

Re:State

Re:Imagining Whitehall

Monday 16 June 2025
London

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#ReimaginingWhitehall



Agenda

9.00 - 9.40	Registration and refreshments
9.40 - 9.50	Welcome and introduction Charlotte Pickles, Director, <i>Re:State</i> Simon Godfrey, Senior Director, External Engagement and Business Growth, BT
9.50 - 11.00 In partnership with 	Panel one – Mission control: delivering the Government’s priorities This panel will discuss the tools, approaches, and cultural shifts required for Whitehall to redefine its role in driving new and challenging Missions at the heart of the Government’s agenda. Susan Acland-Hood, Permanent Secretary, Department for Education Richard Clarke, Director General, Public Safety Group & SRO, Safer Streets Mission, Home Office Nick Kimber, Director, Public Service Reform, Cabinet Office Ed Stainton, Managing Director, Public Sector, BT
11.00 - 11.20	Break
11.20 - 12.30 In partnership with 	Panel two – Getting the machine learning: AI-driven Whitehall This panel will examine how the civil service can integrate AI into its practices while equipping its workforce with the necessary expertise. It will discuss how Whitehall can use AI to deliver a smarter, more responsive government. Chloe Hoggard, Vice President, Head of MuleSoft Public Sector, Salesforce Christophe Prince, Director, Data and Identity, Home Office Sapna Sanghvi, Deputy Director, Data Science & AI, Ministry of Justice Liam Wilkinson, Head of AI Incubation, Incubator for Artificial Intelligence
12.30 - 13.10	Keynote address Georgia Gould OBE MP, Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office
13.10 - 13.15	Closing remarks
13.15 - 14.15	Lunch

Our mission

While 2024 delivered a new Government, Britain continues to face the same – era-defining – challenges. In fact, in many respects they are even more acute. Geopolitical tensions and risks continue as the backdrop to domestic decisions. Demographic and technological change, already reshaping the nation, continues at pace. And economic growth, the number one mission of the new Labour Government, remains elusive.

At *Re:State*, we believe that Britain's prosperity is inextricably linked to the health of our public services and the effectiveness of the State. Yet the public service institutions and approaches we rely on remain modified versions of those built as part of the post-war settlement. The aims and ambitions of those who designed them were inspiring, but the challenges that faced 1940s Britain are not those of today. Continuing to tweak a broken system, hoping for radically different outcomes, won't work.

Instead, we want to see a public service model that reduces demand rather than simply manages it. We want to see a settlement that recognises that the welfare of the people cannot – and should not – be delivered by the State alone.

In practice we think that means overhauling the centre: dismantling top-down bureaucracies and building local capabilities; rethinking outdated institutions; and challenging existing models.

That is precisely what our 'Re:Imagining the State' programme is focused on: putting forward bold but implementable ideas to transform how our state infrastructure works.

I am delighted to welcome you to our annual 'Re:Imaging Whitehall' conference, again bringing together reform-minded leaders, experts and practitioners. The Government's *Plan for Change* commits to overhauling the Whitehall machine: embedding mission government, reducing headcount and boosting performance, deploying AI and rethinking risk, reforming incentives and accountability, and enabling a more long-termist approach. These are all topics *Re:State* has been exploring, and we're excited to continue to do so with you today.

Thank you for joining us.



Charlotte Pickles
Director
Re:State

Our team



Rosie Beacon
Research Manager &
Head of Health



Cory Berman
Researcher



Florence Conway
Researcher



Sean Eke
Researcher



Joe Hill
Policy Director



Dr Simon Kaye
Policy Director



Sylvie Macdonald
Events & Partnerships
Officer



Joe Martin
Senior Researcher



Alice Semark
Researcher

Re:Imagining Whitehall

This year, our 'Re:Imagining Whitehall' programme turns three. Our longest-running workstream starts from the position that a high-performing civil service is vital to remaking the State and supporting the government of the day with the challenges they face.

We are defining the model for a civil service in the twenty-first century, not rooted in abstract ideas but the very real challenges which civil servants deal with every day.

