

Ministers rip up consultation culture

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Ministers working closely with the new Cabinet Secretary order a clear up of Whitehall consultation culture to speed up decision making and deliver for the British people.

As the next step in a wider programme of clearing out Whitehall's layers of unnecessary bureaucracy, Ministers have today announced immediate measures that will:

- End the introduction of unnecessary reporting and consultation requirements through introducing a higher bar to their inclusion in legislation.
- Use AI to identify existing disproportionate reporting and consultation duties that are slowing down delivery.
- Take action to ensure Equalities Impact Assessments are proportionate and actually improve policy and outcomes.
- Replace Environmental Impact Assessments with Environmental Outcomes Reports as part of a significant step in reducing bureaucracy around new infrastructure projects.

Working alongside the new Cabinet Secretary, Antonia Romeo, to deliver the Prime Minister's priorities, Ministers will also implement a number of changes to:

- Reform the process for collective Cabinet agreement of government policy to speed up decision-making.
- Introduce a new accountability framework for Permanent Secretaries, designed to focus on delivering the Prime Minister's priorities, and holding people to account for doing so. Measures will ensure change is lasting, preventing unnecessary duties and impact assessments being introduced.

These reforms will speed up the work of government, to effect positive change in communities across the country quicker.

Minister for the Cabinet Office, Nick Thomas-Symonds said:

For too long, the levers of power in Whitehall have been trapped under layers of outdated regulations and overlapping consultations that prioritise process over progress.

We are stripping away these layers to empower brilliant public servants to deliver change for working people, replacing an outsourcing of responsibility with accountability and decisive action.

Attorney General Richard Hermer KC said:

There are too many examples where well-intentioned processes are slowing down decision-making at the heart of government. This delays real change and fails the public we serve.

We are getting on with rewiring the government and this review will speed up decision-making across Whitehall to help deliver a more agile, modern state.

Ministers and civil servants have regularly identified excessive processes and checks as clogging up the system, creating distance between decision-makers and implementation of policy, and delaying change for working people across the UK.

Slow government decision making is not a problem that only affects Whitehall, it has real consequences for people across the country - from how we respond to a crisis, to how quickly a new school gets built, roads get repaired or high speed broadband installed.

Where policy impacts a wide range of complex groups, consultations are necessary and helpful, and government will always ensure that proposed plans come under the necessary scrutiny.

However they are increasingly used for routine changes, for example, a single government department consulting on a change to how it produces its Annual Report.

A recent pilot already found 131 consultation requirements in just 10 pieces of legislation. We will extend the pilot to look at all government legislation, driven by No10 Innovation Fellows, to ensure changes are backed by evidence.

Meanwhile, Ministers will consider plans to further streamline the onerous inter-departmental letter-exchanges in the policy-making processes, that delay and reinforce the government in siloes. And both Equalities Impact Assessments and Environmental Impact Assessments will be changed to ensure they are used proportionately.

The changes set out today are part of the wider Civil Service Reform programme launched by Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister, Darren Jones in January.

So that change lasts and the culture shifts, the new Cabinet Secretary is implementing a clearer new accountability framework, working with Permanent Secretaries, to set clear expectations and measurable targets, to drive delivery and innovation in their departments.

These measures will help to fix the gap between Whitehall decision and delivery on the ground, and will be the basis of a wider programme of cutting through government “sludge”.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ministers-rip-up-consultation-culture>