Re:State

THE ALTERNATIVE PEOPLE SURVEY 2026

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ABOUT RE:STATE

Re:State is established as the leading Westminster think tank for public service reform. We believe that the State has a fundamental role to play in enabling individuals, families, and communities to thrive. But our vision is one in which the State delivers only the services that it is best placed to deliver, within sound public finances, and where both decision-making and delivery is devolved to the most appropriate level. We are committed to driving systemic change that will deliver better outcomes for all.

We are determinedly independent and strictly non-party in our approach. This is reflected in our cross-party Advisory Board and our events programme which seeks to convene likeminded reformers from across the political spectrum.

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ABOUT RE:IMAGINING THE STATE

After a decade of disruption, the country faces a moment of national reflection. For too long, Britain has been papering over the cracks in an outdated social and economic model, but while this may bring temporary respite, it doesn't fix the foundations. In 1942, Beveridge stated: "a revolutionary moment in the world's history is a time for revolutions, not for patching". Over 80 years on, and in the wake of a devastating national crisis, that statement once again rings true. Now is the time to fix Britain's foundations.

Re:State's programme, 'Re:Imagining the State', puts forward a bold new vision for the role and shape of the State – one that can create the conditions for strong, confident communities, dynamic, innovative markets, and transformative, sustainable public services.

'Re:Imagining Whitehall' is one of the major workstreams within this programme.

ABOUT RE:IMAGINING WHITEHALL

This paper is part of the 'Re:Imagining Whitehall' workstream. To effectively reimagine the State itself, the institution at its heart needs to radically change – Whitehall. Both the First and Second World Wars led to a rewiring of the core structures of the State, driven by an imperative to 'build back better' and an understanding that the effectiveness of the machinery of government would make or break that endeavour. After a decade of deep disruption – economic stagnation, pandemic, trade conflict, and war in Europe – we face a similar task.

While successive administrations have attempted to modernise the Civil Service and improve the structure of Whitehall, the same problems recur time and time again. The system is slow to change, and reforms are hard to make last. To effectively reimagine the State, major change must occur in the behaviours, processes, and structures of central government. This report presents the findings of the second Alternative People Survey, in which 1,747 civil servants describe how Whitehall is working, and sets out where change is still needed.

ABOUT THE ALTERNATIVE PEOPLE SURVEY

The Civil Service is an unusually anonymous workforce. Its officials traditionally don't, and indeed can't, take public positions about government policy, and political impartiality also extends to discussing their own experience of work. The annual Civil Service People Survey offers a helpful but incomplete picture, mediated through the Cabinet Office's own view of what the important and appropriate questions to ask are.

The Alternative People Survey, run annually by *Re:State* and *Civil Service World*, is designed to fill that gap. Its purpose is to give civil servants a way to say how the system they work within is really functioning, and to track how that changes over time. It is a self-selecting survey, but it gives a powerful indication of how people are feeling.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank *Civil Service World* for partnering with us to deliver this Alternative People Survey, and the 1,747 civil servants who responded.

The arguments and any errors that remain are the authors' and the authors' alone.

METHODOLOGY

This Survey was conducted in partnership with *Civil Service World* (*CSW*) and Public First. It contained 42 questions, of which 41 offered multiple options. Question 36 provided respondents with a free-text box to answer an optional open-ended question.

Some of the Survey's questions repeat questions used in the 2025 Alternative People Survey. Where the same questions have been used, the 2025 results are shown alongside the 2026 results, with the percentage-point change to 2026 in brackets. Changes are calculated against the 2026 results excluding the operational delivery profession. Where questions are new, there are no comparative figures.

The Survey was live between 15 June 2026 and 20 July 2026. It was promoted by both *CSW* and *Re:State* via newsletters and social media channels. 1,747 civil servants completed all required questions in the Survey, a 38 per cent increase compared to 2025.

