

How can No 10 and the CO better support the PM in this next phase?

We spoke to 45+ people over 3 days: predominantly people working closely in No 10 and the CO secretariat but we also had some perspective from departments. We asked open questions about what the problems were and what could be better. This wasn't a perfect or comprehensive exercise. It was very striking how similar the problem diagnosis was whether we were talking to political advisers or civil servants who work either side of the link door. Also how frank and open they were (but with hardly any individual criticism) and how committed everyone was to sorting it out.

There were some universal themes:

1. PM meetings aren't working

There are far too many meetings: they are poorly structured and prepared; we are repeatedly having policy discussions about operational problems which is never going to resolve them (plus without the right expertise in the room); there isn't enough time to prepare good papers and have the necessary pre-meets and gather the right expertise. When that is done it is disregarded. There are too many people in the room and people aren't disciplined about their contributions. "Decisions are never final". "We are trying to do too much and nothing is focused" "We have a hundred actions and no plan" "The top two tiers of leadership spend all their time in the same meetings"

2. The culture isn't getting the best from people

Not working as one team between the CO & No 10 -not one team in the CO. Fights over ownership. "Lots of senior people negotiating with each other rather than doing stuff". Not sustainable. People are exhausted and stressed. Don't feel confident or empowered to take decisions (almost universal sense of powerlessness to direct or fix any of these problems). Trying to do too much so nothing is done well. "no one listens to anyone else". Views ignored. Bad behaviours from senior leaders tolerated. Too much politics (small p) "Elbowy". Focus on grip at expense of collective leadership. Too many people behaving as if they have been parachuted in to save the day. "Explosions of new people causing chaos". Divide between people in the office and at home. Incentives to hoard information not share. No 10 always at war with someone. Everyone wants to be in the room with the PM. Not enough trust. Lots of people¹ mentioned junior women being talked over or ignored. We need a modern culture of organised collaboration not superhero bunfight".

3. The Cabinet Office team is too big to be effective & roles and responsibilities in the CO and No 10 and between the two are not clear

Fallen out of shape. This has compounded some pre-existing problems about ways of working between CO secretariat teams and No 10. Too many CO senior leaders which means they can't take decisions without consulting others. Sense that Cabinet Office has lost its way in making the Whitehall machine work for No 10: not

¹ including those who had talked over junior women