

ALL MINISTERS

7 September 2026

Dear Colleagues,

THE SIMPLIFICATION AND AGENCY OF GOVERNMENT

The Government exists to serve, and it is our duty to deliver the change we have promised the British people. That means as ministers we need to shoulder the responsibility for acting – channelling the democratic mandate that we hold in trust by being bold and ambitious in the decisions we take and the reforms we make, because that is the only way to give Britain the circuit-breaker it needs.

We want to be clear that the Government will act with the full agency that sits with the executive, and which flows from our command of a majority in the House of Commons. We are a government that expects and demands of its ministers a willingness to make choices on behalf of the British people, informed always by the best possible advice but ultimately reached by those elected and empowered to choose. We are also determined to overcome the administrative frictions that past administrations have allowed to accumulate, often with good intentions but which have served to slow the work of government, and which we must not allow to frustrate the speed of change.

We therefore wanted to set out three areas where this Government will act with greater alacrity – on consultations, on legal considerations, and on judicial review – as initial steps in what will be a wider programme of work to pare back counterproductive administrative burdens.

Consultations

First, the way government approaches policy making is not functioning as well as it could. Consultation culture has turned a sensible mechanism for sourcing external input into an industry of dither and delay, which too often fails to hear from those whose perspectives are most relevant to the issue under consideration, and can drag policies to a lowest common denominator outcome.

We will end this trend by reasserting that there is no general duty of consultation, and that the default position should be that ministers reach decisions and proceed to act on them.

In many instances, the best approach will be more participatory policymaking. Involving a wider range of people in shaping our thinking earlier and more directly – with ministers and officials leading engagement in ways that reflect the issue at hand, and which help to build back public trust in government.

Habitual, box-ticking consultation does not serve people or business and is a distraction to government. Formal consultation should only take place where there is a statutory requirement to consult, where it would be conspicuously unfair not to consult, or where ministers believe there is a good case for seeking external input and that the right vehicle for doing so is a formal consultation. Even where departments have historically consulted or previously promised to consult, we expect each individual instance to be considered afresh, thinking about what is fair in the particular circumstances. We also want to see this approach to consultations adopted not just within central government and its agencies, but across the wider public sector – so it is important that we lead from the front.

New general guidance will be circulated by officials and more detailed guidance on approaches to public participation will follow in due course.

Within this Parliament, we will then go further and seek to unwind the thousands of unnecessary consultation and reporting requirements that have come to litter the statute book. We want the starting point to be that requirements should be repealed, retained only by exception, and we will set out more detail on this work in due course. In the immediate, departments should consider where repeals could be accommodated in bills that they are either already progressing or bidding for in future sessions.

Legal considerations

Second, the Government will always act within the law, and government lawyers provide an invaluable service in the support they give to ministers when reaching decisions. It is however vital to recognise that the law, and the level of legal risk involved in a decision, is often not black and white. It is for that reason that, so long as there is a tenable legal argument, it is for ministers to determine how to proceed – and it can be right to act where the level of legal risk is considered to be high. We want all ministers to feel trusted to make these judgements and empowered to accept higher levels of risk where you feel it is warranted.

In support of this approach, we will this week update the legal risk guidance that is used by government lawyers, and which amongst other changes will be clear that it is wholly proper for ministers to take decisions where there is a tenable legal argument even where there is a high legal risk, as well as encouraging lawyers proactively to suggest alternative options where there is a significant barrier or risk to a proposed policy.

Judicial review

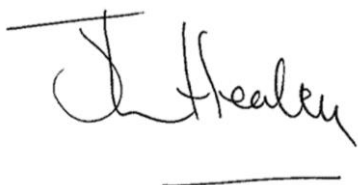
Third, the courts fulfil a core constitutional role in acting as a check on executive competence. The way this role works must however be proportionate, and in some instances it has become clear that the system of judicial review is out of balance. That is why the Government took action last year to limit the number of attempts that can be made to bring a judicial review against nationally significant infrastructure projects, and why the Government has been advancing further reforms to limit the scope for judicial review where Parliament has had a say in authorising a project.

The Government intends to progress these reforms, and to broaden the range of projects to which they can apply, from only energy projects to all nationally significant infrastructure projects. This will mean that transport, water and other types of major infrastructure can benefit from the parliamentary authorisation route once we have passed the necessary legislation.

Getting on with the job

Our intention with these reforms is to reinstalled the sense of agency in government – because promising change is the easy bit, and the real job is making it happen.

If we are to succeed, all of us need to feel that we can act, and act boldly. That means taking responsibility and instilling this greater agency within your own departments. In doing so, we are confident that the Civil Service will embrace this new approach and support us in raising the bar for what a confident and ambitious government can achieve.



THE RT HON JOHN HEALEY MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer



THE RT HON LOUISE HAIGH MP
First Secretary of State



THE RT HON ELLIE REEVES KC MP
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