Results are presented in three columns. The first two are unweighted: one excluding respondents from the operational delivery profession and one including them. The third is weighted by department and grade, and includes operational delivery. Excluding operational delivery gives a sample of 1,456. Results for sub-groups are reported only where at least 100 respondents answered; smaller grades have been combined. We present results excluding the operational delivery profession as a proxy for the 'Whitehall' civil service, which is the focus of this Survey. Operational delivery staff principally deliver frontline services (such as paying benefits or staffing prisons) and their work differs substantially from the policy and corporate roles this Survey is designed to examine.

All weighted results are produced using iterative proportional fitting, or raking. The 2026 sample is raked to two targets, department and grade, so that the proportions match the

sample composition of the 2025 Survey. Public First is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. For more information, please contact the Public First polling team: polling@publicfirst.co.uk.

The breakdown of answers given to Questions 11 to 35 is set out in this paper. The answers given to Questions 1 to 10, which are about respondent demographics, are provided in Appendix 1. Several free-text answers to Question 36 are included in this paper.

It is important to note that while the Survey provides a powerful indicator of civil servants' views, it is not representative of the whole workforce and should not be treated as such. Respondents are self-selecting. Weighted figures are presented alongside unweighted ones, but weighting by department and grade does not correct for self-selection.

Respondents largely came from grades which are likely to have line management responsibilities; most had at least three years' experience in the Civil Service and were fairly evenly split on gender. The policy and operational delivery professions are the most represented, and London is the geography most represented.

- 53 per cent of respondents are female and 43 per cent are male, while 4 per cent preferred not to say.
- 6 per cent of respondents are Senior Civil Servants; 41 per cent are Grades 6 and 7; 48 per cent are SEO, HEO and EO; and 5 per cent are administrative grades and other.
- 14 per cent are from the Department for Work and Pensions, 10 per cent are from the Ministry of Defence, 10 per cent are from HM Revenue and Customs, and each other department represents less than 10 per cent.
- 25 per cent are from the policy profession; 18 per cent are from operational delivery; 13 per cent from project management and delivery; 11 per cent from human resources; 10 per cent from digital, data and technology; and less than 10 per cent from each of the other professions.
- 33 per cent are based in London, 10 per cent in the Northwest, and less than 10 per cent from each of the other regions.
- 64 per cent have been in the Civil Service for ten years or more, 22 per cent have been in the Civil Service for between five and nine years, 9 per cent have between three and four years, and 5 per cent have two years or less.
- 53 per cent are line managers.

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1. Introduction

The second Alternative People Survey arrives at a moment of genuine opportunity for reform. Fieldwork for this year's Survey closed on 20 July 2026, the day Andy Burnham succeeded Sir Keir Starmer as Prime Minister. Within days the new Government had begun its own reorganisation of the centre: creating an Office for the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, within which sits Number 10 North; disbanding the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (barely two years after it had been given responsibility for digital government); and establishing a OneGov Delivery Agency to take on recruitment, shared services and vetting. Within two weeks a Cabinet Statement announced "a fundamental rewiring" of the State, within which central government – namely Whitehall – would become "smaller and more strategic".[1]

This latest reorganisation is set against a familiar backdrop. The public finances remain under severe strain, departmental budgets are tightly constrained, and this Government, like those before it, has committed to reducing the size of the Civil Service. On this latter point, none have succeeded: the Civil Service has grown by around 8,000 people since the last Survey, even as departments run voluntary exit schemes and recruitment freezes.[2]

Last year, *Re:State* and *Civil Service World* launched the Alternative People Survey, building on the survey which supported the 2024 report *Making the grade: prioritising performance in Whitehall*. This is the second edition and offers a year-on-year comparison as well as a single snapshot. Results are now presented on three bases, including one weighted by department and grade. Weighting cannot, of course, correct for self-selection, but nonetheless the results give a powerful indication of how people are feeling, particularly within the 'Whitehall' Civil Service that is the focus of this Survey. Reflecting this, figures quoted in the text are the unweighted figures excluding the operational delivery profession, unless otherwise stated.

