

Cabinet Office

Departmental Improvement Plan

March 2014

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Foreword by the Permanent Secretary

The Cabinet Office is a corporate centre for government, an innovative policy department, and a secretariat providing support and intelligence for the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister.

Across this range of activities, we aim to create the conditions necessary for government to succeed. Teams across the Cabinet Office are determined and skilful, and they deliver results for Ministers and for citizens.

But this Departmental Improvement Plan gives us the opportunity to reflect on how we can perform better as a department in our own right. It is not a long or detailed plan. We are fortunate in having colleagues in every team and at every level who want to make this a better organisation and are prepared to take the initiative and get things done. This plan reflects some of that enterprise. But it also focuses on just five priority areas where we think planned improvements are necessary and achievable. We'll be revisiting the plan over the course of 2014.



Richard Heaton

Permanent Secretary and First Parliamentary Counsel

What we aim to be

Cabinet Office – at the heart of government

Cabinet Office occupies a central position in government. We have a wide range of activities and relationships, but the core of our role is to ensure that government works efficiently and effectively to deliver ministers' priorities. We do that by

- Enabling collective decision-making in government
- Providing services, and leading professional functions, as a corporate centre for government
- Leading on specific policy priorities which best belong at the centre

Cabinet Office supports

- The Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister
- Cabinet and Cabinet committees
- The Minister for the Cabinet Office and other Cabinet Office ministers
- The parliamentary business managers
- The Cabinet Secretary and the Head of the Civil Service

These roles and relationships give Cabinet Office a more complicated structure than most other government departments, as well as requiring us to adapt rapidly to changing needs and political priorities.

Flexible and responsive

To deliver a wide range of services, Cabinet Office needs to have the right range of skills and experience. We also need to know what our capabilities are, and to be able to apply them where the need is greatest. To do that we need

- A culture based on openness (but with appropriate protection for sensitive information), and shared commitment to its overall goals
- A joined up organisation which can respond with a single consistent voice to people who need information and advice
- Consistent shared knowledge about who does what and who knows what
- Effective processes for ensuring that resources and ministerial priorities are aligned

Best Cabinet Office

Cabinet Office sets demands and expectations for the civil service as a whole. It needs to be an exemplar of what it asks of others, including demonstrating the civil service values of honesty, integrity, impartiality and objectivity. It should be creative, innovative and an incubator for developing – and testing – new ideas. To do that we need

- A culture of creativity, supported by an understanding and acceptance of appropriate risk

- Individual and organisational adaptability, reconfiguring rapidly to reflect changing requirements and priorities
- A willingness to learn from others – within and beyond the public sector – and to apply that learning in delivering better outcomes

Customers and networks

Cabinet Office provides services to the public, to other parts of government and internally. The basis for interactions can vary a lot – some are to support, some are to co-ordinate, some are to require – but they should always be based on an understanding of the needs and interests of the people we work with and they should always demonstrate value and avoid duplication. To do that we need

- Insight into the perceptions and expectations of the people and organisations we work with
- A clear map of the relationships and requirements managed by the Cabinet Office and their overall impact
- The ability to ensure that information can be collected once and used where it is needed

Governance and leadership

Cabinet Office is a complex organisation. There will always be a risk of different parts acting in a fragmented and inefficient way. We need to manage that risk. So everybody in the Cabinet Office needs to understand how what they are doing contributes to the achievement of the department's goals and to be empowered to make informed decisions about how best to deliver them. To do that we need

- Leadership structures which support corporate decision making and accountability
- Effective management of risk

Environment and systems

People in Cabinet Office work with information and data. We need tools and an environment which support us effectively and which stimulate creativity, innovation and productivity. We increasingly expect to collaborate more effectively across and beyond the department and to work productively wherever we may be. To do that we need

- A culture of trust and professionalism which recognises delivery not presence
- Flexible technology and work environments designed to support personal and team effectiveness
- A focus on learning, development and feedback which grows individual and organisational skills and capability

Being exemplary

Cabinet Office's role at the heart of government and our leadership of civil service reform and government efficiency mean that it should lead by example. To do that we need

- An approach to leadership and change which supports the attitudes and capabilities of wider civil service reform
- Senior leaders who are individually role models for the organisation and who collectively are leaders of the whole, not just leaders of their part

Where we are

The Cabinet Office already performs well against many of these challenges. It has embraced and adapted to the new demands of coalition government. It consistently delivers high quality services ranging from continuing support for the Prime Minister and collective government through to new developments such as the creation of the Government Digital Service, the drive for efficiency across government and the reform of the civil service. It has been through – and is continuing to go through – substantial organisational change, including the creation of the Efficiency and Reform Group and now of the Crown Commercial Service. In many new and emerging areas, it is recognised as world-leading in its approach.

