”.³⁸ These objectives emerged from a “comprehensive exercise” the Cabinet Office carried out in 2018 to assess whether the public sector was overly concentrated in London and the South East. This resulted in the realisation that “the problem we were trying to address” was that “80% of our policymaking capability—our senior civil servants—was in London”. In addressing this by relocating policy posts out of London, the Cabinet Office believed it would both save money, given the lower costs of accommodating and paying staff outside the capital, and contribute to wider policy objectives by “creating career opportunities for people in other places and [by] improving the way we make policy”. Expanding on this latter point, Mr Chand explained: “Having senior folk in different parts of the UK would allow us to inform better government policymaking, rather than developing policy through the lens of people who live and work within SW1 of London”.³⁹

15. Separately, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office, Alex Burghart MP (the responsible Minister for this programme), wrote to us, stating that, according to the Cabinet Office’s modelling, Places for Growth will deliver:

- a) Savings in staff costs (by virtue of paying lower salaries outside London) totalling £672 million over 10 years.
- b) Local economic benefits in areas where civil service posts have been relocated to, ranging from £26 million to £137 million annually, and equating to between £260 million to £1.4 billion benefit over a 10-year period.

34 Cabinet Office, [Declaration on Government Reform](#), 15 June 2021, Action 1.

35 HM Government, [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#), Cp 604, February 2022, pp. 129–131.

36 Sir Henry Hardman, [The Dispersal of Government Work from London](#) (The Hardman Report), June 1973, Cmnd 5322, paragraph 25; Sir Michael Lyons, [Well Placed to Deliver: Independent Review of Public Sector Relocation](#) (the Lyons Review), HM Treasury, March 2004.

37 A search for “Places for Growth” on www.gov.uk on 3 May 2023 returned 109 results. While many of these pages referred to the programme, none was devoted exclusively to the programme itself.

38 [Q171](#).

39 [Q170–171](#).

- c) Savings in estate costs, with an estimated average saving of £1,500 per full-time equivalent (FTE) post, equating to £33 million savings in total.⁴⁰

16. While the Cabinet Office was forthcoming in response to our requests for information, it is worth noting that it had not previously put this information in the public domain. Given the Cabinet Office describes this as “Our flagship Places for Growth programme”, this lack of published documentation on it is striking.⁴¹ In particular, the absence of a prospectus document (and supplementary progress notes) makes it harder for public and parliamentary scrutiny of the programme’s design and progress.

17. Without further details on the research that underlies Places for Growth, for example, it is hard for observers to assess whether the target to relocate 22,000 posts by 2030 is sufficiently ambitious, or indeed realistic. When we asked the Minister about this target he was keen to “refute the idea that it was pulled out of a hat”, declaring that a “great deal of work went into that number”.⁴² Ultimately, after our request for further information, the Cabinet Office published a slide pack produced by consultants in 2018, which contained details of the exercise referred to by the Minister.⁴³ This showed that the Cabinet Office had sought to calculate a number of posts for relocation based on an assessment of numbers of posts that were suitable for this purpose.

18. A further reason to publish details on the design of a programme is to help ensure that individual decisions can be justified with reference to an overall set of mission principles and systematic processes. In the absence of a published methodology to guide decisions on where to move posts to (and where to move them from), observers have raised questions about whether some of these decisions have been excessively driven by personal or political calculations, poorly co-ordinated across government, or taken without due consideration of local impacts. It was observed by the Institute for Government, for example, that the decision by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to open a second headquarters in Wolverhampton was particularly convenient for the then Secretary of State, who had a home nearby and family connections to the city.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, HM Treasury’s decision to open an Economic Campus in Darlington has been linked with both the close proximity of the town to the then Chancellor Rishi Sunak’s constituency and with the suggestion that Darlington is a key ‘Red Wall’ seat.⁴⁵

40 [Correspondence from Alex Burghart to William Wragg MP](#), 28 February 2023.

41 Cabinet Office, [Annual Report and Accounts 2021–22](#), December 2022, p. 2.

42 [Q174](#).

43 [Letter from Alex Burghart MP on follow up evidence after the 28 March oral evidence session](#), 17 May 2023, Annex A.

44 Sarah Nickson, [Ministers should not promise a revolution from civil service relocation](#), Institute for Government, 24 February 2021.

45 Craig Berry, [‘What’s really behind Rishi Sunak’s decision to move part of the Treasury to Darlington?’](#), *The Conversation*, 5 March 2021. It should be noted that the relocation programmes of previous governments have also been linked to political considerations regarding siting offices in key marginal constituencies: see *Lyons Review*, HM Treasury, March 2004, p. 74.

Places for Growth commitments: assessing progress to date

Relocating 22,000 civil service posts

19. In March 2023, the Government announced it had relocated over 11,000 civil service posts from London, and had thus already reached more than 50% of its target of relocating 22,000 posts across the UK by 2030.⁴⁶ This reflects a rapid growth in the programme, from 2,000 relocated posts by December 2021, to 6,000 by March 2022, to 8,396 by September 2022.⁴⁷

20. While this indicates good progress towards Places for Growth's headline target, a lack of clarity in how this target has been framed creates some difficulties in judging how significant an achievement this is. For example, the Government has variously defined its target as relocating 22,000 posts from "central London",⁴⁸ "Greater London",⁴⁹ "London and the South East",⁵⁰ the "South East"⁵¹ and "London, the South East and [part of] the East of England".⁵² This creates uncertainty as to the baseline against which the Government is counting relocations.

21. Similarly, the Government has not been sufficiently clear about its definition of a relocated post, risking confusion over what it is committing to achieve. As an illustration, the Onward think tank expressed its concern to us that the Government was not on track to meet its 22,000 target, on the basis that the number of civil servants in London was still rising—when meeting the target "would require 2% of civil servants in London and the South East to move out of those regions every year between now and 2030".⁵³ However, the Cabinet Office later confirmed to us that its 22,000 target "does not take into account other activities and growth that may take place that would lead to increases [i.e. in overall civil service numbers in London]".⁵⁴ In other words, the Government is not committing to reduce the total number of officials based in London by 22,000 from a baseline number in any particular year. In fact, the 22,000 target is being achieved in large part not by officials moving out of London but by recruiting new starters to new vacancies being created in regional offices.⁵⁵ While the Cabinet Office stressed these are "real posts" that "should not be recreated back in London", it is essentially relying on a counterfactual narrative: that all the posts newly recruited to regional offices, and badged under Places for Growth, would have been filled in London if not for the programme.⁵⁶ This makes external scrutiny of the Government's self-reported progress difficult.

46 HC Deb, 16 March 2023, [col 948](#).

47 Cabinet Office, [Annual Report and Accounts 2021–22](#), December 2022, p. 45; Cabinet Office ([FGE0006](#)).

48 HM Treasury, [Budget 2020: Delivering on Our Promises to the British People](#), HC 121, March 2020, p. 49.

49 HM Government, [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#), Cp 604, February 2022, p. 129.

50 [PQ 191911](#) [Places for Growth programme], 23 November 2018.

51 Cabinet Office, [Annual Report and Accounts 2021–22](#), December 2022, p. 3.

52 [Letter from Alex Burghart MP on follow up evidence after the 28 March oral evidence session](#), 17 May 2023, Annex A.

53 UK Onward ([FGE0005](#)).

54 [Q173](#).

55 [Correspondence from Alex Burghart MP to William Wragg MP](#), 28 February 2023.

56 [Q173](#).

Rebalancing the proportion of the Senior Civil Service based in London

22. The lack of clarity over the framing of Places for Growth targets extends to the Government's commitment "to move [...] 50% of UK-based Senior Civil Service roles, out of Greater London by 2030".⁵⁷ The most straightforward reading of this target would suggest a commitment to move 50% of those Senior Civil Service (SCS) posts based in London at the outset of the Places for Growth programme out of the capital. As of March 2020, there were 4,160 senior civil servants based in London: moving 50% of these posts out of London would mean relocating 2,080 SCS posts by 2030. In other publications, however, the Government has framed this target as a commitment "for 50% of Senior Civil Servant roles to be based outside of London by 2030",⁵⁸ and this is the way it has been understood by external observers such as the Institute for Government.⁵⁹ This would make the target significantly more achievable. In 2020, London's 4,160 SCS posts made up 68% of the UK-based total (6,110). To take this down to 50% (3,055) would mean relocating 1,105 posts.⁶⁰

23. Interpreting the SCS commitment in this way, the Government appears to be moving in the right direction, albeit slowly. As of November 2022, the Government had relocated 255 SCS roles,⁶¹ while the proportion of the UK-based Senior Civil Service based in London had declined to 65%.⁶² The Institute for Government told us: "Keeping up this momentum over the next eight years would just about enable the government to achieve its target." However, it cautioned, "there is a long way to go and it is likely that as the 'low hanging fruit' SCS relocations are achieved, the task will get harder."⁶³

24. One further issue we noted on the reporting against the SCS commitment concerned not so much an imprecision in the framing of the target as an over-enthusiastic presentation of progress. In September 2022 the Cabinet Office reported:

The number of Senior UK Civil Servants now based in Glasgow has grown by 1,400 per cent under the scheme, with 30 senior officials now permanently located in the city. The government plans to have at least 50 per cent of UK-based Senior Civil Servants located outside of London by 2030.⁶⁴

25. The use of the 1,400% figure is hyperbolic and though mathematically correct is likely to mislead: given the total is 30 posts, the rise of 1,400% must describe an increase merely of 28 posts, from an original 2 posts. The use of this figure suggests a wish to dress up the progress that has been achieved as something more grandiose; it led in any case to enthusiastic headlines in the press.⁶⁵ The close proximity of a percentage figure for an increase in SCS posts in one office and the national 50% SCS target is also suggestive of a closer connection between this announcement and achievement of the overall target.

57 HM Government, [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#), Cp 604, February 2022, p. 129.

58 Civil Service, [Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy: 2022 to 2025](#), 24 February 2022, p. 16.

59 Institute for Government (FGE0007).

60 Cabinet Office, [Statistical Tables - Civil Service Statistics 2020](#), December 2020, Table 16.

61 [Correspondence from Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP to William Wragg MP](#), 24 November 2022.

62 Cabinet Office, [Statistical Tables - Civil Service Statistics 2020](#), December 2020, Table 16; Cabinet Office, [Statistical Tables - Civil Service Statistics 2022](#), March 2023, Table 16.

63 Institute for Government (FGE0007).

64 Cabinet Office, ["Close to 1,000 jobs moved from London to Scotland under UK Civil Service shakeup"](#), Press release, 27 September 2022.

65 Nicole Mitchell, [Number of senior UK Civil Servants now based in Glasgow grows by 1400 per cent, Cabinet Office reveals](#), Glasgow Times, 27 September 2022.

26. The Government appears to be making progress towards its target of relocating 22,000 posts by 2030, and steady progress towards a target of reducing the proportion of Senior Civil Service posts based in London to 50% of the total. However, a number of issues with the framing and reporting of these targets makes it difficult to judge how substantial the Government's achievements are. It is striking that the Cabinet Office has published so little information on the rationale and design of its Places for Growth programme, and also its new Plan for London. In particular, the Cabinet Office has not published a clear and definitive statement on the exact region from which it is seeking to relocate posts, nor of exactly what its target for senior officials is. In some of its communications it is also adopting a boosterish approach to reporting progress, which is likely to give an exaggerated picture of its achievements. Overall, the Cabinet Office has not done the basics of launching a programme well, notably failing to be clear and consistent in framing the rationale underlying the programme and the targets it is aiming to achieve.

27. Publishing details of the rationale and success criteria for a major programme is essential for public transparency and assisting parliamentary scrutiny. This is not only a democratic good in itself; by exposing the justifications for their interventions to scrutiny, departments can hope to strengthen the design of their policies and gain greater public confidence in their decisions. *In future, whenever the Cabinet Office launches a named programme, it should publish a prospectus document in advance of its operation, setting out details including the programme's rationale, key objectives, and evaluation plan. It should additionally maintain a dedicated webpage on GOV.UK, on which it periodically publishes updated metrics of progress, as well as other corporate announcements related to the programme. Retrospectively, the Cabinet Office should, alongside the response to this report, publish this information, both for Places for Growth and for its Plan for London, on a dedicated GOV.UK webpage, and commit to updating it with metrics of progress at regular intervals, at least annually. In publishing this information, the Cabinet Office should clearly show how Places for Growth and the Plan for London fit together.*

Ministerial presence in regional Hubs

28. In addition to its 2030 targets, the Government has set out a high-profile commitment to maintain a regular ministerial presence outside London in its new regional Hubs and headquarters.⁶⁶ More widely, the Government has also drawn attention to its creation of a dedicated Cabinet meeting room in its new Edinburgh Hub, and been explicit that its Hub in Cardiff has the capacity to hold full Cabinet meetings; neither, however, appears to have been used to host the Cabinet to date.⁶⁷

29. We looked specifically at how often Cabinet Office ministers had worked from their second headquarters in Glasgow. Announcing the creation of these headquarters in March 2021, the Cabinet Office set out its expectation that “ministers will spend a significant

66 Cabinet Office, [Declaration on Government Reform](#), 15 June 2021; HM Government, [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#), Cp 604, February 2022, p. 129.