The results of this second Survey show a Civil Service which has been better equipped over the past year but not better managed. There has been considerable progress on technology and the tools available to staff, but almost none on how people are recruited, promoted, rewarded, and removed. Of respondents:

- 82 per cent were using AI tools in their work, up from 30 per cent last year, and 78 per cent of that group believed it helped them do their jobs better;
- only 7 per cent agreed with the statement "the civil service in general manages poor performance well", with 76 per cent disagreeing, compared to 8 per cent and 79 per cent respectively in 2025;
- 69 per cent agreed that their department provides sufficient access to data and technology, up from 48 per cent last year, and 52 per cent that they are encouraged to identify ways to cut waste, up from 37 per cent; and
- just 16 per cent believed that internal promotion processes lead to the right people being promoted, a new question in this year's Survey.

[1] Cabinet Office, *Rewiring the State - Cabinet Statement* (Cabinet Office, 2026).
[2] Cabinet Office, *Statistical Bulletin - Civil Service Statistics: 2025* (Cabinet Office, 2025); Cabinet Office, *Statistical Bulletin - Civil Service Statistics: 2026* (Cabinet Office, 2026).

A high-performing government requires a high-performing civil service. High-performing organisations attract, reward and retain talent, and quickly tackle underperformance. They create environments and cultures that incentivise creativity and innovation; they are laser-focused on outcomes, and they build the capacity and capability to achieve them.

The findings of this Survey suggest the Civil Service is capable of moving quickly when it is given the means to do so. The proportion of respondents using AI in their work has risen from 30 per cent to 82 per cent in a year, largely on their own initiative. What has not changed is the system around them. Reform of the machinery of government is ongoing, but the instruments for managing performance – for promoting the right people, rewarding those who deliver, and addressing those who do not – appear from our Survey results to be no more effective than last year. As one official wrote:

> "I think underperformance is managed badly. There is recognition of underperformance but no real consequences. There is little incentive for underperforming civil servants to improve."

It is essential that the Government recognises that in many areas, the starting point is a culture of significant disillusionment, rooted in a system whose approach to performance management, pay, process, and technology is no longer fit for purpose. That culture will need to change, as another official wrote:

> "The civil service still moves too slowly and has a low level of risk appetite and often appears to be trying to avoid it completely rather than intelligently manage it. I don't [think] the civil service is 'the blob' it's made out to be, and I've seen similar challenges in large private sector organisations. Cultural change is probably the biggest challenge the civil service faces."

The new Government has moved quickly to reshape the centre of government, and the Cabinet Secretary is in the process of undertaking a fundamental review as part of a new 'Future Civil Service' programme.[3] The findings that follow suggest that the real test of these reforms will be whether they reach beyond the machinery of government to the culture and systems that determine how civil servants are recruited, promoted, rewarded, and removed.

[3] Cabinet Office, *Review into the Organisation, Performance and Transformation of the Permanent Civil Service* (Cabinet Office, 2026).

2. Results

2.1 Talent and performance management

The first Alternative People Survey found strong support among civil servants for a more direct approach at both ends of the performance range: better recognition for those who deliver, and a workable route out for those who do not. A year on, the need for urgent reform remains, with the underlying problems largely unchanged. Talented civil servants still leave due to the lack of opportunity, and poor performers are still moved between teams rather than managed out. Both drain the capacity of departments already under pressure.

Two separate responses to the free-text question sum up the issue well:

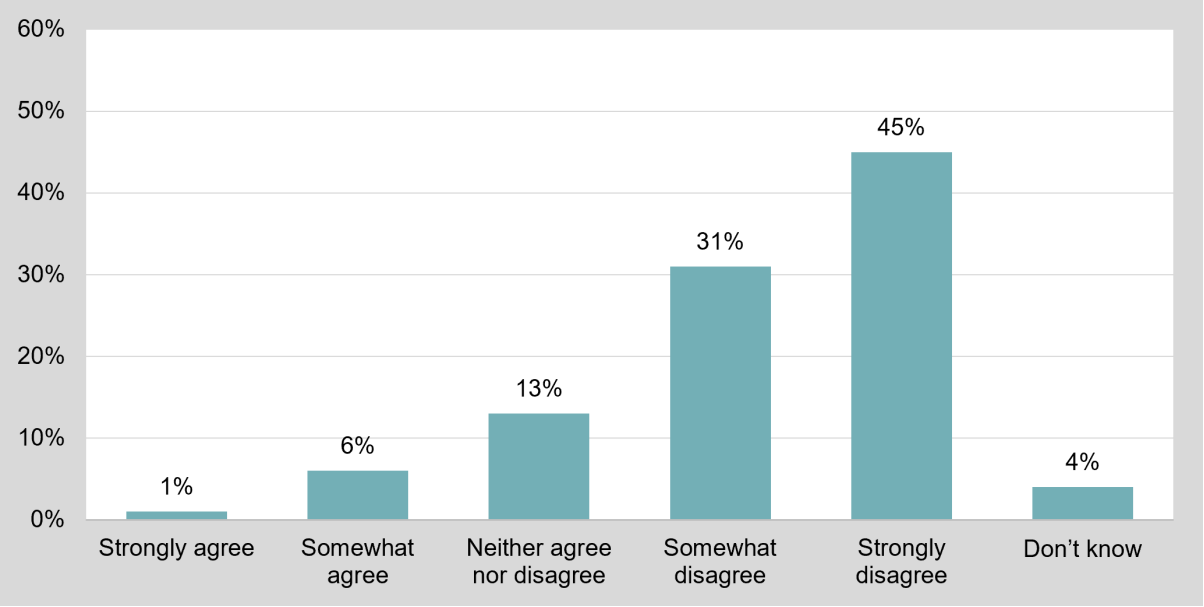
> "The Civil Service does not reward talented internal candidates by promoting them. If candidates know the right individuals then they will be promoted but many are overlooked despite having the right skills, talent and desirable leadership qualities."

> "There is no culture of managing poor performance, so managers don't do it."

2.1.1 Poor performance

On poor performance, the Survey once again confirms that civil servants have little faith in the system. 76 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement "the civil service in general manages poor performance well", and 45 per cent strongly disagreed. Only 7 per cent agreed.

Figure 1: To what extent do you agree with the statement that "The civil service in general manages poor performance well"?



Source: *Re:State* and *Civil Service World*, Alternative People Survey 2026 (Re:State, 2026).

In addition, almost two-thirds (63 per cent) agreed with the statement that “managers are incentivised to move poor performers to another role or department, rather than manage them out of the civil service”. And, as last year, more than half of respondents, 55 per cent, agreed with the statement “I am aware of disciplinary issues where action should have been taken but has not”. This is damning.

This year the Survey asked line managers directly about the support available to them, and the results help explain the figures above. Just 11 per cent agreed that “the processes for managing poor performance or disciplinary issues are straightforward and efficient”, while a full three-quarters disagreed. Only a third agreed that they feel supported through their training to manage poor performance and disciplinary matters, while line manager respondents were evenly divided on whether they feel supported by their leadership team, with 40 per cent agreeing and 40 per cent disagreeing.

Again, like in last year’s Survey, poor performance was among the most frequently raised topics by respondents in the free-text box, with particular focus on how long the process takes, and the toll it takes on the manager responsible.