As our first 'Re:Imagining Whitehall' conference under the new Government, it's a great opportunity to reflect on the impact of our recent work:

- *Mission control* – before the General Election, we set out our model for how to make mission-led government a success, elements of which have been adopted in the Mission Delivery Unit.
- * *Making the grade* – which identified a new model for addressing the twin challenges of encouraging exceptional talent and addressing repeat poor performance in the civil service. The measures on poor performance are being pursued by the Government.
- * *Getting the machine learning* – set out the practical steps for the Government to take to significantly increase automation and AI adoption in the civil service, with recommendations featured in the *AI Opportunities Action Plan* and the *Blueprint for a Modern Digital Government*.
- * *Grown-up government* – took a long-term look at the challenges of getting high-quality political support for Ministers, where Britain is an international outlier in how few appointments Ministers can make, and special adviser salaries have been even more sharply depressed than civil service roles.

- *The price of everything* – we set out priority areas for the Treasury's new Office for Value for Money to investigate. *Re:State* is now a formal evaluation partner to OVfM.
- *Byte-sized budgeting* – our report identified the challenges with the funding model for digital services in government, with analysis and recommendations taken up in the *Performance Review of Digital Spend* by HM Treasury.
- *Quangocracy* – taking a look at the complex landscape of public bodies, we recommended a new model for classifying them, and new principles which would see over 100 existing or new public bodies brought in house or closed. Two weeks later the Government announced a plan to do just that, starting with NHS England being brought back in house. We called for this last year in our 'Re:Imagining Health' paper, *Close enough to care*.
- *Everythingism* – we wrote about the challenges with a delivery approach which expects every government policy to deliver every other government policy, all at once, and called for a return to simplification and focus.
- *Rebuilding state capacity* – working in partnership with the Labour Growth Group, we outlined the key policies to improve Whitehall's ability to deliver for the Government.

The stakes have never been higher. Less than a year on from the election, and the future of party politics looks even more uncertain. But for officials in Whitehall, the challenges remain the same – delivering for the public, and reforming the State to deliver for citizens.

Looking to the year ahead, we plan to advance the state of thinking and best practice on all these issues, and plenty more.

REFORM	REFORM	REFORM	REFORM	REFORM
Making the grade Prioritising performance in Whitehall	GETTING THE MACHINE LEARNING Scaling AI in public services	GROWN UP GOVERNMENT Towards a comprehensive model of political support	FULL STREAM AHEAD The future of the Fast Stream	QUANGOCRACY The future of public bodies
Joe Hill Charlotte Pickles Sean Eke	May 2024 Joe Hill Sean Eke	September 2024 Patrick King Charlotte Pickles	November 2024 Patrick King Joe Hill	December 2024 Patrick King Alice Simsek
				February 2025

Delivery and democracy, looking back to look forward



Dr Michelle Clement
Author and Lecturer

“There has never been a time in history when the need for governments to deliver on their promises has been more important than now. Cynicism about politics, politicians and government has grown, is growing and needs to be diminished because it is dangerous. ... Effective delivery alone cannot reverse these disturbing trends – but it is equally clear that they cannot be reversed in the absence of delivery.”

Writing in the foreword of my book *The Art of Delivery: The Inside Story of the How the Blair Government Transformed Britain’s Public Services*, Sir Michael Barber highlights the importance of the moment we are in. History provides an important lens for current events, but the lack of institutional memory in government means that much of this story remains untold.

The Labour Party won the 1997 General Election with the biggest parliamentary majority since the Second World War, but it took until the second election win in 2001 for a mature public service reform agenda, ambitious ministerial team and effective machinery of government to be developed. Prime ministers really do have to learn on the job (and without their own department)!

The challenge of implementing structural reform and delivering policies that would make a difference by the end of the Parliament was a tall order. Alan Milburn, Secretary of State for Health 1999-2003, told me, “What you’re doing is you’re flying the machine, and you’re building it at the same time.”

Though it was part of larger whole, a wider intellectual and institutional approach to reforming public services, the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit would come to be seen as the “single

biggest contributor” to the delivery of this ambitious agenda. It monitored and supported the implementation of Blair’s public service reform priorities in health, education, transport, crime, and asylum. Not only did it increase the power of the Prime Minister, but it also became a kind of ‘transmission belt’ for Cabinet ministers to communicate blocks to progress back to the centre. Remarkably, given the Blair-Brown rivalry, it became a tool for the Treasury to assess the deliverability of new policies in successive spending reviews. Moreover, it set in train a culture shift within Whitehall which saw ‘delivery’ become a recognised responsibility of the Civil Service.