67 HM Government, [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#), Cp 604, February 2022, pp. 130, 287; Sarah Priddy, [“Regional Cabinet meetings of the UK Government”](#), House of Commons Library, 12 May 2022; [Q179](#).

amount of time in Scotland".⁶⁸ However, the Cabinet Office told us that, as of 28 February 2023, Ministers had visited their Glasgow headquarters on five occasions, amounting to six days of visits in total:

- 5 May 2022: former Minister for Brexit Opportunities and Government Efficiency (Rt Hon Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg MP);
- 28 June 2022: former Parliamentary Secretary, Heather Wheeler MP;
- 27 September 2022: former Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP);
- 19 December 2022: the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Rt Hon Jeremy Quin MP); and
- 22 and 23 February 2023: the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP).⁶⁹

Appearing before us in late March 2023, the Minister, Alex Burghart MP, told us this had worked out at roughly one ministerial visit every eight weeks over the preceding year. Taking visits to the Cabinet Office's other regional offices into account, it worked out at approximately one ministerial visit per month.⁷⁰

30. Mr Burghart told us he had not yet been able to visit Glasgow since taking up his ministerial post at the Cabinet Office in October 2022, owing to the volume of his legislative duties. He had, however, been able to visit the department's regional office in Birmingham. Visiting the Glasgow headquarters was logistically more difficult, he explained, as a result of its distance from London:

The practical challenges are fairly straightforward. It is four and a half hours on a train to Glasgow. If you fly, there is a carbon element involved in that. For me as a Minister, the limitation is mostly on time. I went to Birmingham the other day, and you are door to door, literally, in under two hours. [...] That is much more doable to pop up for a meeting. The further away you get, the bigger the constraints are. [...] With time constraints, it is a little harder to spend more time there.⁷¹

An impression this statement conveyed was that Glasgow and Edinburgh were the furthest geographical limit which Ministers would consider for the creation of Government Hubs. The Minister, however, denied that towns and cities more distant in travel time from London were automatically ruled out.⁷²

68 Cabinet Office, "[UK Government to relocate over 1000 civil service jobs to Scotland](#)", Press release, 15 March 2021.

69 [Correspondence from Alex Burghart MP to William Wragg MP](#), 28 February 2023.

70 [Q177](#).

71 [Q178](#).

72 [Q186](#).

31. Beyond how often Ministers visit regional offices, we were also interested in what they do when they get there. The civil service unions we spoke to said that, in their experience, Ministers were not in practice working out of these regional Hubs. Garry Graham of Prospect told us: “We were told that there was significant appetite and enthusiasm for that, but we have no evidence of that happening”.⁷³ Amy Leversidge from the FDA observed:

when Ministers go outside to the second headquarters or to the different offices, it tends to be as visits. The impression that I get is of people going around the office saying, “Thank you; aren’t you doing a good job?” rather than actually working from the office.⁷⁴

32. The Minister partly reinforced this impression in describing his own approach to visiting a regional office. While he did describe “holding workaday meetings with the officials who work on the portfolios I cover”, he saw one of his main purposes as being “to walk around the floor, talk to people at random, see how they feel about it and see how they are using the space”.⁷⁵ Officials we spoke to on our visit to Glasgow spoke in positive terms about the visibility of Ministers when they did visit, suggesting that in many cases they would not be as able to speak to Ministers in an office in Whitehall. This supports an argument made by the Institute for Government that there is a prestige value in ministerial visits which could help to establish a department’s presence in a region.⁷⁶ At the same time, it also suggests that Ministers may be more visible in a regional office because they do not really need to be there, their real work being in Whitehall.

33. The Government has made high-profile commitments that Ministers would spend significant working time in regional offices—though without clearly explaining what value this was meant to deliver. To date, Ministers have not been able to meet this commitment, making flying visits rather than basing themselves outside London for significant amounts of time to conduct substantive work. The responsible Minister himself suggested a good reason for this: ministerial work is closely linked to Parliament and the Cabinet, and long travel times make it impractical for Ministers to spend very significant working time away from Westminster. *The Government should either live up to its public commitment for Ministers to spend more time working outside the capital, or issue a revised ambition with an accurate statement of what Ministers can actually commit to. This should extend to the Government’s purpose in building Cabinet meeting rooms in two of its new Hubs, and the Cabinet Office should include in its response to this report details of when the Cabinet plans to meet in Edinburgh and Cardiff.*

Economic impacts of civil service relocation

Economic benefits from opening new regional offices

34. The Government has repeatedly stated that the Places for Growth programme will lead to significant economic benefits—and this is clearly reflected in the name of the programme itself. The then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP, gave a clear articulation of this expectation in September 2022: “We want

73 [Q120](#).

74 [Q120](#).

75 [Q177](#).

76 Institute for Government ([FGE0007](#)).

to drive growth right across the United Kingdom and moving Civil Service jobs out of London is crucial to delivering this".⁷⁷ Boosting economic growth was set out as an objective of the programme from its formal beginnings in 2018, both for "each destination location"⁷⁸ and "for the UK overall".⁷⁹ It remains one of the programme's core expected benefits, the Rt Hon Jeremy Quin MP, Paymaster General and Minister of State for the Cabinet Office, informing the House of Commons in March 2023 that the programme was "spreading prosperity and opportunities across the whole of our United Kingdom".⁸⁰

35. In a number of press releases, the Cabinet Office has sought to put monetary values against the economic benefits it expects to generate, and alluded to research which supports these figures. For example, a February 2023 press release, announcing the construction of a new Government Hub in Manchester, stated:

Government modelling expects that the programme will provide an economic boost of between £260m–£1.4bn in total across the country, helping to deliver on one of the Prime Minister's key promises to grow the economy.

Latest relocation studies suggest a local economic benefit of £30 million per 1,000 roles relocated, which suggests the moves to Greater Manchester could generate more than £60 million in economic benefits to the area.⁸¹

Other Cabinet Office press releases have alluded to further details of this research: "It is expected that these jobs will provide a significant boost for local business and enterprise, with government research having shown that workers put around 50% of their salaries back into the local economy."⁸²

36. By contrast, we had heard evidence that there was a lack of good quality research that was publicly available on this topic. Professor Tony Travers from the London School of Economics summarised the situation: "the decision to move jobs away from the core of the civil service in London is made more easily than answering the question of what the impact on the economy would be". Looking at the effects of relocations in previous years, he was aware of "some evidence, from small samples, of small benefits on the economy of the areas to which civil servants are moved" but noted this came from "a very limited amount of research".⁸³ For its part, the Centre for Cities cited its own findings in evidence to us, suggesting "we must be very cautious about the economic impact that these policies can have" as "the evidence suggests their impact is limited".⁸⁴

37. We asked the Cabinet Office for more details of its own research on the economic benefits of its policy since it had not published any itself. Specifically, we asked whether its estimates of local economic benefits were based on the assumption that workers would normally come into the office (and thus spend money in the surrounding area) five days

77 Cabinet Office, "[Close to 1,000 jobs moved from London to Scotland under UK Civil Service shakeup](#)", Press release, 27 September 2022.

78 [PQ 191911](#) [Places for Growth programme], 23 November 2018.

79 Cabinet Office, [Government Estate Strategy: Better Estate, Better Services, Better Government](#), July 2018, p. 10.

80 HC Deb, 16 March 2023, [col 948](#).

81 Cabinet Office, "[Construction starts at Manchester government hub as 'cyber corridor' plans accelerate](#)", Press release, 23 February 2023.

82 For example, Cabinet Office, "[New government hub housing roles moved from London opens in Birmingham](#)", Press release, 28 July 2022.

83 [Q66](#).

84 Centre for Cities ([FGE0008](#))

a week; and, if so, whether this calculation had been revised to reflect the increase in hybrid working since the pandemic. Ravi Chand conceded that these estimates had been made before the pandemic.⁸⁵ He said that the Cabinet Office was now embarking on an assessment of whether economic benefits were actually being realised as planned, which he expected to be completed in Autumn 2023.⁸⁶ But in any case, he explained, by saying that 50% of salaries were spent in a “local” area, the Cabinet Office meant anywhere within a roughly one-hour “travel-to-work” distance from the office. It thus did not matter to the Government’s calculation of economic benefits whether civil servants were spending money in the location of their office, or in the place where they lived.⁸⁷

38. This is an important clarification, since it means that even if the Government’s estimates of economic benefits are fully realised, they will not necessarily accrue in full to the towns or cities in which regional Hubs are opened. As an example of what this could mean, we might consider HM Treasury’s new Economic Campus in Darlington. Steven Boyd, chief executive of the Government Property Agency, told us: “The provision of the Darlington Economic Campus in that location will make a really big impact on the area.”⁸⁸ While not disagreeing that Darlington stood to benefit from this new office, Jordan Urban of the Institute for Government told us: “Because it is such a well-connected place, the effective travel-to-work area is very large”—meaning there is “the prospect of some people commuting in from other parts of the north-east and the north more generally.”⁸⁹ Under the Cabinet Office’s methodology for calculating the economic benefits arising from the programme, this implies that whatever benefits are associated with this move to Darlington would in part be diffused across a much larger area than the town itself.

39. At least in this case, such economic benefits would remain within the wider region; this is not necessarily always going to be the case, particularly where regional Hubs are within closer commuting distance from London and the south-east, especially so if people only commute in for part of the week. In 2021, the Institute for Government suggested that, with DLUHC reportedly struggling at the time to staff its new Wolverhampton headquarters, an “official is reported to have said that staff might be able to stay in London, work remotely and commute to the West Midlands a couple of times a week”.⁹⁰

40. The Cabinet Office only published any information on how it has modelled the distribution of economic benefits arising from this policy after our oral evidence session with the Minister.⁹¹ This referred to benefits accruing to the “region” in each case but did not define this geographical area in detail. While it did refer to a detailed internal exercise to model economic benefits (with references to a range of external studies), it did not explicitly or comprehensively show how all the figures cited in press releases were worked out. Moreover, the Cabinet Office has previously cited figures for economic benefits in high-profile press releases before releasing any details on the underlying economic

85 [Q199](#).

86 [QqQ211–214](#).

87 [Qq188–189](#), [195](#).

88 [Q204](#).

89 [Q101](#). In a recent report, the Institute for Government quoted an official working in Darlington as saying: “here, an hour-long commute means you’re coming from Leeds”. Jordan Urban, Thomas Pope, and Alex Thomas, [Settling In: Lessons from the Darlington Economic Campus for civil service relocation](#), Institute for Government, 9 June 2023, p. 8.

90 Sarah Nickson, [Ministers should not promise a revolution from civil service relocation](#), Institute for Government, 24 February 2021.

91 [Letter from Alex Burghart MP on follow up evidence after the 28 March oral evidence session](#), 17 May 2023, Annex A.

analysis work. In related fields of government evidence there are clear expectations or rules on ensuring that underlying data and research are published, so that Parliament and the public can scrutinise the basis for official statements and decisions at the time they are made.⁹²

41. In our 2021 report on *Government transparency and accountability during Covid-19* we were clear that: “Ministerial statements published on Government websites must include hyperlinks or footnotes directing to the detailed data underpinning any numbers or statistics quoted”.⁹³ We were pleased to note the Government’s acceptance of this recommendation, promising it would “endeavour to publish all statistics and underlying data when referenced publicly, in line with the Code [of Practice on Statistics]”.⁹⁴ While it is the case that this Code only applies formally to official statistics, rather than the broader kind of economic research under discussion here, the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) is categorical that departments ought to apply the same transparent approach to wider research: “Data to support any public statement should be published in advance or at the same time as the statement is made, with a clear explanation of strengths and limitations”. Specifically relating to press releases, the OSR states that “links to the sources of the data should be clearly set out”.⁹⁵

42. The Cabinet Office has made high-profile statements about the economic benefits to be delivered by Places for Growth, referring to research which supports its estimates. However, it has only just published information about this research, and this information was not written for easy digestion by the general public. This is a clear example of bad practice, as it prevents Parliament and the wider public from comprehensively reviewing the arguments and evidence underlying the alleged benefits of the programme. *The Cabinet Office should, alongside its response to this report, publish details of the research underpinning its claims of economic benefits in a form which clearly explains how the claims made in previous Places to Growth press releases have been calculated. Moreover, the Government Analysis Function should, within six months, publish a statement on its website and write to heads of the analysis function within all government departments urging them to bring the transparency requirements of all government analysts into line with the best practice guidelines set by the Office for Statistics Regulation. This should make clear that, whenever economic research is referred to in press notices and ministerial statements, departments should present links to a published form of this research.*

92 For example, the Government Social Research profession is clear that: “As well as driving up standards, publishing the evidence on which policies are based also delivers greater transparency across government, enabling the public to hold government and public bodies to account.” Government Social Research, [Publishing research in government: GSR publication protocol](#), May 2022, p.1.