Cabinet Office has a skilled, energetic and committed workforce. People are proud to work here and would recommend it as a great place to work. In critical areas it is demonstrating clear evidence of improvement. Compared with a year ago, a much higher proportion of Cabinet Office staff believe that innovation is supported and that they will be evaluated on what they achieve rather than on the processes they follow.

But it is equally clear that there are areas where Cabinet Office needs to improve. In almost every area of organisational performance, there are parts of Cabinet Office performing to a very high standard; but the standard is not shared across the organisation. Just as importantly, Cabinet Office is often seen – by its staff and by the people and organisations it deals with – as not embodying the clarity of purpose and leadership it should do.

This plan is about identifying and addressing the areas of relative weakness in Cabinet Office's performance, continuing the journey to make it an organisation which consistently delivers high quality outcomes and is – and is seen as – the embodiment of the civil service values.

Planning and implementing change to Cabinet Office as an organisation is itself one of those areas of relative weakness. The baseline information which should form the foundations of an effective plan does not always exist. A high priority for the departmental improvement plan must be to make the process for doing this kind of planning more robust, based on a broader range of firmer evidence, and to improve the range and quality of evidence for measuring progress. This plan therefore focuses on what should be done to create the foundations and to start to build on them.

A more substantial plan looking further forward must itself be one of the products of that process.

The Cabinet Office is not static. The innovation and creativity of the organisation is reflected in a wide range of existing change projects. The next section of the plan brings together initiatives under way as well as setting out the additional actions needed to ensure that it is robust and comprehensive.

What we are going to change

The Cabinet Office change agenda is based on qualitative evidence from within the organisation and from people and organisations with which it interacts. That is reinforced by and tested against quantitative evidence, particularly from the people surveys in 2012 and 2013, which are a vital source of information about attitudes and ambitions within the organisation. The Cabinet Office Executive Management Committee has agreed that in 2014 Cabinet Office will particularly address the people survey themes of leadership, organisational objectives and learning and development.

2014 will also be a year in which Cabinet Office continues to build on its existing strengths. The innovation and creativity which has been a hallmark of earlier years needs to be complemented by a strong focus on implementation and on demonstrating that Cabinet Office does not just generate new ideas, but makes them work.

One extra need, reflected in the actions below, is to improve the range and the robustness of the indicators available for assessing progress and identifying where further improvement may be needed.

The actions needed to take this forward are grouped under five headings:

- Building clear and consistent external relationships
- Improving IT, communication and collaboration
- Embedding innovation and creativity
- Enhancing capability
- Improving line management and personal development

The table on the next page sets out the actions we intend to take under each heading and the measures we will use to assess progress.

DIP Goals	DIP Actions	Indicative Measures
1. Building clear and consistent external relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather regular structured customer feedback from stakeholders, including other government departments, Ministers and service recipients • Create a single view of the information requests made by Cabinet Office of other government departments as the basis for reducing the burden of compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder feedback • Number of data requests made of departments
2. Improving IT, communication and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver a major technology development programme to provide user-centred IT for Cabinet Office • Create a workplace which facilitates modern ways of working and supports collaboration within and beyond Cabinet Office • Implement the communications strategy including focussed internal communications, a user-friendly intranet and all staff events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rollout of new IT • Users' rating of new IT • Usage of collaboration tools • People survey rating of information and engagement
3. Embedding innovation and creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create space and opportunity for staff to innovate and to work flexibly • Empower improvements to be made at every level • Promote visible senior leadership of organisation level improvements • Deliver an internal annual event to celebrate and reward innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost per capita of corporate provisions • Adoption of flexible working • People survey ratings of leadership visibility and clarity of purpose • Number and range of award nominations
4. Enhancing capability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a programme of activities that builds on our strengths and capability gaps identified through analysis of the Annual Skills Review 2013 findings • Align recruitment, secondment and development activities with the right skills to deliver our agenda • Ensure proper succession and workforce planning is in place for posts in the department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of activity needs and gaps reported • Adoption of standard measures by Board • People survey rating of change management in Cabinet Office • Accuracy of workforce forecasting

DIP Goals	DIP Actions	Indicative Measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a business-led staff induction for Senior Civil Servants and others joining Cabinet Office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six month rating of inductions
5. Improving line management and personal development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop transparent and accountable performance management at all levels of the Cabinet Office • Ensure that all managers have clear and consistent performance objectives about their management responsibilities • Ensure that all staff have a plan for learning and development which enhances personal and organisational capability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Line manager feedback on clarity of management objectives • People survey rating of learning and development • Feedback on performance and development management

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