Much has been written about ‘the science of delivery’ – that is the consistent monitoring processes – but little has been written about ‘the art of delivery’ – the relentless relationship-building. Barber’s ability to form effective working relationships was critical to this art, without which the ‘science’ could not have been put into practice.

During his Government, Blair set a new standard for what I call “prime ministerial responsibility”. He became so adept that one permanent secretary remarked, “the Prime Minister was invariably on top of the detail and knew the answers better than the officials in front of him”.

But crucially, Blair also developed the necessary humility that successful prime ministers come to appreciate. In early 2002 speaking to a group of civil servants, Blair said, “you’ve probably got used to the idea that your career depends on me ... I’m just coming to terms with the idea that my career depends on you.”

Mission control: delivering the Government's priorities

Mission government must not fail to launch



Dr Simon Kaye
Policy Director
Re:State

The biggest risk to a mission is that it never really gets started in the first place.

Many things can go wrong after that point, of course. The resources could be misdirected. There could be ‘mission-creep’, absorbing ever-more objectives and aspirations to the point of undeliverability (some people call this ‘Everythingism’).

Or a crucial area of innovation or advancement could misfire, setting a mission back by years.

‘Levelling up’ – the cornerstone domestic policy programme of the last Government – incorporated explicit ‘missions’ into its framework, and created statutory responsibilities around reporting on progress toward them. These were missions that got to the launchpad, that got underway – and fizzled out for other reasons.

But, if we take into account all of the missions – explicit or implicit – that are promised or planned by successive generations of politicians, the number one cause of mortality is failure to launch. As Thomas Edison once observed, “strategy without delivery is hallucination” – and many missions fall at the first hurdle: no delivery architecture is ever truly built.

They never find the wherewithal to get started. The crucial people are never put in place. The need to urgently respond to the crisis-of-the-day is never quite shaken off. The conversation moves on, the urgency fades, and the mission is absorbed by day-to-day practice: a fresh language for an old way of doing things.

And, just like that, the mission is stillborn.

Take a clear-eyed look at the missions promised by the current Government – at the idea of ‘Mission government’ itself – and it becomes clear that ‘failure to launch’ remains a risk. This is not for lack of effort. The Mission Boards have been established, with Secretaries of State as chairs, and a Mission Delivery Unit has been set up in the

Cabinet Office. Innovative approaches are being trialled, with valiant efforts to collaborate at the national, regional, and local scales.

Yet, so far, the levers and measures promised within these frameworks are in the realm of traditional policymaking, rather than being transformative to the wider system.

As *Re:State* research has argued, a truly mission-led government would reboot Whitehall by breaking decisively from business-as-usual structures. Rather than layering missions onto existing systems, new institutions with teeth and accountability, like a central Missions Unit with its own permanent secretary-level CEO, would support mission leaders to act with genuine autonomy.

This Government would not be alone in finding its efforts stymied by inertia. The ‘Big Society’ concept – a mission of sorts – arguably occupied the same role in David Cameron’s winning 2010 manifesto as ‘Mission government’ did in Starmer’s 2024 campaign. It was then the big idea, the promise to do things in a fundamentally different way: to reorganise the system around a new system of priorities.

The Big Society, to all intents and purposes, never materialised: it was overtaken by the depth of local cuts as fiscal retrenchment began to bite.

Financial constraints are certainly one of the inhibiting factors on the realisation of real mission government today. The sheer scale and multiplicity of the promised mission agenda is another – perhaps there are too many priorities.

But the organisational and logistical shifts promised by properly-established mission government should not be forgotten. This could yet be the critical impetus needed to shake up the Whitehall system for good.

Mission government is a profound cultural shift



Nick Kimber
Director, Public Service Reform
Cabinet Office

Missions set ambitious goals which, by definition, we don't yet know how to achieve. If we did, they wouldn't be stretching enough, nor would they inspire the whole societal effort needed to reach them. Governments, in dialogue with citizens, can set missions but they can't deliver them alone.

The way government works needs to shift, from delivering services and managing risk, to stewardship and orchestration across a range of different dimensions. It requires public servants thinking about policy horizontally (between different sectors, disciplines and partners); vertically, from Westminster to neighbourhood level (with information and power flowing from top to bottom and bottom to top); and diagonally (linking operational managers and frontline delivery staff with senior leaders).