93 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [Government transparency and accountability during Covid 19: The data underpinning decisions](#), Eighth Report of Session 2019–21, HC 803, March 2021, paragraph 46.

94 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [Government transparency and accountability during Covid 19: The data underpinning decisions: Government’s response to the Committee’s Eighth Report of Session 2019–21](#), First Special Report of Session 2021–22, HC 234, May 2021, p. 1.

95 Office for Statistics Regulation, [Regulatory guidance for the transparent release and use of statistics and data](#), 18 October 2022.

Economic impacts of office closures

43. At the same time as the Government is opening new regional Hubs, it is also closing existing offices. In particular, Phase 1 of the Government Hubs programme has seen HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) close over 160 smaller local offices around the country, often in medium-sized towns, while consolidating staff into larger regional Hubs in major cities.⁹⁶ As of March 2023, HMRC had opened 14 regional Hubs.⁹⁷ In a number of cases other government departments have rented floorspace in these Hubs for their own regional offices: the Cabinet Office's second headquarters in Glasgow is an example.⁹⁸ HMRC's approach to property consolidation, in which it has largely pulled out of towns and concentrated in big cities, has thus helped to condition the locations to which Places for Growth posts are being moved to. For the most part, the Cabinet Office had in any case earmarked 15 of the UK's largest cities as its Places for Growth locations, although in at least three cases—HM Treasury's Darlington campus, DLUHC's Wolverhampton headquarters, and the Home Office's site in Stoke—the Government appears to have added locations that were not in this original plan.⁹⁹

44. The closure of local offices in Phase 1 of the Government Hubs programme is partially reversing some of the regional dispersal of civil service roles implemented in the past. While these posts are not being brought back to London, they are in some cases being moved away from towns to which they had been relocated by previous governments, with the intention of supporting those local economies. A *Financial Times* article reported that Bootle is losing more than 1,000 HMRC jobs (which have been transferred to a new regional Hub in Liverpool), commenting: "Ironically, the struggling Merseyside town was regenerated in the 1960s and 1970s by relocating government offices to the area".¹⁰⁰

45. The Prospect union suggested to us that there was "a clear tension between the Government's 'Places for Growth' programme and the movement to city-based government hubs around the country."¹⁰¹ On the basis of evidence we received from the Cabinet Office it is possible to make a comparison of towns and cities which had lost civil service offices under Phase 1 of the Government Hubs programme, and those which were gaining regional Hubs under Phases 1 and 2.¹⁰² A geographical representation of these two types of communities is depicted in the map in Figure 4: this shows the geographical contraction of civil service offices to a smaller number of locations, mainly in big cities.

96 Cabinet Office ([FGE0006](#)).

97 [Q235](#).

98 Oral evidence taken before the Public Accounts Committee on 13 October 2022, HC (2022–23) 48, [Q65](#).

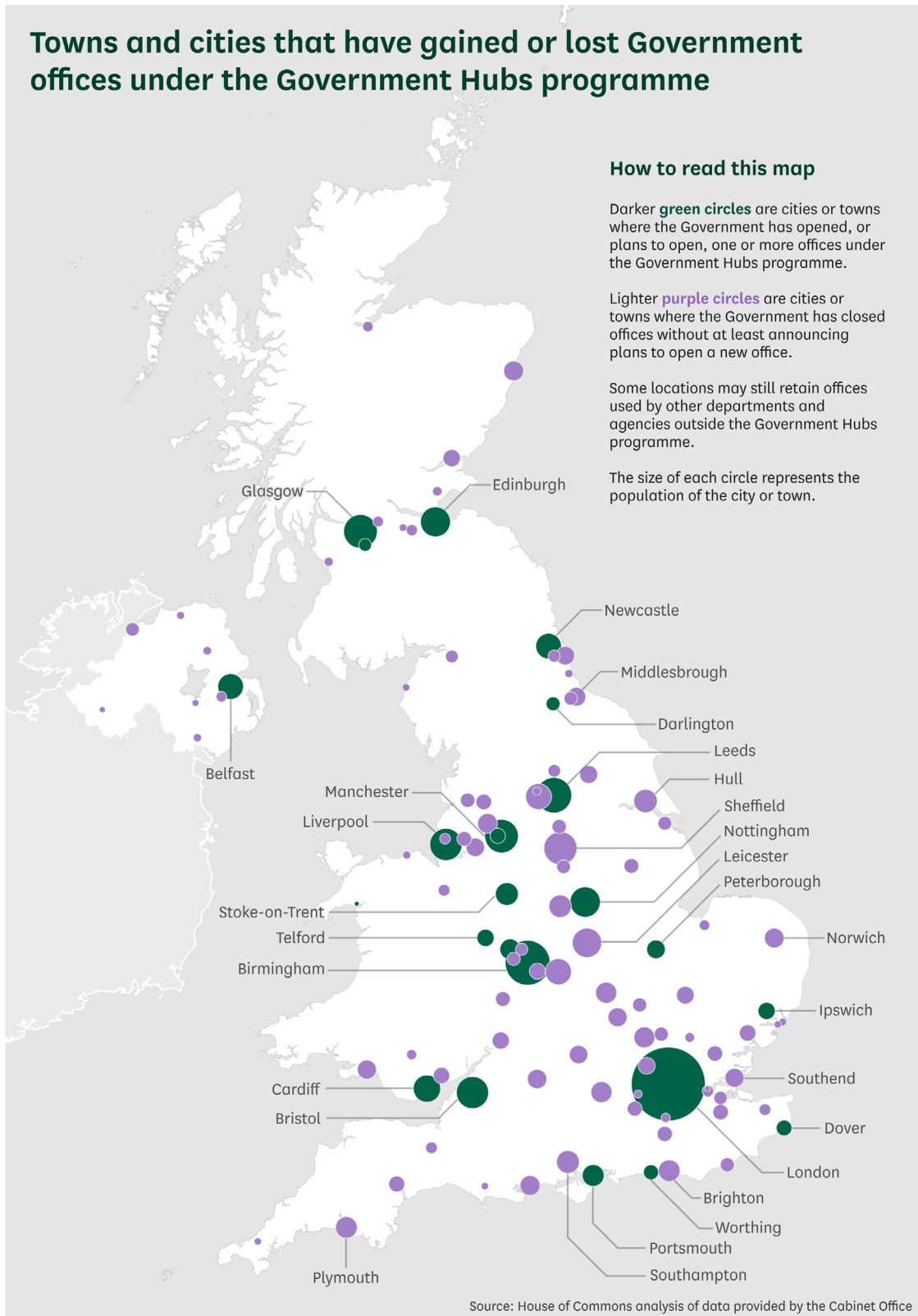
99 As Ravi Chand put it to us: "When we got to the levelling-up discussion, we then looked at places around not just big cities but other locations that we could try" ([Qq187–190](#)); [Q202](#); Oral evidence taken before the Public Accounts Committee on 13 October 2022, HC (2022–23) 48, [Q26](#).

100 Jim Pickard and Peter Foster, [Closure of UK tax offices in rundown towns undermines levelling up agenda](#), *Financial Times*, 21 January 2022. The *Official History of the Civil Service* details that a previous relocation of civil service posts to Bootle had been pushed through in 1979 by the personal intervention of the then Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. Rodney Lowe, *The Official History of the Civil Service*, volume 1 (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 323.

101 Prospect ([FGE0012](#)).

102 [Correspondence from Alex Burghart MP to William Wragg MP \(Annex B: HM Revenue & Customs, HMRC office closures and regional centres, 30 November 2022\)](#), 28 February 2023; Cabinet Office ([FGE0006](#)).

Figure 4: Towns and cities that have gained or lost offices under the Government Hubs programme



Notes:

1. Information is from the final quarter of 2022.
2. This data relates solely to office openings and closures under the Government Hubs programme (and thus is not a comprehensive reflection of the location of all government offices).

3. HMRC's office in Porthmadog closed in 2018. However, Porthmadog is represented here as hosting an opened office under the Government Hubs programme, given HMRC lists it as one of its remaining locations. This follows a decision to allow HMRC staff based in Porthmadog to move to Thedford House, a local DWP office.

Source: House of Commons analysis of [Correspondence from Alex Burghart MP to William Wragg MP \(Annex B: HM Revenue & Customs, HMRC office closures and regional centres, 30 November 2022\)](#), 28 February 2023; Cabinet Office (FGE0006); Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, ["HMRC's Welsh language customer services team to remain in Porthmadog"](#), press release, 20 July 2017.

46. Commenting on HMRC's office closures in 2017, the Public Accounts Committee noted:

Closing down offices in any town will affect that local community. For example, HMRC employs around 1,500 people in Cumbernauld, who will be expected to move to the regional centre in Glasgow. Closure of the Cumbernauld office will have a serious impact on the town, community and local businesses. [...] We raised similar concerns about the closure of the Livingston and Wrexham offices.¹⁰³

47. The NAO's Chief Analyst, Ruth Kelly, was clear that, according to the Treasury Green Book, when appraising a government programme, the net impacts of decisions (such as, in this case, office openings and any corresponding office closures) ought to be calculated together; and in addition, there was "a requirement now to do distributional analysis for a proposal that has a very clear place-based approach".¹⁰⁴ In his evidence, Tony Travers suggested such calculations might pose a policy dilemma for the Government: while overall benefits to the wider economy might be greater when jobs were concentrated in large cities, local economic benefits would tend to make more of a difference to smaller towns, typically the places "where levelling up is an aim".¹⁰⁵

48. Despite HM Treasury guidance on this point, Ravi Chand told us the Cabinet Office had not sought to quantify the negative impacts in areas where local offices had shut as part of the Government Hubs programmes: "If we were to start to take those into account, it would really overly complicate what we are trying to assess ourselves".¹⁰⁶ The Cabinet Office stated that this was a matter for individual departments, which should only take the decision to close a local office and transfer posts to a regional Hub if they assessed this as being value for money.¹⁰⁷ The Minister later wrote to us to say: "HMRC has always considered that the economic impact on locations it is leaving would be limited, as those taking up posts in a regional centre will continue their normal activities where they live and the office accommodation HMRC vacates is likely to be re-let or redeveloped by the landlords".¹⁰⁸

49. The Government is not only relocating posts from London to the regions and nations, but also relocating posts from local offices (often in economically deprived towns) to large regional Hubs (mostly in big cities). We are concerned that the Cabinet Office is not seeking to estimate the net economic impacts of its different relocation policies, once these local office closures are taken into account. *The Cabinet Office*

103 Public Accounts Committee, [The HMRC Estate](#), Fifty-third Report of Session 2016–17, HC 891, April 2017, paragraph 7.

104 [Q51](#).

105 [Q63–70](#).

106 [Q209](#).

107 [Q210](#).

108 [Letter from Alex Burghart MP on follow up evidence after the 28 March oral evidence session](#), 17 May 2023.

should publish within six months analyses of economic losses in towns where government offices have been or are going to be shut down under the Government Hubs programme, as well as the expected benefits in areas where Hubs are opening.

2 Government Property Agency: Managing the office portfolio

The Government Property Agency and the office portfolio

50. In 2018, the Cabinet Office established an executive agency, the Government Property Agency (GPA), to take on management responsibility for the office portfolio.¹⁰⁹ Reviewing the Cabinet Office's plans for the GPA in 2017, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) expressed scepticism that it would achieve sufficient 'buy-in' from individual departments to improve value for money.¹¹⁰

51. Five years on, PAC's concerns appear to have been partially justified. As of March 2023, the GPA directly managed less than half (44%) of all government offices.¹¹¹ Three major departments had yet to agree a timeline for transferring their office properties to the GPA: HMRC, the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP), and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). It is government policy that all remaining departments will transfer their office properties to the management of the GPA by March 2025, but Steven Boyd, the GPA's chief executive, confirmed to us that this will not happen by that date.¹¹² At the same time, he stressed the GPA still had strategic responsibility for the entire office portfolio, and was working closely with the departments that were managing their own offices.¹¹³ He was confident the GPA was delivering significant savings from driving property rationalisation across government, estimated so far at about £900 million.¹¹⁴

The GPA's scope of influence

52. One issue arising from the GPA's lack of control over the whole office portfolio concerns the fact that three of the departments that are still managing their own offices have the largest estates (HMRC, DWP, and Defra). This means that where these departments pursue their own property strategies this could risk undermining the very co-ordination the GPA is supposed to bring. The PCS Union provided us with an illustration which suggested a lack of co-ordination between Phase 1 of the Government Hubs programme, under which HMRC closed its Wolverhampton offices, and Phase 2 (managed by the GPA) in which DLUHC opened its new headquarters there:

It is safe to say that there is no joined-up thinking now. We had a position back in the end of 2021 where everybody in HMRC got an email from the Secretary of State at the Department for Levelling Up, Michael Gove and his Permanent Secretary, trumpeting the new office and the new site in Wolverhampton. A big statement was made that civil servants will no

109 Comptroller and Auditor General, [Managing central government property](#), HC 571, National Audit Office, July 2022, paragraph 1.9.

