

## 10,11 CIVIL SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS\*

### 10 Fewer SpAds

See FSM AMb-10 SpAds

### 11 Note

On 15 Jun 21, the government published a "Declaration on Government Reform" jointly signed by "PRIME MINISTER, Boris Johnson" and "CABINET SECRETARY, Simon Case" (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/declaration-on-government-reform>).

That document describes itself as "Our vision for making government work better in service of citizens", and sets out its intended "Actions in 2021" at Annex A. Specifically, on Page 3, the Declaration says:

"In the aftermath of 1945, Britain built back better with new housing, safer streets, national parks and a healthier countryside, higher than ever standards of universal healthcare, increased educational opportunity, technological advances, and a commitment to greater economic justice. These changes required the re-wiring, and renewal, of government. That is why reform is necessary now – not as an end in itself but as a means of delivering the better Britain the public demands and deserves."

However, if you then read "ANNEX A – ACTIONS IN 2021", you will be shocked by: (a) the sheer scale of what was promised to be done but has NOT since actually been done; and (b) the truly pathetic programme of actions that was proposed in the first place. Clearly, there is currently a total lack of understanding within government about how to improve: either the current political system in Westminster; or the interface between Ministers and the Civil Service; or the effectiveness of the Civil Service itself. However, we offer a few thoughts below with a view to starting a wider conversation, perhaps after the Maude "Review of Governance and Accountability" reports later this year.]

### 11/4 Restore Civil Service role

Re-ignite the role of Civil Servants to offer objective, expert advice to government Ministers, alongside the obligation of Ministers to consider such advice carefully.

How?

### 11/1,2,3 Civil Service staffing

Start by distinguishing between 'managerial expertise' and specific, sectoral, 'subject-matter expertise' within the Civil Service.

There is already (IIRC) a distinction between "administrative" and "scientific". This proposal seems to broaden the scope of "scientific".

Administrative civil servants tend to be singularly lacking in "managerial expertise".

Scientific civil servants are generally oppressed by the nearly universal belief of managers that they should be paid more than the people whose activities they manage.

Value, develop and deploy both areas of expertise appropriately, but differently.

Provide equal opportunities for career and salary advancement for both managerial and subject-matter experts, rather than seeking to develop a workforce comprised of 'generalists' who, supposedly, can be moved between departments and functions at will and effectively outsourcing 'subject-matter expertise' to expensive consulting firms.

### Notes:

- It is almost but not quite true to say that "governments get the Civil Service they deserve".
- This is certainly the case today, following 18 years of monopoly Conservative government, 13 years of Labour monopoly government and nearly 14 years of Conservative monopoly government (tempered briefly by 5 years of Conservative-led Coalition government with the Lib Dems). During this time, the average tenure in post of government Ministers has progressively

plummeted. For example, there have been 15<sup>1</sup> Housing Ministers in post over the 13 years from 6 May 2010 to 5 May 2023 (see the full list below). Moreover, it should be noted that Theresa May worked with four Permanent Secretaries during her six years in post as Home Secretary from May 2010 to July 2016.

- For instance:
  - If you analyse the list of Housing Ministers shown below in more detail, based on whether they were appointed during the Coalition period or subsequently, you will discover that the average tenure of Housing Ministers appointed during the Coalition government is 15.5 months, whereas, for those appointed during the subsequent monopoly Conservative government to date, the average tenure is just 7.0 months, in other words *under half the time in tenure*; and
  - If you look at the number of, say, Justice Ministers, the situation is even worse. The Coalition government had two Justice Ministers over five years from 2010 to 2015 (i.e. a tenure in post of 2.50 years = 29.0 months each on average), whereas there have been 7 Justice Ministers in the 8 years of subsequent, monopoly Conservative government (i.e. a tenure of 1.12 years = 13.7 months each on average).

#### **Housing Ministers since 6 May 2010**

- Grant Shapps (2 years and 4 months)
  - Mark Prisk (1 year and 1 month)
  - Kris Hopkins (9 months)
  - Brandon Lewis (2 years)
  - Gavin Barwell (11 months)
  - Alok Sharma (7 months)
  - Dominic Raab (6 months)
  - Kit Malthouse (1 year)
  - Esther McVey (7 months)
  - Chris Pincher (2 years)
  - Stuart Andrew (5 months)
  - Marcus Jones (2 months)
  - Lee Rowley (7 weeks)
  - Lucy Frazer (3 months)
  - Rachel Maclean (since 7 February 2023)<sup>2</sup>
- Put simply, it is **not possible to govern effectively** with this level of both Ministerial and Civil Service churn.

---

[1] **Afternote:** This total number was increased to 16 Housing Ministers over 3 years 6 months (= 162 months) when Rachel Maclean was replaced after just 9 months in post by Lee Rowley was appointed on 13 Nov 23. This equates to an average tenure in post per Housing Minister of 10.1 months each.

[2] **Afternote:** Rachel Maclean was replaced on 13 Nov 23 by Lee Rowley, having spent just 9 months in post as Housing Minister.