At Camden, four years into an attempt to pivot the borough and the Council to a mission-based approach, we have thought about our four missions as complemented by one which is about generational reform of the local authority itself. This not so secret 'fifth mission' provides the call to action for officers and elected members and a basis for dialogue with our community and partners.

An annual We Make Camden conference (this year attended by the Prime Minister) brings together 200 leaders from across the borough to provide the regular cadence of reflection, looking back on what we've achieved together

and forward to the challenges and opportunities of the coming year. Missions provide the clarity of purpose that can cut through the hyper-complexity of governing our corner of north London, creating permission to try things and take risks.

At national level, missions are providing similar opportunities for experimentation and renewed relationships between different tiers of government. The Test, Learn and Grow programme takes place as its starting point, working with local areas to drive rapid cycles of learning about what works to reform public services and drive the delivery of national missions. Early work with four local authorities over the last three months has shown promising impact, and modelled a new way of working.

Over the course of the next three years, we will work with half a dozen more places to test approaches to community-led neighbourhood health that support the 'left shift' to prevention, support employers to change recruitment practices to drive down the disability employment gap, trial approaches to reducing violence against women and girls, and other ideas anchored in missions. Alongside this we will explore ways of 'growing' this way of working, cultivating the conditions for iterative, design-led approaches that support public servants to work across the dimensions described above. Missions at their best, whether local or national, create an environment to innovate and test and learn shows one way of doing that.



Making missions matter



Ed Stainton
Managing Director
Public Sector
BT

Whether at the national level or within individual organisations, missions shaped by political priorities and community needs are essential. By focusing on outcomes, we can ensure that the necessary changes, across both the public and private sectors, are delivered effectively.

At BT, missions play a fundamental role in our work. From ensuring the reliability of the 999 service, to supporting critical national infrastructure through our work with NATS, DWP, HMRC, local authorities, and the NHS, we uphold the principles of public service. This commitment is embedded in our DNA and is just as vital in delivering high-quality services to consumers and businesses across the country.

The years ahead are pivotal. The work we're doing today is laying the foundation for future success and the growth our country urgently needs. We've invested significantly – financially, technically, and personally – to build capabilities that can withstand the challenges we face, whether from hostile nation states, cybercriminals, or unforeseen threats. We are ready to play our part in building a better Britain.

The Government's missions – Safer Streets, a future-ready NHS, economic growth, opportunity for all, and a cleaner, greener Britain – are foundational to national success. Technology is central to achieving these goals. Without the commitment of businesses like BT, delivering on this ambition would be far more difficult.

That's why we've aligned our organisation to support these five missions. We've reshaped BT to meet both local and national needs, leveraging our deep experience, exceptional talent, and world-class capabilities to help realise the Government's vision.

If ever there was a time for local champions and national partners, it is now. We are listening, adapting, and evolving – investing in solutions that support the transformation needed to make the UK the best it can be.

We are proud to support *Re:State* in their important work.



Getting the machine learning: AI-driven Whitehall

The machine is learning that scale matters



Joe Hill
Policy Director
Re:State

Last year I had a fantastic conversation at our ‘Reimagining Whitehall’ conference about the potential of AI in public services, and what a Government taking those reforms seriously would need to do. A year on, what’s changed?

I believe we’re seeing signs of a generational shift in how the State thinks about AI adoption. In the whole economy, and specifically in public services. There’s widespread, mainstream consensus that AI isn’t a fad, isn’t going to blow over, and is here to stay. It’s stated government policy – from the *AI Opportunities Action Plan* to the *Blueprint for a Modern Digital Government*. And there’s growing evidence in the rest of the economy that simple tools based on machine learning can automate large parts of people’s workflows.

Attitudes have turned on a dime, particularly in the tech sector itself. Tobi Lutke, CEO of Shopify, has announced teams won’t be able to hire people until they prove that AI can’t do the job they want to recruit for. Nicolai Tangen, who manages the Norwegian Sovereign Wealth Fund (the largest in the world), told *Bloomberg* recently that using AI in his organisation “can’t be voluntary. It isn’t voluntary to use AI or not... If you don’t use it, you will never be promoted. You won’t get a job”.