110 Public Accounts Committee, [The HMRC Estate](#), Fifty-third Report of Session 2016–17, HC 891, April 2017, paragraph 6.

111 [Q217](#).

112 Comptroller and Auditor General, [Managing central government property](#), HC 571, National Audit Office, July 2022, paragraphs 3.14–3.15; [Q222](#).

113 [Qq217–227](#); Oral evidence taken before the Public Accounts Committee on 13 October 2022, HC (2022–23) 48, [Q59](#).

114 [Q223](#).

longer need to relocate to find work in the civil service [...] It went to all our people in HMRC, including the people who were forcibly relocated from Wolverhampton a year or so earlier. [...]

The reality that we faced was that there was less than a year, [...] between the one closure and the other opening being announced. The net result was that an awful lot of those people took redundancy and all that expertise was lost.¹¹⁵

53. Steven Boyd commented on this: “I suppose the closure of one office in a place and then, a year later, the opening of a new office in the place without obvious co-ordination is in itself a really good justification for the creation of GPA”.¹¹⁶ This response seemed to imply an assurance that situations such as this should not recur, as the GPA gains influence over the office portfolio as a whole. However, PCS also referred to a large property consolidation programme currently being undertaken by DWP, which it implied was not being joined up with the Government Hubs programme:

Recently announced office closures [...] have included sites in Stoke-on-Trent, Doncaster, Chesterfield, Barrow-in-Furness, Walsall, Bishop Auckland, Washington, Seaham, Rotherham (Dearne Valley) and the East End of London. This follows on from a 2017 decision to open a new site in the Treforest area of South Wales, which although bringing jobs into a fairly deprived area of the country, has done so at the expense of jobs in Cwmbran, Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Tonypany and Newport. None of which fits in with any sort of ‘levelling-up’ agenda.¹¹⁷

Steven Boyd suggested that where this DWP programme concerned offices (rather than job centres, which constitute a separate property portfolio) then these moves were “being co-ordinated to a point” with the Government Hubs programme.¹¹⁸

54. The rationale for the creation of the Government Property Agency was that by taking over the management of all government office buildings it would lead to co-ordinated decision-making and efficiency savings. But with the departments with the biggest office estates remaining outside the GPA’s control, the Government is potentially missing out on opportunities to bring together different public bodies and optimise the location of its office estate. To help ensure joined up decision-making across government, it should be a requirement for every accounting officer, before approving any major property consolidation or relocation proposal, to obtain assurance that their officials have explored opportunities to co-ordinate location and design decisions with the Government Property Agency, in its management of the office portfolio. The Cabinet Office should work with HM Treasury to develop this guidance for accounting officers, and write to us within six months to confirm the results.

115 [Q145](#).

116 [Q229](#).

117 Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Union ([FGE0003](#)).

118 [Q227](#).

Workforce planning, headcount reductions, and demand for office space

55. In order to plan effectively for new Hub buildings—working out what type and size of buildings are needed, and in which locations—the GPA needs to be able to anticipate the needs of government departments for office space. This has recently been complicated by a number of factors, not least a lack of certainty over how often civil servants will be expected to work in the office.

56. Under its Smarter Working programme, the GPA has for a number of years been promoting the benefits of adopting a hybrid of office-based working and working from home.¹¹⁹ Hybrid working was already in use before the outbreak of Covid-19, with only around two-thirds of civil servants working in the office on a typical day on the eve of the pandemic.¹²⁰ Lockdown significantly accelerated the use of homeworking across the civil service, and the GPA has sought to build on this by embedding hybrid working more fully across the office estate following the pandemic.¹²¹

57. At the same time, Ministers have on occasion presented counterbalancing messages about increasing the presence of civil servants in the office.¹²² This was a message highlighted by media reports in spring 2022 that the then Minister of State for Brexit Opportunities and Government Efficiency in the Cabinet Office, the Rt Hon Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg MP, had been leaving notes on the unoccupied desks of civil servants, expressing his desire to see them again in the office.¹²³ Following this, in May 2022, there were reports of chaotic overcrowding at Department for Education offices, after staff were asked to return to the office en masse.¹²⁴ More recently, in May 2023, the Chancellor suggested that working in the office should be the default for all workers, unless there was a particular need for them to work from home.¹²⁵

58. As a result of the increased shift to hybrid working, the GPA acknowledges that Hub offices built to date “are rather larger than they originally needed to be”.¹²⁶ The Government has responded to this reduction in planned demand for office space in two main ways. First, HMRC has rented out spare floorspace in its regional Hubs to other government departments, having originally designed these offices for its exclusive use.¹²⁷ Second, the GPA has altered its specifications for the Hubs yet to be opened under Phase 2 of the programme, making these 25% smaller than in the initial plans.¹²⁸ The question remains whether these decisions go far enough—or potentially go too far—in reducing the planned scale of the Government Hubs programme to accommodate the total numbers of departmental staff that will eventually be based within them. The NAO reported in 2022 that it was not clear what balance of office-based and remote working departments

119 Government Property Agency, [Smarter Working](#), 17 November 2020.

120 Oral evidence taken before the Public Accounts Committee on 13 October 2022, HC (2022–23) 48, [Q74](#).

121 Government Property Agency, [Smarter Working: Learning lessons from Covid](#), 17 November 2020.

122 Comptroller and Auditor General, [Managing central government property](#), HC 571, National Audit Office, July 2022, paragraph 18.

123 Emily McGarvey and Jonathan Blake, [“Jacob Rees-Mogg empty desk note to civil servants insulting, says union”](#), BBC News, 23 April 2022.

124 Richard Adams, [“Push for civil servants to return to office backfires as DfE runs out of desks”](#), *The Guardian*, 20 May 2022.

125 Michael Race, [“Chancellor Jeremy Hunt: Office working should be the default”](#), BBC News, 17 May 2023.

126 Oral evidence taken before the Public Accounts Committee on 13 October 2022, HC (2022–23) 48, [Q60](#).

127 Oral evidence taken before the Public Accounts Committee on 13 October 2022, HC (2022–23) 48, [Q60–65](#).

128 Oral evidence taken before the Public Accounts Committee on 13 October 2022, HC (2022–23) 48, [Q60](#).

were going to adopt, nor whether there would be a civil service wide policy or whether it would differ from department to department.¹²⁹ It recommended that: “The Cabinet Office should work with departments to prepare workforce plans for the next five years. These plans should then be consolidated to produce a single view of workforce plans by year and region”.¹³⁰

59. The extent of hybrid working is not the only factor affecting departments’ demand for office space: it will also be affected by changes in the overall headcount of the civil service. The Government’s policy on the size of the civil service has recently been in a considerable amount of flux:

- At the 2021 spending review, the then Chancellor set an aim to reduce civil service headcount by between approximately 30,000 and 60,000 roles by 2024–25.¹³¹
- In May 2022, it was reported that the Government had increased this target, with the Cabinet Secretary asking departments to reduce headcount by 91,000 posts over the next three years, based on a return to 2016 staffing levels.¹³² This policy is a feature of the Government Property Strategy, published in August 2022, which includes a new mission for the government estate to be “smaller” and thereby “right-sized to respond to the reduction in the size of the civil service”.¹³³
- In November 2022, it was reported that the incoming Prime Minister, Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, had scrapped the 91,000 reduction target.¹³⁴ On 24 November, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP, confirmed this to us in writing: “we do not believe that top-down targets for Civil Service headcount reductions are the right way forward.”¹³⁵
- Appearing before us in January 2023, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster reaffirmed that the Government had dropped the 91,000 target. However, he clarified that he still expected civil service headcount to be reduced in line with reductions in departmental budgets. He told us, “The Prime Minister and I are seized of the need to bring the size back down towards where it was after the reforms we introduced in 2010,” suggesting the Government still wanted to see civil service numbers return to the low point they reached in 2016.¹³⁶ Given civil service headcount stood at 418,340 in March 2016, and has subsequently risen to 510,080 as of March 2022, this would still imply an ambition to cut staffing numbers by around 91,000 (although the Minister did not refer to a

129 Comptroller and Auditor General, [Managing central government property](#), HC 571, National Audit Office, July 2022, paragraph 3.10.

130 Comptroller and Auditor General, [Managing central government property](#), HC 571, National Audit Office, July 2022, recommendation d.

131 Maddy Bishop, Rhys Clyne, Jordan Urban, and Benoit Guerin, [Civil service staff numbers](#), Institute for Government, 14 September 2022.

132 Anushka Asthana, [‘Cutting civil service by 91,000 will require ‘imagination’ admits senior Whitehall official](#), ITV News, 13 May 2022.

133 Government Property Function, [Government Property Strategy 2022–2030](#), August 2022, p. 11.

134 Joshua Neveitt, [‘Rishi Sunak: No 91,000 target for civil service job cuts’](#), BBC News, 1 November 2022.

135 [Letter from Rt Hon Oliver Dowden CBE MP to William Wragg MP](#), 24 November 2022.

136 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [Oral evidence taken on 26 January 2023](#), Q29..

number, specify a timescale over which such reductions should be achieved, nor suggest what impacts on the functioning of government such reductions might necessitate).¹³⁷

60. The civil service unions we spoke to suggested that last May's announcement of the 91,000 job reduction target had had a disruptive influence on implementation of the Places for Growth programme. Martin Kelsey from the PCS Union said that "the proposal on the 91,000 [job reduction figure] seemed to eclipse a lot of thinking around departmental planning".¹³⁸ Garry Graham from Prospect talked about the impact that this announcement had on staff considering whether to relocate:

The announcement [...] that 91,000 civil servants were to lose their jobs [...] would obviously cause people concern and give them concerns about making long-term decisions that might involve uprooting their family. I think that all those issues combined have led to a rather sluggish approach to this.¹³⁹

61. Perhaps understandably, given this level of uncertainty, the GPA's plans for the remainder of Phase 2 of the programme remain somewhat unclear. As of March 2023, Steven Boyd told us that 18 Hubs were open (14 from Phase 1, managed by HMRC, and four from Phase 2, managed by GPA), with eight in the process of construction or refurbishment, and a further six in the planning stage. Altogether this would make 32; but he informed us that the six in planning "may or may not come to pass", and concluded somewhat vaguely: "You would expect this to bring the total in the reasonably near future to around about 30".¹⁴⁰

62. In order to do its job effectively, the Government Property Agency needs good quality workforce plans from departments, enabling it to plan for the right size and location of government offices. This has been made more difficult by uncertainties resulting from government policy and communications. On the amount of time civil servants should work in the office (which thus affects the demand for office space), high-profile statements from Ministers have been at odds with key policy programmes. Meanwhile, the Government has made sudden and unclear statements about the size of the civil service, most recently stating both that it had scrapped targets for headcount reductions and that it was still committed to achieving the same scale of cuts but clarifying neither how this was to be achieved nor over what timescale.

63. *In its response to this report the Cabinet Office should write to us with a definitive statement of government policy on the flexibility civil servants should have on how often they work in the office. Within the same period, the Cabinet Office should write to us with a clear statement on what size of headcount reductions the Government is modelling, in what timescale this is intended to be achieved, and what impact this will have on departments' requirement for office space. Until the GPA has greater certainty over departments' workforce plans and demand for office space, it should review whether to proceed now with those Hubs currently in the planning stage, and not actively plan for any additional Hubs.*

137 Office for National Statistics, [Civil Service statistics, UK: 2016](#), October 2016; Cabinet Office, [Statistical bulletin - Civil Service Statistics: 2022](#), March 2023.

138 [Q122](#).

139 [Q123](#).

140 [Q235](#).

Charging rent on office properties owned by the Government

64. One of the issues concerning the GPA's lack of control over HMRC's management of its Hubs concerns the rent HMRC is charging other government tenants. In December 2022, the Public Accounts Committee expressed its concern that HMRC was renting floorspace in its Hubs to other government departments at above market rents, stating: "We warned HMRC about this practice".¹⁴¹

65. Related issues have been raised about the GPA itself. In a 2017 report on the Government's previous estates strategy, the NAO highlighted the Cabinet Office's plans to begin levying a rental charge on departments even for the London offices they themselves already owned as freeholder.¹⁴² In evidence to the Committee in 2020, Alex Chisholm, the Chief Operating Officer for the Civil Service and Permanent Secretary for the Cabinet Office, confirmed this had begun to be implemented.¹⁴³

66. In its original written submission to this inquiry, the Cabinet Office stated the GPA's rationale for charging departments rent, even to stay in the buildings they own as freeholders, was to incentivise them to downsize their London-based operations.¹⁴⁴ In this, the Cabinet Office appears to have implemented a suggestion for such incentive mechanisms made in the 2004 Lyons Review.¹⁴⁵ This raises some questions, however, concerning those cases in which the GPA is charging rent on buildings which the Government has no intention of selling. Giving evidence in October 2022, Steven Boyd confirmed that the GPA did not want to sell any more historic Whitehall offices.¹⁴⁶ In these cases, it appeared unclear what action the GPA was seeking to incentivise departments to take, since it did not want them to dispose of their freehold office buildings. More widely, the GPA has made clear that, due to a downturn in the business property market, now is a bad time to sell office property in London. In fact, it is looking to buy more freeholds, as it believes this to be better value for money than leasing from private landlords.¹⁴⁷

67. The Cabinet Office explained that the reason departments were being charged rent, even for offices on which the Government owned the freehold, was because the GPA was seeking to treat all departments fairly and equally, imposing a similar charge for use of office space irrespective of whether the building was freehold, rented, or in a PFI arrangement. It was confident the GPA was able to provide good value for money for departments and the Government as a whole, by acting as an overall property manager.¹⁴⁸

141 Public Accounts Committee, [Managing central government property](#), Thirty-first report of Session 2022–23, HC 48, 21 December 2022, Conclusion 8.