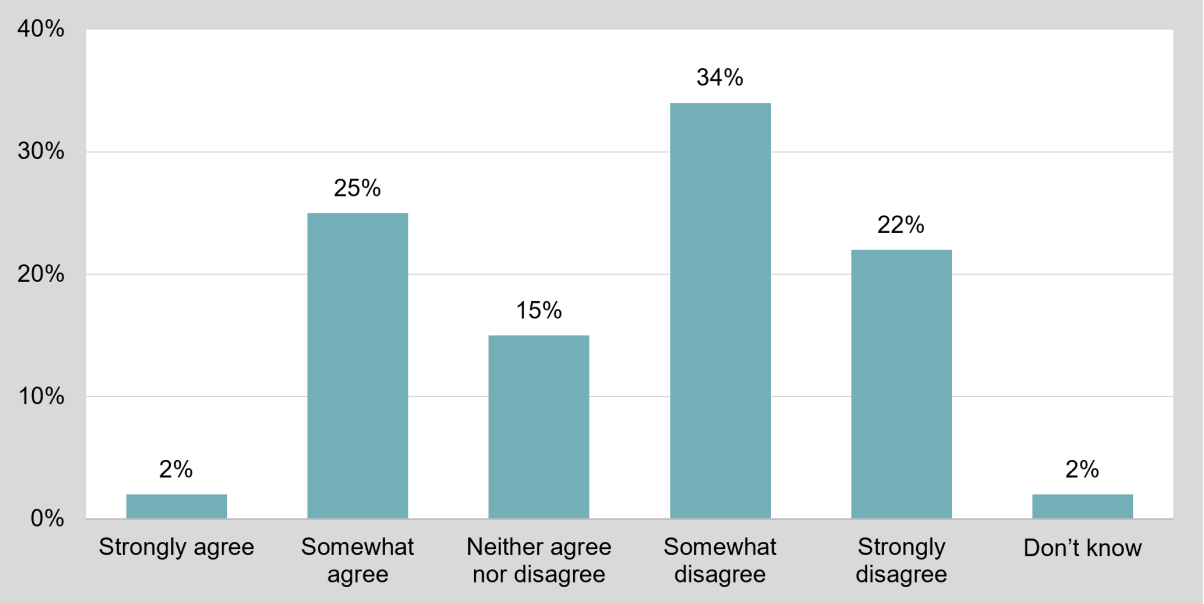
> “I love [the Civil Service] and the mission and there’s a lot of good but we need to improve recruitment and be able to fire poor performers within 3 months rather than it taking 36 months and causing significant stress for the line manager.”
>
> “The HR processes and functions actively discourage and undermine line managers addressing poor performance. A culture has been established where addressing poor behaviour and performance is used against the line manager by the employee claiming it is bullying or harassment.”
>
> “Managing poor performance is difficult because HR won’t do anything. They provide ‘advice’ but all of the actions fall on line managers, adding to busy workloads.”
>
> “Depressing to see chains of management where no one can have a difficult conversation without considering it vulgar.”

This anecdotal criticism of the HR function is reflected in the Survey. Fewer than one in five, 17 per cent, strongly agreed that they understand the role the HR function in their department plays, while only 42 per cent agreed that they “do not feel the need to go around or operate outside the usual HR processes to hire, manage or remove poor performers”, and close to three in ten disagreed. Where the formal process is this slow and difficult, a significant minority of managers appear to feel the need to work around it.

2.1.2 Talent progression

As with poor performance, responses again suggested considerable dissatisfaction with the Civil Service’s approach to talent. 56 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement that “talented people rise to the top of the civil service”, and only 39 per cent agreed that “there are opportunities to progress which makes a future career in the civil service an exciting prospect”.

Figure 2: To what extent do you agree with the statement that "Talented people rise to the top of the civil service"?



Source: *Re:State* and *Civil Service World*, Alternative People Survey 2026 (Re:State, 2026).

Respondents commented that:

> "There is no progression within teams. To get promoted you have to find a job elsewhere which means the team you are leaving loses valuable expertise and institutional memory. It is a hugely wasteful and inefficient way of running departments."

> "Internal promotions are non-existent. If you do well in your job and wish to obtain a higher grade you have to leave your post or go through the job evaluation process which could mean applying for your own job. This would not happen in the private sector."

This year the Survey included specific questions on promotion, and the results are among the most negative. Just 16 per cent of respondents believe that internal promotion processes lead to the right people being promoted, while 66 per cent believe they do not. This sits alongside the finding reported above that 56 per cent disagree that talented people rise to the top of the Civil Service, and suggests the two are connected.

> "People who do not have many original thoughts but are comfortable in ingratiating themselves with senior leaders gain promotion over hard working and talented people."

> "HR support is extremely poor. Recruitment processes help people who are good at interviews get promotion rather than those who are good at the job."

> "Efficiency is often negatively impacted by red tape and multi-layered processes. For example, you can't just promote someone who has actively demonstrated their competence and skills in a role but have instead to run a whole recruitment campaign."

