



**The Baroness Drake CBE  
Chair, the Constitution Committee,  
House of Lords**

**20 September 2022**

**Dear Jeannie**

## **THE CIVIL SERVICE**

We are writing to suggest the Constitution Committee carries out an inquiry into the appointment and removal of Permanent Secretaries and other senior civil servants.

The number of permanent secretaries who have left prematurely has risen in recent years, often associated with a change in Prime Minister or Cabinet reshuffles. If this is a reflection of better performance management, so much the better though the timing suggests it is not. There is growing evidence the motivation is perceived political alignment, and that appointments are less a reflection of open competition and more of ministers handpicking senior officials, usually by going back to someone they have worked with in the past rather than properly surveying all the candidates, many of whom they will not know.

We are concerned that this is impugning the constitutional independence and political impartiality of the Civil Service and reducing its effectiveness.

One of the advantages of our system is that, at a transition of ministers, the civil service supplies continuity and experience which enables handovers to be completed quickly and efficiently, in contrast to the many months of transition in the United States.

We are also concerned that this approach is reducing the effectiveness of advice. It is not conducive to impartiality or “speaking truth under power”. And by changing the implicit contract between ministers and officials, it may already be affecting the ability of the civil service to recruit and retain talent.

London  
SW1A 0PW



The civil service is a national asset. It is held in trust by the government of the day for the next administration. There may, or may not, be a case for moving to a system of political appointments as in the United States. But we would argue that this is best done openly after genuine debate and ideally with cross party support. At present, it appears to be happening by stealth.

We would welcome your Committee investigating these issues.

Yours sincerely

*Nick Rafter*

signed on behalf of:

Lord Sedwill  
Lord Macpherson of Earl's Court  
Lord Kerslake  
Lord O'Donnell  
Baroness Prashar

Lord Turnbull  
Lord Wilson of Dinton  
Lord Burns  
Lord Butler of Brockwell