142 Comptroller and Auditor General, [Progress on the government estate strategy](#), HC 1131, National Audit Office, April 2017.

143 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, [Oral evidence taken on 29 September 2020](#), Q331.

144 [Written evidence from the Cabinet Office \(FGE06\)](#), paragraph 11, December 2022.

145 Sir Michael Lyons, [Well Placed to Deliver: Independent Review of Public Sector Relocation](#) (the Lyons Review), HM Treasury, March 2004, p. 3.

146 Oral evidence taken before the Public Accounts Committee on 13 October 2022, HC (2022-23) 48, [Q81](#)

147 Oral evidence taken before the Public Accounts Committee on 13 October 2022, HC (2022-23) 48, [Qq66-71](#)

148 [Letter from Alex Burghart MP on follow up evidence after the 28 March oral evidence session](#), 17 May 2023.

68. The Cabinet Office has provided a plausible explanation for the GPA's practice of charging departments rent on offices which the Government owns and has no intention of selling. This answer emphasises the value for money which the GPA is able to secure by acting as office property manager for multiple departments. As this value depends on scale, it is important that individual departments stay within these arrangements, rather than trying to find better deals from commercial landlords on a local basis. Nevertheless, to tie departments into these arrangements successfully, the GPA needs to be able to demonstrate that it is providing value for money. *The Government Property Agency should commission an external review, to publish within twelve months, of the value for money of the service which it is providing to departments in return for its rental charges.*

3 Civil service culture and people: Implications of the relocation agenda

Making a success of relocations: the people element

69. Previous initiatives similar to Places for Growth, such as the 2004 Lyons Review and the 1973 Hardman Report, have acknowledged there were trade-offs to be managed in any major relocation programmes—for example, a risk of reduced efficiency if policy officials were based a long way from Whitehall, and required to travel frequently to London and back.¹⁴⁹ Equally, there was a recognition that officials in regional offices might feel marginalised from their mainstream departments in Whitehall.¹⁵⁰ Previous governments have also noted the significant upfront costs in relocating staff, mainly from paying relocation packages to those who moved and redundancy payments to those who did not;¹⁵¹ indeed, these costs were the reason given by the Thatcher government in 1979 for bringing the programme of relocations initiated by the Hardman review to a close.¹⁵²

70. Historically, as well as successes there have been a number of repeated risks and drawbacks associated with past dispersals of civil servants. The first has been a reluctance of officials, especially senior civil servants, to move away from London,¹⁵³ the Lyons Review noting in 2004 that this was a long-standing issue.¹⁵⁴ Where a move out of London has led to a large turnover of staff and concomitant loss of knowledge, this has sometimes had a notable effect on the performance of a whole organisation.¹⁵⁵ Meanwhile, where policy officials and senior civil servants have moved out of London, in practice they have often been required to continue to travel to Whitehall for meetings. From the PCS Union, Geoff Lewtas observed to us:

There were quite a number of senior civil servants who took posts in Leeds. There were also Department of Employment people in Sheffield who were at the senior level. Their experience was that often they would spend half their week in London because Ministers required their presence, their knowledge and their input in decisions that Ministers needed to make.¹⁵⁶

149 See, for instance, Sir Henry Hardman, [The Dispersal of Government Work from London](#) (The Hardman Report), June 1973, Cmnd 5322, paragraph 25.

150 Sir Michael Lyons, [Well Placed to Deliver: Independent Review of Public Sector Relocation](#) (the Lyons Review), HM Treasury, March 2004, paragraph 3.30.

151 Ian R. Smith, [Relocation: Transforming where and how government works](#), HM Treasury, March 2010, paragraph 1.12.

152 HC Deb, 26 July 1979, [cols 902–922](#).

153 In the autumn of 1973, the then Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister (Robert Armstrong, a future Cabinet Secretary) observed that, while the Hardman Report had generated much research on dispersing policy posts, there had been little actual movement out of London 'because they themselves [civil servants] were very reluctant to be dispersed'. Jon Davis, [Prime ministers & Civil Service reform 1960–74](#), PhD thesis, 2009, p. 205.

154 Sir Michael Lyons, [Well Placed to Deliver: Independent Review of Public Sector Relocation](#) (the Lyons Review), HM Treasury, March 2004, pp. 7, 29, 67.

155 The performance of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) was criticised after its move to Newport between 2005 and 2010, when 90% of London-based staff chose not to retain their posts in the new location. See Professor Sir Charles Bean, [Independent Review of UK Economic Statistics](#), March 2016.

156 [Q124](#). The Institute for Government similarly observed that "the East Kilbride office of what is now the FCDO [... had] struggled to maintain senior presence there because of this perception that they need to be shuttling back and forth to London": [Q101](#) [Jordan Urban].

Finally, another historical issue has been that past dispersals have occasionally been subject to reversal, a high-profile example coming in the 2016 decision by the then Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to close its Sheffield office and move around 250 jobs back to London.¹⁵⁷ The rationale for this decision was that it would save money and increase administrative efficiency. The then permanent secretary, Martin Donnelly, explained to the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee:

We came very clearly to the conclusion that, within that strategic vision, it did make sense to have all of the people doing our policy, headquarters work, in one place close to ministers, that that was better for our delivery.¹⁵⁸

71. As the Cabinet Office has not published a significant policy document on Places for Growth, it is hard to review the extent to which it has taken the lessons from past relocations into account in developing policy this time round.¹⁵⁹ However, it is clearly seeking to implement civil service relocation in a different way to the past. Giving evidence to the Public Accounts Committee in late 2022, Alex Chisholm emphasised these differences by pointing to “not just the sheer number of roles, but the types of roles” that were now being relocated:

You will remember that much earlier such programmes in Government [...] were very much about back office and support-type roles. Part of what is so exciting about this is that it is the full range of roles. If you go to Darlington, you can do any job in the Treasury from Darlington that you could do down the road on Horse Guards. That is a very big change, and a very positive one. It has opened up the civil service to anybody who wants to work for us in any part of the country, which is very positive and very good for the economic connections and local growth.¹⁶⁰

72. To facilitate this approach, the Government is seeking to take advantage of the cultural and technological shift towards videoconferencing and remote working. The Government's intention is that a take-up of videoconferencing by Ministers and senior officials will mean that policy officials are able to build senior careers outside London, without continually having to commute down to Whitehall. Further, the growth of remote working means that it is easier for relocation to occur in a more gradual fashion: if colleagues no longer need to be co-located in the same office to work together, then instead of having to move whole teams and functions together in one go—with all the disruption and relocation or redundancy costs that brings—departments can achieve significant relocation of posts by recruiting to regional Hubs as vacancies arise. This innovative approach offers the possibility of minimising the upfront costs that have been a barrier to major relocations

157 “[Sheffield BIS office closure: Jobs to move to London](#)”, BBC News, 25 May 2016.

158 Matt Foster, “[BIS estate to shrink from 80 sites to “seven or eight”, says minister Sajid Javid](#)”, Civil Service World, 10 February 2016. Ultimately, some of these posts were retained in Sheffield following machinery of government changes in the summer of 2016, which saw higher education and skills policy transferred to the Department for Education – which retained its Sheffield office. Matt Foster, “[Brexit shake-up lifts redundancy threat for some BIS Sheffield staff](#)”, Civil Service World, 4 August 2016.

159 The Cabinet Office has referred to internal work on this theme. For instance, a 2018 Civil Service blog post stated: “By looking at previous public and private sector relocations and creating a portfolio of testimonials from those who have made the decision to move with their role, we aim to mitigate the risks associated. It will also allow departments and employees to prepare for the move and reduce the impact of this change to how government operates.” Tamsin Morgan, [The Places for Growth Programme: driving growth across the UK](#), Civil Service blog, 30 August 2018.

160 Oral evidence taken before the Public Accounts Committee on 13 October 2022, HC (2022–23) 48, [Q79](#).

in the past.¹⁶¹ It could also help to avoid the risks observed with the recent ONS move to Newport, where a major issue was said to be that the move was implemented in full too quickly, meaning the organisation experienced an accelerated loss of expertise when experienced colleagues decided to leave rather than relocate.¹⁶²

73. At the same time, this innovative approach gives rise to novel risks to be managed. Witnesses we spoke to emphasised the need for an ongoing commitment by Ministers to embrace videoconferencing, in order for the programme to be a long-term success. Commenting on HM Treasury's Darlington Economic Campus, Alex Thomas from the Institute for Government (IfG) was clear that: "The energy around the campus would degrade very quickly if you had a Chancellor who insisted on in-person meetings, because the whole thing would flip. It is fragile".¹⁶³ The recent evidence appears to be positive in this respect, with the IfG suggesting that "the current set of ministers were (mostly) socialised by the pandemic into accepting hybrid ways of working".¹⁶⁴ For his part, the responsible Minister, Alex Burghart, assured us that he was "very happy to meet with my officials virtually", and had shared hybrid meetings with ministerial colleagues who seemed equally happy with the arrangements.¹⁶⁵ Nonetheless, a risk remains that, as memories of the pandemic recede, Ministers may in the future insist on more face-to-face meetings, and it will fall to the Cabinet Office to manage this risk. Further risks to be managed include the danger that, in relying on filling vacancies to achieve relocations, departments will seek to make all their new appointments to regional offices, in order to achieve their Places for Growth targets—even where a post ought to be based in London on grounds of practicality.¹⁶⁶

74. Previous governments which implemented similar programmes of civil service relocation acknowledged the risks and potential disadvantages—for example, significant upfront costs of relocation and redundancy packages, plus a loss of efficiency and coherence from moving policy roles far away from Whitehall. The Government is doing things differently this time—for example, generally recruiting new starters to regional offices to fill vacancies when they arise rather than relocating existing staff relying on videoconferencing, and seeking to relocate more SCS posts in order to create more senior career pathways outside London. This approach does, however, present novel risks, such as the potential development of a two-tier departmental culture, if regional offices mainly comprise new starters who have never worked in Whitehall. A further risk is that departments may be exclusively filling vacancies to locations outside London, even where such posts require significant presence in London, in order to meet Places for Growth targets.

75. *The Cabinet Office should issue guidance to departments that London should not be ruled out as location for new recruitment, where it is more appropriate for certain posts to be based in the capital. It should also use the Civil Service People Survey to monitor and address evidence of a perception among regionally-based staff that they*

161 The Cabinet Office has confirmed in writing that relocation and redundancy packages have not been a major factor in the costs of implementing Places for Growth. [Correspondence from Alex Burghart MP to William Wragg MP](#), 28 February 2023.

162 [Letter from Alex Burghart MP on follow up evidence after the 28 March oral evidence session](#), 17 May 2023, Annex A.

163 [Q101](#).

164 Institute for Government ([FGE0007](#)).

165 [Qq180–181](#).

166 [Q182](#).

have lower engagement scores or views on career prospects. Equally, should the Civil Service People Survey reveal engagement to be higher in regional offices, the Cabinet Office should conduct research into what departments running Whitehall offices may be able to learn from them.

