

Message

From: John Owen [john.owen@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]
on behalf of John Owen <john.owen@cabinetoffice.gov.uk> [john.owen@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]
Sent: 27/04/2020 8:10:49 AM
To: Simon Case [simon.case@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]
CC: Helen MacNamara [helen.macnamara@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]; Mark Sweeney [mark.sweeney@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]; Simon Ridley [simon.ridley@cabinetoffice.gov.uk]
Subject: Re: How we govern

I think this is an excellent idea and exactly what we should be doing now as we prepare to enter the 'normal state' phase of this crisis. Let's use the discussion to scope out what the qu's are that need answering as (tempting though it is) we won't be able to solve it amongst ourselves. And then that will help us to work out who does this for us because it is a potentially huge piece of work- how do we govern more effectively in the modern world.

Should also keep in mind the wider read across with civil service 'reform' agenda.



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On Sun, 26 Apr 2020 at 12:47, Simon Case <simon.case@cabinetoffice.gov.uk> wrote:
Helen,

Yes, I'm in.

Your thoughts below capture many of the key issues for me. I agree that any conversation ought not start with self-flagellation - we can all see the flaws at present, but those are not anyone's "fault". Most things are Covid's fault - it is challenging us like very few things have before! Based on experiences from the crisis so far, we ought to take the opportunity now to ask ourselves, "what could we do differently from here?"

On practicalities, I'll fit in with the majority view as to whether we go for beginning or end of day. I would always vote to include Jonathan Jones in most conversations (simply because he just makes many things better!), but I think there would be an especially strong argument for making him part of this one.

Simon (C!)

On Sun, 26 Apr 2020 at 12:31, Helen MacNamara <helen.macnamara@cabinetoffice.gov.uk> wrote:

Simon R just prompted me on wider question we need to consider - Simon C and I had discussed a week or so ago. Am going to put something in diaries for later in the week - vote for beginning or end of the day; and who you think should come. But I want us to start a conversation on this because we should think through whether there are changes we should be recommending that will put us in a better position to govern well and

respond to the challenges in X months. I don't think we can carry on working as we are - we're not going to get the best outcomes and we are damaging people who work for us.

Some thoughts as a starter for 10.

1. It is not surprising that we - in government - are not set up to respond to a pandemic of this scale and the impact it is having across our economy, society and political system.
 2. We should not beat ourselves up about this. It would be surprising to discover that we were.
 3. Across the "system" (I am not convinced we have "a system") there are issues of accountability and delivery and that we are discovering the structures we have aren't facing into the problems that need fixing. Most government departments are geared to doing the things that their ministers want to do; not responding to external events.
 4. There is a really interesting q as to whether this is about not having structures that work for a) pandemic response and mgmt and or b) governing in general. The conversations about PPE and supporting vulnerable people are good examples (that we should use as case studies for the discussion); but so is the way we are going about the response strategy.
 5. It is reasonable to assume that this pandemic will have widespread consequences that we don't know and can't see yet. It is also reasonable to assume that we will need to be in the "adaptive" phase for 18 months-2 years until there are widespread treatments that dramatically reduce the mortality and/or effective vaccination (it is not an accident that I have put it this way round).
 6. It would be helpful to have some end states. What are the 3 scenarios we think we might be living in this time next year (I mean 3 central scenarios in terms of controlling the pandemic - not extremes of loss of public order etc - we should think about those mega risks too); and what would we need government (local and national) to be doing and what would they need to make that work?
 7. Plus there may be some related constitutional changes. On a small scale can see - for example - a pressure to make SAGE like the OBR? Simon R reminded me that after Grenfell we knew the Dept wasn't big enough to do what it had to do so it had to grow but that we thought the dept could manage. -There is a much bigger q for DHSC. Will it be able to do everything that is being asked of it? What is the medium term answer? I don't think we can necessarily put off the qs of the right governance of the NHS until afterwards. But these aren't academic qs. And answer should come from the function that we think is needed. And on the wider question not clear how much this changes relationship between citizen and state.
- Equally the thought of being involved in these conversations might be v depressing. So totally optional. But I'd like to have help in getting the commission right for a piece of work I think we need to do away from the fray. We'll work out who and how.

Let me know if you're up for.

H

		Helen MacNamara Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet
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