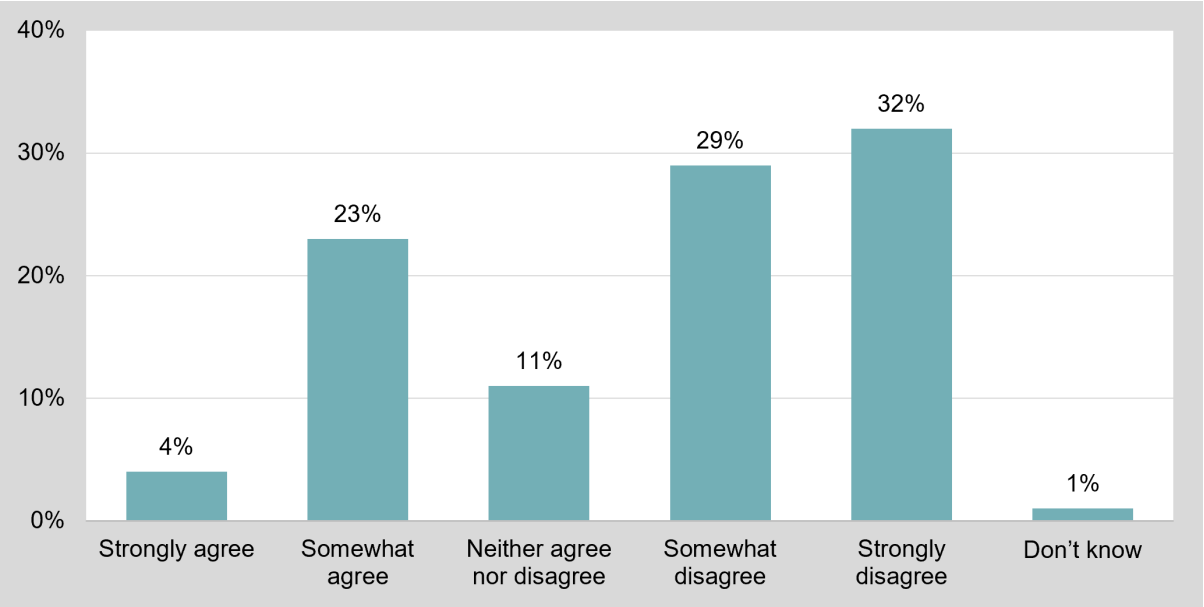
This echoes the finding of *Re:State's* 2023 report, *Civil unrest: a portrait of the Civil Service through Brexit, the pandemic and political turbulence*, that a tick-box, competency-based HR system is undermining the meritocratic principle, leading to 'shadow' systems for promotion.[4]

Somewhat more encouragingly, however, 68 per cent of respondents agreed that "I have a good line manager and feel supported by them to progress", up five points on last year. Civil servants think considerably better of their own managers than of the system as a whole, suggesting a structural issue.

2.1.3 Pay

On pay, 27 per cent of respondents agreed that "the pay bands in my department appropriately reflect differences in responsibilities and workload", while almost two-thirds, 61 per cent, disagreed. That is an improvement of seven points on last year, but still leaves a clear majority dissatisfied. As in 2025, the effect is not only on morale. Where there is no route to pay progression in post, officials are forced to move roles, with detrimental results for departments' efficiency and experience levels.

Figure 3: To what extent do you agree with the statement that "The pay bands in my department appropriately reflect differences in responsibilities and workload"?



Source: *Re:State* and *Civil Service World*, Alternative People Survey 2026 (Re:State, 2026).

> "Incentivising better performance means enabling people to get paid more within their grade. Otherwise, there is literally no incentive to do more than the bare minimum."

> "Performance related pay and bonuses/rewards are for the birds when base pay is so low and there is no real budget for people to receive significant increases through performance. We're just shuffling crumbs around at the cost of time, efficiency and morale."

[4] Amy Gandon, *Civil Unrest: A Portrait of the Civil Service through Brexit, the Pandemic and Political Turbulence* (Re:State, 2023).