Pay and administrative issues

76. It is a feature of the Government Hubs programme that staff from different departments will be co-located within the same buildings. Focusing on the Darlington Economic Campus, where a number of departments have staff in addition to HM Treasury, the Institute for Government suggested that this had the potential to break down departmental silos and foster joined-up policy-making.¹⁶⁷

77. One potential practical issue with this policy, however, is the fact that, following the delegation of pay and conditions to individual departments in the 1990s, each department is a separate employer, with its own pay scales and personnel policies (although pay in the Senior Civil Service is managed centrally across government). This same situation was observed to cause personal friction and logistical problems within the former regional Government Office network, which co-located staff from 13 departments in offices across nine regions of England in the 1990s and 2000s.¹⁶⁸ From the PCS Union, Martin Kelsey outlined some of the problems this might cause within the new Government Hubs:

[Where] you have different employers in the same building, you will get to a position where people [...] will just have to go up a couple of floors to another government department that is paying a different rate of pay. You are then in the position where departments are competing with each other for the same pool of staff. That is not a sensible approach when it comes to maintaining a workforce.¹⁶⁹

78. Dave Penman, General Secretary of the FDA union, has recently highlighted the difficulties in harmonising pay and conditions of staff even where departments have merged together. In February 2023, he tweeted: “nearly three years after the last major Machinery of Government change creating [the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office], we’ve still not resolved all the pay consequences for staff”.¹⁷⁰ When questioned on this issue, the responsible Minister dismissed the potential for unrest to arise as a result of the co-location of civil servants from different departments, with differing pay and conditions: “We do not envisage it creating any new frictions at all.”¹⁷¹

79. Co-locating officials from different departments within the same regional Hubs potentially offers the opportunity to create collaborative teams, generating new insights and leading to more joined up policy-making. At the same time, past experience suggests that problems may arise from the fact that different departments are individual employers, with their own pay scales for officials below the Senior Civil Service grades. We disagree with the Minister’s assessment that there are no risks to consider here. Instead, we believe this has the potential to both lead to tensions where staff from different departments are co-located, and cause practical issues where

167 Institute for Government ([FGE0007](#)).

168 RAW Rhodes et al., *Decentralising the Civil Service* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), p. 143.

169 [Q140](#).

170 Dave Penman (@FDAGenSec), www.twitter.com, [7 February 2023](#).

171 [Q259](#).

staff seek to move between departments within Hubs in pursuit of improved pay and conditions. To help realise the wider potential of the Government Hubs programme, the Cabinet Office and GPA should promote case studies which demonstrate the practical benefits of staff from different departments working together within regional offices. The GPA should report on such case studies, highlighting the practical impacts on policy-making, in its annual reports. The Cabinet Office should also monitor the extent to which staff within regional Hubs transfer between departments, investigating both the reasons for it and the level of disruption this causes to departmental business.

80. A factor which could exacerbate any issues arising from co-locating staff on different pay scales is the long period of pay restraint in the civil service. Between 2010 and 2022, according to the Institute for Government, civil service salaries reduced in real terms by between 12% at the most junior grades and 23% at the most senior.¹⁷² Equally, starting salaries have lagged behind inflation, especially so for entrants to the Civil Service Fast Stream. According to the FDA union: “Since 2010, the Fast Stream starting salary has gone from £27,000 to £28,000—a rise of only 3.7% in 12 years.”¹⁷³ For the FDA “the cost of living in London” presented an “advantage to moving posts out of London”, especially for Fast Streamers from whom: “we have heard frequent anecdotal accounts [...] that they are concerned about being posted in London as they fear they will not be able to afford housing.”¹⁷⁴

81. The Government has also identified Places for Growth as potentially boosting the value of civil service pay—while at the same time lowering its pay bill. A 2018 Civil Service blog suggested that one of the rationales for Places to Growth was to “tackle the recruitment, retention and related cost-of-living challenges for civil servants associated with London-based roles.”¹⁷⁵ The implication would appear to be that the Government recognises that it is finding it challenging to pay competitive salaries in London, and that rather than raising salaries in London it is more cost-effective to move posts to areas with a lower cost of living, where civil service salaries would all things being equal stretch further. The benefits to staff in this case would be partly eroded by the fact that, in grades below the Senior Civil Service (SCS), departments place staff based outside London on national pay scales, which are lower. As a result, the Cabinet Office told us that the relocation of posts from its London offices to its new Glasgow headquarters had saved the department £466,326 in 2021–22, given the difference between national and London average pay per grade.¹⁷⁶ The Cabinet Office also told us that median salaries in its Glasgow office were roughly in line with median salaries in the region.¹⁷⁷ Anecdotally, however, we heard from staff based in the Glasgow office that pay for equivalent roles in the Scottish Government tended to be higher, with some staff attracted to Scottish Government offices as a result.

172 Rhys Clyne, [Collapsing civil service pay undermines the government's ability to deliver](#), Institute for Government, 1 February 2023.

173 FDA (FGE0009). These figures are for rises in absolute terms, and should be set in the context of a rise in CPI inflation of 36.1% between 2010 and 2022 (Bank of England, [Inflation Calculator](#), accessed 15 February 2023).

174 FDA (FGE0009). In 2022 Dave Penman, General Secretary of the FDA, suggested that Fast Streamers were “skipping meals” and “terrified of being rotated to London, because they simply will not be able to afford rent, heat and food”: [Civil servants ‘terrified’ of being sent to London because they can’t afford rent, says union leader](#), Evening Standard, 30 August 2022.

175 Tamsin Morgan, [The Places for Growth Programme: driving growth across the UK](#), Civil Service blog, 30 August 2018.

176 Cabinet Office (FGE0006).

177 Cabinet Office (FGE0006).

82. For SCS staff, meanwhile, the benefits of working in areas with a lower cost of living are greater, since their pay is already on a national pay scale; this does however mean that the Government does not receive any financial benefit in lower salary costs from its target of reducing the concentration of SCS posts in London to 50%. Equally, this policy does not do anything to improve the pay of SCS staff based in London, which has increasingly been highlighted as a significant issue.¹⁷⁸

83. The stagnation of civil service pay poses challenges for retention, recruitment, and morale—and may in some cases lead to real hardship. Moving posts out of the capital, where costs of living are lower and where the Government does not pay a London premium on civil service salaries, has the potential to offer financial benefits to both the Government and its officials. Nevertheless, a large contingent of staff—especially senior posts—are always going to be required to work in London, and the Places for Growth programme will on its own do nothing for the individuals holding such roles. Civil service relocation has a role to play within the overall policy relating to civil service pay, but it should not be seen by the Cabinet Office as a replacement for addressing underlying issues.

Diversifying the culture of the civil service for better policy-making

84. One of the Government's stated objectives for Places for Growth is that the programme will "improve diversity and inclusion to better reflect the public".¹⁷⁹ By contrast, some observers have expressed concern that the programme actually risks making the civil service less diverse, for example in terms of ethnicity. The PCS Union wrote to us to warn: "There are no rigorous equality impact assessments that accompany Places for Growth and certainly we are not aware of any modification to any plans owing to diversity concerns."¹⁸⁰ The Institute for Government has set out the need for departments to manage the risks of transferring posts away from London, a highly diverse city:

People from a minority ethnic group make up 35.6% of the economically active population in London, but in other areas this proportion is significantly lower, ranging from 17.4% in the West Midlands to 4.8% in the North East. [...]. Shifting the balance away from London could make it harder to meet targets such as increasing the proportion of new recruits to the senior civil service from minority ethnic groups to 13.2% for the period 2022–25.¹⁸¹

85. As we observed earlier, however, the Government Hubs programme involves the transfer of posts not only from London to other regions but from local offices to major cities, which generally have the most ethnically diverse communities.¹⁸² The overall effect may be to move civil service posts to areas that are *more* diverse. As an illustration, in the parliamentary constituency of Bootle, which saw its HMRC offices close under

178 Jim Dunton, "[SCS pay 'not enough to live on in London', ex-cabinet secretary warns](#)", Civil Service World, 23 May 2023; Sarah Nickson, Alex Thomas, Suhasini Vira and Jordan Urban, "[Pay reform for the Senior Civil Service](#)", Institute for Government, November 2021.

179 [Letter from the Rt Hon Jacob Rees-Mogg MP to William Wragg MP](#), 2 September 2022.

180 Public and Commercial Services Union (FGE0003).

181 Sarah Nickson, Erenie Mullens-Burgess and Alex Thomas, "[Moving Out: Making a success of civil service relocation](#)", Institute for Government, November 2020, p. 14.

182 Office for National Statistics, "[Population by ethnicity and Local Authority 2021](#)", 22 December 2022.

the Government Hubs programme, the percentage of people who identify as White is 95.3%; in Liverpool, Riverside, the location of the new Government Hub those posts were transferred to, it is 76.1%.¹⁸³

86. For its part, the Government appears to be treating the relocation of posts out of London as something which will necessarily increase the diversity of the civil service in itself. In February 2022, the Government published its Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2022 to 2025. While not including any specific objectives on improving representation across the whole civil service based on characteristics such as ethnicity, disability and gender, its top four actions all related to Places for Growth. This suggested the Government was expecting, for example, that to “Deliver our commitment for 50% of Senior Civil Servant roles to be based outside of London by 2030” (Action 2 in the strategy) would automatically make the civil service more diverse.¹⁸⁴

87. This reflects the Government's emphasis within Places for Growth on increasing the geographical diversity of the civil service, and with it the social backgrounds (and potentially cultural attitudes) of civil servants. The Levelling Up White Paper described a central objective of Places for Growth as being to “deliver a Civil Service that better reflects the country it serves, with a wider range of voices from beyond Westminster involved in policy and decision-making”.¹⁸⁵ In its commentary on this thinking, the Institute for Government has observed that one of the Government's drivers for relocating civil servants out of London is to “shift what it perceives as civil servants' ‘urban metropolitan’ mindsets by encouraging them to experience life in non-metropolitan areas”.¹⁸⁶

88. When asked how the fact that Cabinet Office officials were based in Glasgow would affect the advice he received, or the decisions he would take, the responsible Minister told us:

That is a very good question. I have thought about this myself. It is quite difficult to know, in that you ask yourself how many of the views one takes, or the policy papers one has written in the past, are determined by where one is and where one has grown up. Obviously, there is an influence there, but it is quite hard to immediately identify in all circumstances. It is certainly true that we are seeing people come into the Civil Service who had not previously considered a role there. That is bound to offer additional perspectives, which we believe will be useful to us across Government.¹⁸⁷

89. In its 2020 report on civil service relocation, the Institute for Government reported that civil servants it spoke to had mixed views on whether regional Hubs would make much difference to their policy-making:

Some London-based staff told us that having offices in different areas of the UK improved their understanding of life outside the capital, and they gave examples such as appreciating the importance of spending on roads in areas with poor public transport. But interviewees working on policies applied

183 House of Commons Library, [Constituency data: Ethnic groups, 2021 census](#), 29 March 2023.

184 Civil Service, [Civil Service Diversity and Inclusion Strategy: 2022 to 2025](#), 24 February 2022, p. 16.

185 HM Government, [Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#), Cp 604, February 2022, p. 129.

186 Oliver Davies, Jordan Urban, and Samuel Olajugba, [Relocation of the civil service](#), Institute for Government, 3 May 2022.

187 [Q262](#).

across the country tended not to think their regional location influenced the quality of their work, strengthened relationships with stakeholders or made new partnerships possible.¹⁸⁸

More recently, the IfG has sounded a cautiously positive note. Reflecting on a visit to the Treasury's Darlington Economic Campus, Alex Thomas suggested that regionally broadening the intake of civil servants ought to improve policy-making, albeit "only in small, incremental ways" that underlined that relocation ought to be seen as a "10, 20, or 30-year project".¹⁸⁹

90. One of the arguments put forward for how Places for Growth would improve policy advice and decisions is that it could expose departments to greater insights about the needs and experience of communities outside the capital. On our visit to Glasgow, we heard about the extensive outreach activities the Cabinet Office was undertaking with local employers and the third sector. The IfG reported something similar about the Darlington Economic Campus, where civil servants were engaging "with different external stakeholders and gather different [...] information to their London colleagues".¹⁹⁰ We asked the responsible Minister what the objectives behind such engagement with local stakeholders were, and how would it feed into national policy-making. He responded that it was partly focused on establishing a pipeline for recruitment, specifically encouraging people who might never have considered it a possibility for them to think of a career in the civil service, and partly it was about gaining insights from local stakeholders, which "are of great relevance to us".¹⁹¹

91. The lack of a more definitive answer as to the purpose of such regional liaison (beyond raising the regional profile of the civil service as a potential employer) is perhaps unsurprising, given the way in which the Places for Growth and Government Hubs programmes are being implemented. Government Hubs, in which civil servants from multiple departments are often co-located within the same office buildings, bear some resemblance to the former regional network of Government Offices (GOs). Government Offices were created in 1994—to act as "Whitehall for the English regions", implementing policy at a local level and managing the spending programmes of their sponsoring government departments—before being abolished by the Coalition government in 2010–11.¹⁹² GOs received some criticism at the time for remaining too much the creature of Whitehall departments, rather than exploring greater potential to develop bottom-up policies for the regions they were based in.¹⁹³ However, by bringing together the same array of Whitehall departments in each region, they were able to introduce some regional feedback into the formation of domestic policy. The purpose and occupancy of Government Hubs are not planned in the same way, however.

188 Sarah Nickson, Erenie Mullens-Burgess and Alex Thomas, [Moving Out: Making a success of civil service relocation](#), Institute for Government, November 2020, p. 8. The Centre for Cities has expressed similarly critical sentiments: "A senior civil servant in Salford or Sandwell isn't going to drive changes in decision-making if they still spend their days on Teams calls to Ministers and officials in Whitehall." Andy Hollingsworth and Adam Hawksbee, [Beyond a Whitehall lift and shift: Making a success of public sector relocation](#), Centre for Cities, 22 February 2021.

189 [Qq108–109](#).

