

CHARTER FOR UK GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT WITH THE OVERSEAS TERRITORIES

Preamble

1. This Charter re-affirms the commitment of the Government of the United Kingdom to the Overseas Territories. Together with the Crown Dependencies, we form one undivided realm, committed to working in partnership with one another.
2. The Charter does not seek to replicate the breadth and depth of the constitutional, societal, and historic relationship with the Territories, but to provide a clear and ambitious statement of the principles of how the UK Government will engage with the Governments of the Territories.
3. The Charter of Engagement consolidates and codifies responsibilities and established practice for UK Government engagement with the Overseas Territories. It aims to provide clarity for officials and reinforce consistent engagement in line with the constitutional arrangements of each Overseas Territory, as set out in their written constitutions contained in Orders in Council. These Orders set out the powers and responsibilities of the institutions of government, which in populated Territories include a Governor, and elected leaders, legislatures and representatives.

Section 1: Introduction

4. The Overseas Territories make invaluable contributions to our British family and are integral to both the history and the future of the United Kingdom. We are equal partners in a relationship defined not by history alone, but by shared purpose and mutual contribution, including safeguarding precious biodiversity, hosting critical international security assets, providing key economic value, sporting and cultural contributions, and advancing our shared values of freedom and openness.
5. The relationship is grounded in shared values, mutual respect, and a commitment to prosperity, security, and sustainability. The people of the Territories are predominantly British nationals.
6. The UK has a fundamental responsibility, flowing from international law and our shared history, to ensure the security and good governance of the Overseas Territories and their peoples^{1,2}.

¹ The [1999 White Paper](#) established the modern constitutional framework through an Act of Parliament

² The [2012 White Paper](#) remains important as the foundation of the UK's modern relationship with the Overseas Territories

7. The UK aims to support the Territories to continue to develop self-government and free political institutions and to invest in capacity building within the Territories to ensure the effective exercise of the Territory Government's responsibilities³.

Section 2: The UK's international legal responsibility

8. The UK's primary obligations under international law for the populated Overseas Territories flow from Article 73 of the UN Charter⁴. Under that Article, the UK must treat the interests of the peoples of the Territories as paramount and promote their well-being, including by advancing their political, economic social and educational development. Further, the UK is responsible for the Territories' external relations and is responsible in international law for their compliance with applicable international obligations.

9. The United Kingdom carries significant contingent liabilities in respect of the Territories, resulting from moral, legal and political imperatives. The UK has a range of mechanisms through which it fulfils its responsibilities to the Overseas Territories and manages these liabilities. Some responsibilities are fulfilled via a Territory Government, Governor and some (for example in matters of defence) by the UK Government directly – this requires strong partnerships between each of us.

10. Under the relevant constitutions, powers are delegated to the democratically elected governments of the Territories, consistent with the UK retaining the ability to fulfil its sovereign obligations and responsibilities and meet its duty to manage its liabilities effectively.

Section 3: Principles of UK Engagement with the Overseas Territories

- 11. This Government affirms the following principles for its engagement with the elected Governments of the Overseas Territories⁵:
 - a. devolution and democratic autonomy for the Overseas Territories, and consistency on the principles of partnership and engagement
 - b. listening to the Territories, following the principle of “nothing about you without you”
 - c. partnership with the Territories based on mutual respect and inclusion – where rights come with responsibilities, including to uphold our common values
 - d. good governance and ensuring proper democratic accountability and regulation
 - e. defending the Territories' security, autonomy and rights, including the right of self-determination

³ [The Overseas Territories 2012 White Paper](#)

⁴ [Chapter XI: Article 73 — Charter of the United Nations](#)

⁵ [2024 UK and Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council communiqué](#)

- f. the people of the Territories are considered in relevant UK Government policymaking and delivery

Section 4: Internal UK departmental allocation of responsibility

12. This section concerns the allocation of responsibilities or oversight within the United Kingdom Government for engagement with the Overseas Territories, whether that be for issues which are a clear UK lead or usually devolved to the Territory Government or Governor. This reflects the fact that the United Kingdom has international obligations under international law, as set out in Section 2, which cannot be altered unilaterally by the UK or Territory.

13. Within that framework, departmental responsibility for the Territories generally rests with the UK department holding the corresponding policy lead. Governors have powers and responsibilities under the relevant Constitutions and can receive instructions from UK Secretaries of State on behalf of the Crown, related to these.

14. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has lead responsibility within the UK Government for managing the UK's relationship with the Overseas Territories and for coordinating engagement across Whitehall e.g. of other government departments' own responsibilities to OTs, and chairing the OT Ministerial Group.

- 15. The UK Government affirms that:
- a) all UK Government departments recognise their responsibilities to the Governments of the Territories in their area of competence and expertise⁶
 - b) all UK Government departments with responsibilities for the Overseas Territories should assign a Minister responsible for their department's relationship with them⁷
 - c) all UK Government departments should consider Territory interests when developing new policies, including legislation, that may affect them and when considering signing up to international treaties
 - d) all UK Government departments should consider their responsibilities to the Territories in departmental business planning, and management of risks and liabilities as well as opportunities
 - e) the Overseas Territories are part of the "homeland" and should be treated as such, not least when it comes to defence and security responsibilities

16. Both the Strategic Defence Review 2025 – *Making Britain Safer: secure at home, strong abroad* and the National Security Strategy 2025: *Security for the British People in a Dangerous World* are examples of how the UK Government is delivering

⁶ [Guide to making legislation \(HTML\) - GOV.UK](#)

⁷ [2023 UK and Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council communiqué - GOV.UK](#)

on the principles this Charter sets out. Other notable examples include the UK OTs Biodiversity Strategy 2025.

Section 5: Governance

17. This section affirms the UK Government's commitment to engaging with the Governments of the Overseas Territories through clear and regular governance mechanisms.

18. The FCDO Minister for the Overseas Territories chairs a Ministerial Group made up of the cross-Whitehall Ministers with responsibility for the Territories. The Ministerial Group agrees, assigns and reviews departmental action to address priority Overseas Territories issues and leads UK Government activity on the Territories, regularly reviewing progress against responsibilities. In line with the principle of 'nothing about you, without you', Overseas Territories' elected representatives are consulted on the agenda of the Ministerial Group and are provided a readout of meetings.

19. The UK-Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council, which was established under the 2012 White Paper, meets annually⁸. The JMC provides a forum for the exchange of views on political and constitutional issues between the Governments of the Territories and the UK Government, promote the security and good governance of the Territories and their sustainable economic and social development and agree priorities, develop plans and review implementation. The agenda is jointly agreed between the UK Government and the Governments of the Territories.

⁸ The JMC has convened annually, with the exception of 2019 (owing to the general election) and 2022 (due to the COVID-19 pandemic).