> "Pay needs to be sorted out. Pay compression at the top and bottom is impacting talent development – why take on much more for hardly anything?"

There is clear appetite for reform. 62 per cent of respondents agreed that civil service pay rises should be based on performance, against 24 per cent who disagreed. That support is not unqualified, however, and respondents raise practical concerns with the implementation of performance-based pay.

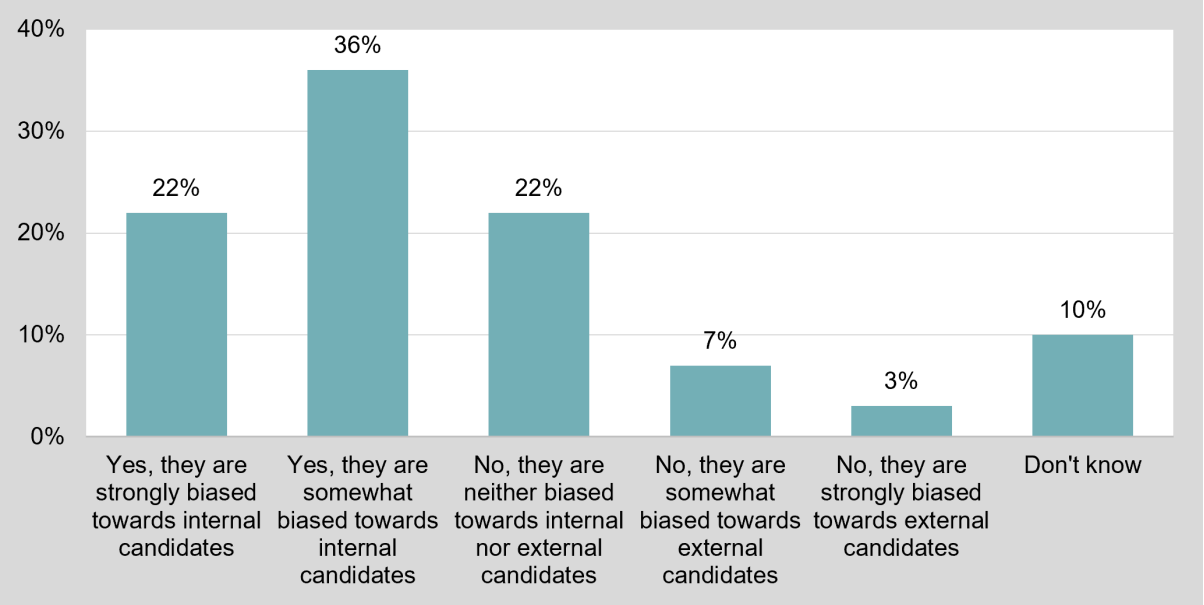
> "On the last question based on performance related pay, I agree with the principle but don't trust that the C[ivil] S[ervice] has the manager and leadership capability to apply this fairly and consistently."

2.1.4 Recruitment

One route to boosting talent is recruiting new people into the Civil Service, and successive governments have committed to opening up recruitment and making the system more porous. Lord Maude, who led civil service reform under the Coalition Government, argued in his 2023 review that "the Civil Service is a people organisation and the most important task of its leadership is the appointment and management of its people".[5] Each subsequent administration has committed to opening up the Civil Service to external talent.

The responses to the Survey's questions on recruitment indicate little progress has been made against this objective. 58 per cent believe recruitment is biased towards internal candidates, against 10 per cent who think it favours those from outside the Civil Service. This may in part be explained by the fact that fewer than one in five think civil service job advertisements are understood and received "well" by external candidates, while over half think they are received "poorly".

Figure 4: Do you believe that on average civil service recruitment processes are biased towards internal candidates?



[5] Lord Maude, *Independent Review of Governance and Accountability in the Civil Service* (Cabinet Office, 2023).

Source: *Re:State* and *Civil Service World*, Alternative People Survey 2026 (Re:State, 2026).