190 Institute for Government ([FGE0007](#)).

191 [Q264](#).

192 Adam Mellows-Facer, [Government Offices for the Regions](#), House of Commons Library, Standard Note SN/EP/2126, 9 November 2010.

193 RAW Rhodes et al., *Decentralising the Civil Service* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003), p. 139.

The contrast between GOs and Government Hubs was described to us by the NAO director, Siân Jones:

Our understanding of the Hubs is that they are slightly different. They are not representing that particular area. They are a collection of civil service colleagues, from different departments quite possibly, relocating into one location but their work is location-agnostic. I could be relocated to York along with colleagues from five or six different departments, but my work may not change. I am physically based in York but I am not delivering on priorities that may affect York or the local area.¹⁹⁴

92. One of the overall themes in the evidence we received was that the reality of the Government's relocation programme was more limited than some of the more transformative claims being made for it. For example, the Centre for Cities sought to underline the point that Places for Growth represented the relocation of central government posts, whose ultimate decision-making remained in Whitehall, as opposed to a devolution of decision-making powers to a local level.¹⁹⁵ Professor Janice Morphet, of the Bartlett School of Planning at University College London, made a case for a robust assessment of which central government functions could be better delivered at a local level by being devolved to local or regional government.¹⁹⁶ The Onward think tank advocated greater collaboration between central government staff in regional Hubs and the wider public sector in each area: "Cross-institutional place-based teams with real budgets and powers could help tackle entrenched issues in local areas like health inequalities and low productivity."¹⁹⁷

93. **Recruiting staff to regional offices has the potential to open up the civil service as a career to a wider number of people. This can have benefits both for civil servants (enabling them to pursue a career in government without necessarily having to move to London) and for government policy (if it leads to greater understanding within departments about the differing needs of local communities). The Government's thinking about how to achieve these benefits appears unclear, however. In particular, there is a risk that in viewing certain communities outside London as being more representative of the country as a whole, the Government is stereotyping communities outside the capital as all being essentially the same and all being radically different to the varied communities in London, overriding local differences in needs and interests. It remains to be seen how HM Treasury's Darlington Economic Campus will improve policy-making for the remainder of the country.**

94. **The previous system of Government Offices for the English Regions received some criticism at the time for not sufficiently doing bottom-up policy-making for the regions they were based in. However, there was at least a comprehensive structure in place, in which the same government departments were represented in each region, as a scaled down version of Whitehall for local areas. The Government's current approach to the Places for Growth and Government Hubs programmes is much more haphazard. Without a clearer rationale for why a particular function has been relocated to a**

194 [Q56](#).

195 Centre for Cities ([FGE0008](#)). See also Andy Hollingsworth and Adam Hawksbee, [Beyond a Whitehall lift and shift: Making a success of public sector relocation](#), Centre for Cities, 22 February 2021.

196 Dr Janice Morphet (Visiting Professor at UCL, The Bartlett School of Planning) ([FGE0010](#))

197 UK Onward ([FGE0005](#)).

particular regional Hub, the Government increases the risk both that its programmes will fail substantially to influence policy-making and that a future government may reorganise or reverse what it has done.

95. *To increase the impact and rationale of each regional Hub, the Cabinet Office should co-ordinate the local outreach work undertaken by each department's regional offices (liaising with local authorities, businesses, and third sector stakeholders). The objective should be to systematically improve central government's understanding of local needs, and the local impacts of government policy, in each region and nation of the UK.*

96. The Government's claims for Places for Growth imply that it expects there to be an appreciable difference in mindset between policy officials employed in London and those in regional offices, and a corresponding change to policy. However, the responsible Minister was not able to pinpoint how policy advice drafted in a regional office would be different from that drafted in Whitehall. Even where some staff in regional offices may be more likely to have different educational and professional backgrounds, the majority of policy officials are likely to be university graduates wherever they are based given current recruitment criteria, with a certain broad shared framework of intellectual values and approaches this tends to imply. It remains unclear, both as to what changes Ministers want to see in the policy advice they receive from officials, and how the fact of basing more officials in regional Hubs will achieve these changes. *The Cabinet Office should publish details of its understanding of how the location of officials influences the advice they provide, setting out how exactly it expects recruiting staff to regional offices will lead to tangible differences in policy development and improvements to the welfare of citizens and communities.*

4 Overall conclusions

97. At the outset of this report, we discussed the key issues which, in our terms of reference, we said we would investigate in this inquiry. Returning to these points in the light of the individual conclusions set out in this report, our headline findings are as follows:

- **Progress towards targets:** The Government appears to be performing well against its key targets in the Places for Growth programme. This picture is clouded, however, by a lack of clarity from the Cabinet Office as to how these targets are framed—meaning, for example, that the Government could meet its targets to move posts out of London even while increasing the absolute number of civil servants based in the capital.
- **Economic and cultural benefits:** The Government has repeatedly published high-profile statements as to the local economic benefits from opening new regional offices, but has not provided adequate evidence to back up these claims. Under questioning, the Cabinet Office confirmed that its definition of “local economic benefits” extended to where people lived, not just where their office was based; that its calculations had not yet been revised to take into account the increase in homeworking since the pandemic; and that they had not attempted to measure the net impacts of the Government Hubs programme, including the effects of closing older offices in numerous communities. Regarding wider cultural benefits, meanwhile, regional Hubs are extending valuable opportunities to take up policy roles across a wider geographical sweep of the country, however their wider impacts are circumscribed by the fact their role is not to make or implement policy for their region.
- **Managing uncertainty:** To date, the Government has shown flexibility in managing unanticipated reductions in demand for office space resulting from the post-pandemic increase in hybrid working, by enabling other government departments to rent out spare floorspace in the first phase of Hubs managed by HM Revenue & Customs. However, the Government’s failures to establish both a clear and credible policy on headcount reductions, and a clear policy on hybrid working in the Civil Service as a whole, are feeding through into uncertainty from the Government Property Agency as to the size of the Government Hubs programme moving forward.
- **Policy tensions:** Unlike previous governments which launched their own programmes of civil service dispersal, the Cabinet Office has not made a serious effort to publicly engage with the potential trade-offs to be managed in the Places for Growth and Government Hubs programmes. Notably, it has not explicitly addressed the consequences on those towns whose offices are closed in order to concentrate civil servants in a smaller number of larger regional Hubs.
- **Learning lessons from the past:** The Cabinet Office is seeking to take advantage of the recent uptake of videoconferencing and hybrid working to accelerate the staffing of regional offices. If these continue to be supported by Ministers, their use should help to avoid some of the problems which affected previous relocation programmes, such as requiring policy officials to make frequent trips to Whitehall to attend meetings. However, the Cabinet Office has not shown

evidence of seeking to learn from those past examples in which relocation policies were reversed, such as in 2010–11 abolition of the Government Office network. Without this, there is a risk the Cabinet Office is not being mindful of the need to design these programmes with sufficient clarity of rationale to help future-proof them, in the event a future government re-examines the rationale for the current configuration of regional offices.

98. Overall, the Cabinet Office has a number of successes to point to regarding the Places for Growth and Government Hubs programmes. The number of posts allocated to regional offices under Places for Growth is growing rapidly, and HMRC and the GPA have made significant progress in meeting their objectives of consolidating the office portfolio into a smaller number of larger, more modern buildings. However, these promising signs are undermined to an extent by weaknesses in the framing, reporting, and rationale for these programmes. Notably the reported economic and cultural benefits of civil service relocation have not been clearly demonstrated.

99. Beyond the specific design and impacts of these programmes, we were struck by what they revealed about the Cabinet Office's approach to policy-making. The fact that Civil Service relocation has been pursued by several previous governments provides an historical comparison against which this Government's approach stands out for its lack of published research, its failure to seriously engage with the trade-offs to be managed, and its exaggerated approach to progress and benefits. The Cabinet Office's approach to presentation is particularly disappointing, given it is the responsible department for the Government Analysis Function, Government Communications Service, and Evaluation Task Force—all of which provide guidance to departments on the robustness of policy development or communications. This lack of rigour manifests itself as a vagueness at the heart of this policy, with the Cabinet Office not providing a clear account of why certain functions are being located in particular places, what difference this will make to government policy, or how exactly this will impact on regional communities and their citizens.

Conclusions and recommendations

Places for Growth: Levelling up the UK through civil service relocation

1. The Government appears to be making progress towards its target of relocating 22,000 posts by 2030, and steady progress towards a target of reducing the proportion of Senior Civil Service posts based in London to 50% of the total. However, a number of issues with the framing and reporting of these targets makes it difficult to judge how substantial the Government's achievements are. It is striking that the Cabinet Office has published so little information on the rationale and design of its Places for Growth programme, and also its new Plan for London. In particular, the Cabinet Office has not published a clear and definitive statement on the exact region from which it is seeking to relocate posts, nor of exactly what its target for senior officials is. In some of its communications it is also adopting a boosterish approach to reporting progress, which is likely to give an exaggerated picture of its achievements. Overall, the Cabinet Office has not done the basics of launching a programme well, notably failing to be clear and consistent in framing the rationale underlying the programme and the targets it is aiming to achieve. (Paragraph 26)
2. Publishing details of the rationale and success criteria for a major programme is essential for public transparency and assisting parliamentary scrutiny. This is not only a democratic good in itself; by exposing the justifications for their interventions to scrutiny, departments can hope to strengthen the design of their policies and gain greater public confidence in their decisions. *In future, whenever the Cabinet Office launches a named programme, it should publish a prospectus document in advance of its operation, setting out details including the programme's rationale, key objectives, and evaluation plan. It should additionally maintain a dedicated webpage on GOV.UK, on which it periodically publishes updated metrics of progress, as well as other corporate announcements related to the programme. Retrospectively, the Cabinet Office should, alongside the response to this report, publish this information, both for Places for Growth and for its Plan for London, on a dedicated GOV.UK webpage, and commit to updating it with metrics of progress at regular intervals, at least annually. In publishing this information, the Cabinet Office should clearly show how Places for Growth and the Plan for London fit together.* (Paragraph 27)
3. The Government has made high-profile commitments that Ministers would spend significant working time in regional offices—though without clearly explaining what value this was meant to deliver. To date, Ministers have not been able to meet this commitment, making flying visits rather than basing themselves outside London for significant amounts of time to conduct substantive work. The responsible Minister himself suggested a good reason for this: ministerial work is closely linked to Parliament and the Cabinet, and long travel times make it impractical for Ministers to spend very significant working time away from Westminster. *The Government should either live up to its public commitment for Ministers to spend more time working outside the capital, or issue a revised ambition with an accurate statement of what Ministers can actually commit to. This should extend to the Government's purpose in building Cabinet meeting rooms in two of its new Hubs, and the Cabinet Office should include in its response to this report details of when the Cabinet plans to meet in Edinburgh and Cardiff.* (Paragraph 33)

4. The Cabinet Office has made high-profile statements about the economic benefits to be delivered by Places for Growth, referring to research which supports its estimates. However, it has only just published information about this research, and this information was not written for easy digestion by the general public. This is a clear example of bad practice, as it prevents Parliament and the wider public from comprehensively reviewing the arguments and evidence underlying the alleged benefits of the programme. *The Cabinet Office should, alongside its response to this report, publish details of the research underpinning its claims of economic benefits in a form which clearly explains how the claims made in previous Places to Growth press releases have been calculated. Moreover, the Government Analysis Function should, within six months, publish a statement on its website and write to heads of the analysis function within all government departments urging them to bring the transparency requirements of all government analysts into line with the best practice guidelines set by the Office for Statistics Regulation. This should make clear that, whenever economic research is referred to in press notices and ministerial statements, departments should present links to a published form of this research.* (Paragraph 42)
5. The Government is not only relocating posts from London to the regions and nations, but also relocating posts from local offices (often in economically deprived towns) to large regional Hubs (mostly in big cities). We are concerned that the Cabinet Office is not seeking to estimate the net economic impacts of its different relocation policies, once these local office closures are taken into account. *The Cabinet Office should publish within six months analyses of economic losses in towns where government offices have been or are going to be shut down under the Government Hubs programme, as well as the expected benefits in areas where Hubs are opening.* (Paragraph 49)

Government Property Agency: Managing the office portfolio

6. The rationale for the creation of the Government Property Agency was that by taking over the management of all government office buildings it would lead to co-ordinated decision-making and efficiency savings. But with the departments with the biggest office estates remaining outside the GPA's control, the Government is potentially missing out on opportunities to bring together different public bodies and optimise the location of its office estate. *To help ensure joined up decision-making across government, it should be a requirement for every accounting officer, before approving any major property consolidation or relocation proposal, to obtain assurance that their officials have explored opportunities to co-ordinate location and design decisions with the Government Property Agency, in its management of the office portfolio. The Cabinet Office should work with HM Treasury to develop this guidance for accounting officers, and write to us within six months to confirm the results.* (Paragraph 54)
7. In order to do its job effectively, the Government Property Agency needs good quality workforce plans from departments, enabling it to plan for the right size and location of government offices. This has been made more difficult by uncertainties resulting from government policy and communications. On the amount of time civil servants should work in the office (which thus affects the demand for office space), high-profile statements from Ministers have been at odds with key policy

programmes. Meanwhile, the Government has made sudden and unclear statements about the size of the civil service, most recently stating both that it had scrapped targets for headcount reductions and that it was still committed to achieving the same scale of cuts but clarifying neither how this was to be achieved nor over what timescale. (Paragraph 62)