Public services desperately need productivity improvement. There has never been a better burning bridge to catalyse reform than the one Whitehall has now. The heat is rising, but change is still slow, because there’s a missing ingredient.

Scale. In our paper *Getting the machine learning* from last September, we identified scale as the key missing ingredient. Government is full of goodwill for AI adoption, promising technologies in pilot stages, and problems they could address. But Whitehall

still lacks the mechanisms, from funding to recruitment and development to deployment, to implement the AI transformation at sufficient scale.

Scale is key because that’s where the benefits lie, to the public and public services. There are plenty of hubs of innovation, often piloting AI in interesting new areas of greenfield policy development. But the real change will come when we can use it in the hardest places – where there are big caseworking operations, serving hundreds of thousands of members of the public, every single day.

“The future is already here – it’s just not evenly distributed yet” is one of those fantastic quotes of uncertain provenance, but most people attribute it to the sci-fi writer William Gibson. It’s timeless because progress always emerges in a few places, then spreads. Right now, those pockets of innovation are mainly in the private sector, but you can see plenty of examples in the civil service.

We know what the playbook for embracing scale is, and how it departs from the norm. A new relationship with industry – strategically partnering with hyperscalers, building competitive capability in-house, and growing commercial partnerships by using off-the-shelf tools. A realistic attitude to risk, which puts automated software on the same footing as public servants. And a model of investment which can move more quickly than an annual business case process.

At this critical juncture, as the AI revolution turns the global economy on its head, history will judge States on whether they can update to a new world order. Only by embracing change at scale is that possible.

AI can make the civil service future-ready



Chloe Hoggard
Vice President
Head of MuleSoft Public Sector
Salesforce

AI is revolutionising the private sector, enhancing customer experiences, optimising operations, and driving innovation across many industries. The public sector, however, stands to gain even more from AI's transformative power. For the civil service to fully leverage this potential, it's crucial to focus on practical integration, workforce development, and responsible innovation.

Salesforce has witnessed firsthand how AI, especially when combined with trusted data and robust governance, can significantly improve public service delivery. From reducing casework backlogs and improving citizen interactions through AI agents to automating triage processes, the applications are vast and expanding. The immediate priority is implementing these solutions at scale within the government.

Initial integration should target high-value, low-risk use cases. AI adoption doesn't require extensive overhauls; it can begin with process improvements that alleviate administrative burdens, allowing civil servants to concentrate on more critical tasks. Salesforce's unified AI platform, Agentforce, is already assisting public sector teams in triaging complex queries, generating policy insights, and streamlining case management, all while maintaining trust and transparency.

However, technology alone is insufficient. True transformation requires upskilling the workforce. A future-ready civil service must

cultivate widespread digital fluency and AI literacy, extending beyond specialised teams. This requires ongoing training, accessible tools, and a culture that empowers civil servants to confidently use AI.

Procurement reform is essential, too. Often, outdated procedures hinder innovation and prioritise short-term fixes over adaptable platforms. That is why initiatives such as the *Blueprint for Digital Government* and the UK's *Digital, Data and Technology Playbook* are welcome, promoting greater flexibility and collaboration with industry, particularly SMEs and AI innovators.

Finally, responsibility must remain paramount. Citizens rightly expect the government's use of AI to be ethical, explainable, and secure. Salesforce designs its enterprise-grade AI systems with a strong emphasis on transparency and reliability, providing users with clear insights into output generation and ensuring human oversight at every stage.

We can all agree AI presents an unprecedented opportunity to create a more intelligent and responsive government that not only meets but also shapes public expectations. The UK possesses the ambition and talent to be a leader in this field. Now it needs the infrastructure, investment, and collaboration to realise this potential.



Join us

As an educational charity, *Re:State* produces robust, evidence-led research with innovative but implementable policy solutions; and we convene reform-minded people from across the political spectrum to advance open debate and generate fresh thinking.

In a nutshell, we are home to bold ideas and big conversations.

We bring together like-minded individuals and organisations who share our commitment to finding innovative solutions to public policy challenges. Our Corporate Partnership programme is part of this impactful network.

We value the commitment of our partners very highly. We pride ourselves on building strong and mutually beneficial relationships, and work with our partners so they can get the most out of joining our network.

To find out more, please contact sylvie.macdonald@re-state.co.uk.



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