8. *In its response to this report the Cabinet Office should write to us with a definitive statement of government policy on the flexibility civil servants should have on how often they work in the office. Within the same period, the Cabinet Office should write to us with a clear statement on what size of headcount reductions the Government is modelling, in what timescale this is intended to be achieved, and what impact this will have on departments' requirement for office space. Until the GPA has greater certainty over departments' workforce plans and demand for office space, it should review whether to proceed now with those Hubs currently in the planning stage, and not actively plan for any additional Hubs.* (Paragraph 63)
9. The Cabinet Office has provided a plausible explanation for the GPA's practice of charging departments rent on offices which the Government owns and has no intention of selling. This answer emphasises the value for money which the GPA is able to secure by acting as office property manager for multiple departments. As this value depends on scale, it is important that individual departments stay within these arrangements, rather than trying to find better deals from commercial landlords on a local basis. Nevertheless, to tie departments into these arrangements successfully, the GPA needs to be able to demonstrate that it is providing value for money. *The Government Property Agency should commission an external review, to publish within twelve months, of the value for money of the service which it is providing to departments in return for its rental charges.* (Paragraph 68)

Civil service culture and people: Implications of the relocation agenda

10. Previous governments which implemented similar programmes of civil service relocation acknowledged the risks and potential disadvantages—for example, significant upfront costs of relocation and redundancy packages, plus a loss of efficiency and coherence from moving policy roles far away from Whitehall. The Government is doing things differently this time—for example, generally recruiting new starters to regional offices to fill vacancies when they arise rather than relocating existing staff relying on videoconferencing, and seeking to relocate more SCS posts in order to create more senior career pathways outside London. This approach does, however, present novel risks, such as the potential development of a two-tier departmental culture, if regional offices mainly comprise new starters who have never worked in Whitehall. A further risk is that departments may be exclusively filling vacancies to locations outside London, even where such posts require significant presence in London, in order to meet Places for Growth targets. (Paragraph 74)
11. *The Cabinet Office should issue guidance to departments that London should not be ruled out as location for new recruitment, where it is more appropriate for certain posts to be based in the capital. It should also use the Civil Service People Survey to monitor and address evidence of a perception among regionally-based staff that they*

have lower engagement scores or views on career prospects. Equally, should the Civil Service People Survey reveal engagement to be higher in regional offices, the Cabinet Office should conduct research into what departments running Whitehall offices may be able to learn from them. (Paragraph 75)

12. Co-locating officials from different departments within the same regional Hubs potentially offers the opportunity to create collaborative teams, generating new insights and leading to more joined up policy-making. At the same time, past experience suggests that problems may arise from the fact that different departments are individual employers, with their own pay scales for officials below the Senior Civil Service grades. We disagree with the Minister's assessment that there are no risks to consider here. Instead, we believe this has the potential to both lead to tensions where staff from different departments are co-located, and cause practical issues where staff seek to move between departments within Hubs in pursuit of improved pay and conditions. *To help realise the wider potential of the Government Hubs programme, the Cabinet Office and GPA should promote case studies which demonstrate the practical benefits of staff from different departments working together within regional offices. The GPA should report on such case studies, highlighting the practical impacts on policy-making, in its annual reports. The Cabinet Office should also monitor the extent to which staff within regional Hubs transfer between departments, investigating both the reasons for it and the level of disruption this causes to departmental business. (Paragraph 79)*
13. The stagnation of civil service pay poses challenges for retention, recruitment, and morale—and may in some cases lead to real hardship. Moving posts out of the capital, where costs of living are lower and where the Government does not pay a London premium on civil service salaries, has the potential to offer financial benefits to both the Government and its officials. Nevertheless, a large contingent of staff—especially senior posts—are always going to be required to work in London, and the Places for Growth programme will on its own do nothing for the individuals holding such roles. Civil service relocation has a role to play within the overall policy relating to civil service pay, but it should not be seen by the Cabinet Office as a replacement for addressing underlying issues. (Paragraph 83)
14. Recruiting staff to regional offices has the potential to open up the civil service as a career to a wider number of people. This can have benefits both for civil servants (enabling them to pursue a career in government without necessarily having to move to London) and for government policy (if it leads to greater understanding within departments about the differing needs of local communities). The Government's thinking about how to achieve these benefits appears unclear, however. In particular, there is a risk that in viewing certain communities outside London as being more representative of the country as a whole, the Government is stereotyping communities outside the capital as all being essentially the same and all being radically different to the varied communities in London, overriding local differences in needs and interests. It remains to be seen how HM Treasury's Darlington Economic Campus will improve policy-making for the remainder of the country. (Paragraph 93)
15. The previous system of Government Offices for the English Regions received some criticism at the time for not sufficiently doing bottom-up policy-making for the regions they were based in. However, there was at least a comprehensive structure in

place, in which the same government departments were represented in each region, as a scaled down version of Whitehall for local areas. The Government's current approach to the Places for Growth and Government Hubs programmes is much more haphazard. Without a clearer rationale for why a particular function has been relocated to a particular regional Hub, the Government increases the risk both that its programmes will fail substantially to influence policy-making and that a future government may reorganise or reverse what it has done. (Paragraph 94)

16. *To increase the impact and rationale of each regional Hub, the Cabinet Office should co-ordinate the local outreach work undertaken by each department's regional offices (liaising with local authorities, businesses, and third sector stakeholders). The objective should be to systematically improve central government's understanding of local needs, and the local impacts of government policy, in each region and nation of the UK. (Paragraph 95)*
17. The Government's claims for Places for Growth imply that it expects there to be an appreciable difference in mindset between policy officials employed in London and those in regional offices, and a corresponding change to policy. However, the responsible Minister was not able to pinpoint how policy advice drafted in a regional office would be different from that drafted in Whitehall. Even where some staff in regional offices may be more likely to have different educational and professional backgrounds, the majority of policy officials are likely to be university graduates wherever they are based given current recruitment criteria, with a certain broad shared framework of intellectual values and approaches this tends to imply. It remains unclear, both as to what changes Ministers want to see in the policy advice they receive from officials, and how the fact of basing more officials in regional Hubs will achieve these changes. *The Cabinet Office should publish details of its understanding of how the location of officials influences the advice they provide, setting out how exactly it expects recruiting staff to regional offices will lead to tangible differences in policy development and improvements to the welfare of citizens and communities. (Paragraph 96)*

Overall conclusions

18. Overall, the Cabinet Office has a number of successes to point to regarding the Places for Growth and Government Hubs programmes. The number of posts allocated to regional offices under Places for Growth is growing rapidly, and HMRC and the GPA have made significant progress in meeting their objectives of consolidating the office portfolio into a smaller number of larger, more modern buildings. However, these promising signs are undermined to an extent by weaknesses in the framing, reporting, and rationale for these programmes. Notably the reported economic and cultural benefits of civil service relocation have not been clearly demonstrated. (Paragraph 98)
19. Beyond the specific design and impacts of these programmes, we were struck by what they revealed about the Cabinet Office's approach to policy-making. The fact that Civil Service relocation has been pursued by several previous governments provides an historical comparison against which this Government's approach stands out for its lack of published research, its failure to seriously engage with the trade-offs to be

managed, and its exaggerated approach to progress and benefits. The Cabinet Office's approach to presentation is particularly disappointing, given it is the responsible department for the Government Analysis Function, Government Communications Service, and Evaluation Task Force—all of which provide guidance to departments on the robustness of policy development or communications. This lack of rigour manifests itself as a vagueness at the heart of this policy, with the Cabinet Office not providing a clear account of why certain functions are being located in particular places, what difference this will make to government policy, or how exactly this will impact on regional communities and their citizens. (Paragraph 99)

Formal minutes

Tuesday 18 July

Members present

Mr William Wragg, in the Chair

Ronnie Cowan

Jo Gideon

Rt Hon David Jones

Rt Hon John McDonnell

Tom Randall

Lloyd Russell-Moyle

Draft Report (*Where Civil Servants Work: Planning for the future of the Government's estates*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 99 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Eighth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 134.

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 5 September 2023 at 09.30am

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Tuesday 13 December 2022

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

[Q1-57](#)

Tuesday 31 January 2023

Professor Tony Travers, Director, LSE London, London School of Economics

[Q58-91](#)

Alex Thomas, Programme Director, Institute for Government; **Jordan Urban**, Researcher, Institute for Government

[Q92-117](#)

Tuesday 21 February 2023

Geoff Lewtas, Director, NTUC Convenor, Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Union; **Martin Kelsey**, HMRC Group Secretary, Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Union; **Amy Leversidge**, Assistant General Secretary, the FDA (trade union); **Garry Graham**, Deputy General Secretary, Prospect (trade union)

[Q118-166](#)

Tuesday 28 March 2023

Alex Burghart MP, Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office; **Ravi Chand CBE**, Director of Places for Growth and Beyond, Cabinet Office; **Steven Boyd MBE**, Chief Executive, Government Property Agency

[Q167-270](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

FGE numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Cabinet Office ([FGE0006](#))
- 2 Centre for Cities ([FGE0008](#))
- 3 Institute for Government ([FGE0007](#))
- 4 Morphet, Dr Janice (Visiting Professor, UCL, The Bartlett School of Planning) ([FGE0010](#))
- 5 Prospect ([FGE0012](#))
- 6 Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Union ([FGE0003](#))
- 7 RICS ([FGE0002](#))
- 8 The FDA ([FGE0009](#))
- 9 The FDA (supplementary) ([FGE0013](#))
- 10 UK Onward ([FGE0005](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2022–23

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Scrutiny 2020–21	HC 213
2nd	The Work of the Electoral Commission	HC 462
3rd	Governing England	HC 463
4th	Propriety of Governance in Light of Greensill	HC 888
5th	Governing England: Follow up to the Government's response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2022–23	HC 1139
6th	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Scrutiny 2021–22	HC 745
7th	The Role of Non-Executive Directors in Government	HC 318
1st Special	Coronavirus Act 2020 Two Years On: Government response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2021–22	HC 211
2nd Special	The Cabinet Office Freedom of Information Clearing House: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2021–22	HC 576
3rd Special	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Scrutiny 2020–21: PHSO and Government responses to the Committee's First Report	HC 616
4th Special	The Work of the Electoral Commission: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 1065
5th Special	The Work of the Electoral Commission: Electoral Commission response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2022–23	HC 1124

Session 2021–22

Number	Title	Reference
1st	The role and status of the Prime Minister's Office	HC 67
2nd	Covid-Status Certification	HC 42
3rd	Propriety of Governance in Light of Greensill: An Interim Report	HC 59
4th	Appointment of William Shawcross as Commissioner for Public Appointments	HC 662
5th	The Elections Bill	HC 597

Number	Title	Reference
6th	The appointment of Rt Hon the Baroness Stuart of Edgbaston as First Civil Service Commissioner	HC 984
7th	Coronavirus Act 2020 Two Years On	HC 978
8th	The appointment of Sir Robert Chote as Chair of the UK Statistics Authority	HC 1162
9th	The Cabinet Office Freedom of Information Clearing House	HC 505
1st Special	Government transparency and accountability during Covid 19: The data underpinning decisions: Government's response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 234
2nd Special	Covid-Status Certification: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report	HC 670
3rd Special	The role and status of the Prime Minister's Office: Government Response to the Committee's First Report	HC 710
4th Special	The Elections Bill: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report	HC 1133

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st	Appointment of Rt Hon Lord Pickles as Chair of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments	HC 168
2nd	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Scrutiny 2018–19	HC 117
3rd	Delivering the Government's infrastructure commitments through major projects	HC 125
4th	Parliamentary Scrutiny of the Government's handling of Covid-19	HC 377
5th	A Public Inquiry into the Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic	HC 541
6th	The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011	HC 167
7th	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Scrutiny 2019–20	HC 843
8th	Government transparency and accountability during Covid 19: The data underpinning decisions	HC 803
1st Special	Electoral law: The Urgent Need for Review: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019	HC 327
2nd Special	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Scrutiny 2018–19: Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's response to the Committee's Second report	HC 822
3rd Special	Delivering the Government's infrastructure commitments through major projects: Government Response to the Committee's Third report	HC 853

Number	Title	Reference
4th Special	A Public Inquiry into the Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic: Government's response to the Committee's Fifth report	HC 995
5th Special	Parliamentary Scrutiny of the Government's handling of Covid-19: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 1078
6th Special	The Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011: Government's response to the Committee's Sixth report of Session 2019–21	HC 1082
7th Special	Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Scrutiny 2019–20: Government's and PHSO response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2019–21	HC 1348