Of particular concern, regardless of where candidates are being recruited from, fewer than a quarter of respondents agreed that "civil service recruitment processes reward the kind of skills and abilities which candidates need to do well in their jobs", while almost 60 per cent disagreed.

This paints a picture of a workforce that is hard to enter from outside and, in the view of respondents, does not reliably identify the right people.

> "Recruitment is the single biggest task I want changed. The rigid approach to what 'good' looks like and lack of meaningful feedback to candidates puts people off applying/re-applying."

> "The way we recruit staff is outdated and no longer fit for purpose. A 45-minute interview is simply not long enough to properly understand someone's potential, skills, experience, or what they can bring to a role."

2.1.5 Voluntary exit schemes

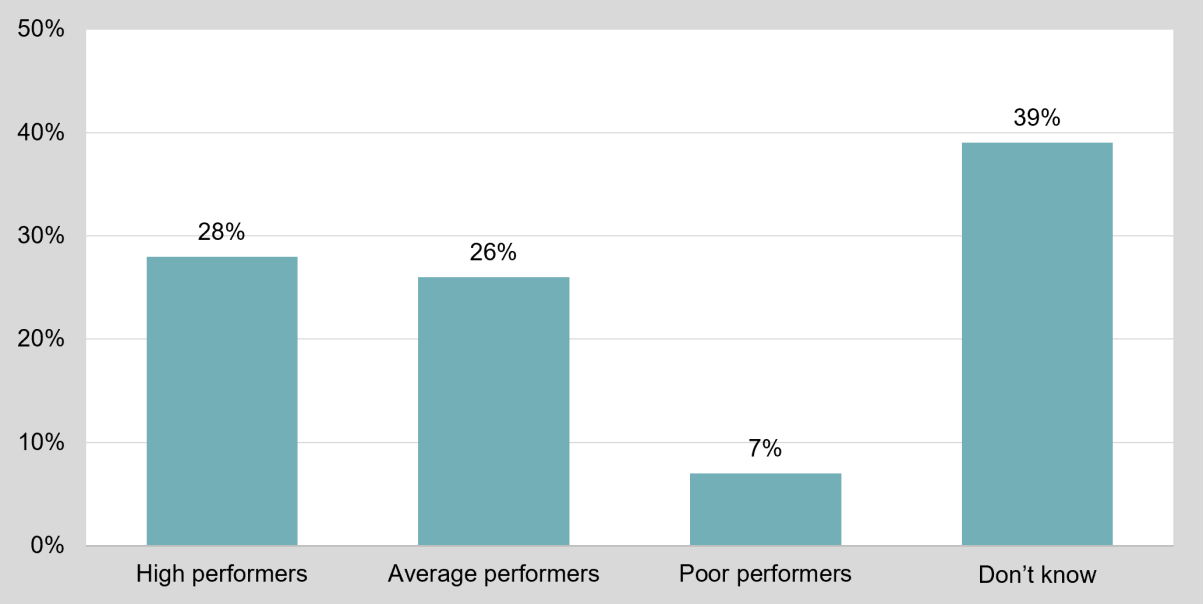
Headcount reductions have similarly been a theme across successive governments, with the new Prime Minister promising the same ("Central government must become smaller").[6] The two key levers used to date have been recruitment freezes and voluntary redundancies. This year, the Survey sought to understand the view of voluntary schemes among those inside Whitehall.

58 per cent of respondents said their department had run a voluntary exit scheme in the last two years. When asked how those schemes are being applied, 60 per cent said they are untargeted, against 40 per cent who said they are strategic and targeted.

Worryingly, among respondents whose department had run a scheme, 28 per cent said that on average those leaving through voluntary exit are high performers and 26 per cent said they are average performers. Just 7 per cent said they are poor performers. The National Audit Office expects more than 8,500 civil servants to leave through current exit schemes by March 2027, at a cost of £536 million.[7] Departments are therefore spending significant sums to exit people that they should be retaining, while the poor performance identified earlier in this section remains largely unaddressed.

[6] Cabinet Office, *Rewiring the State - Cabinet Statement*.
[7] National Audit Office, *Government Exits and Redundancies* (National Audit Office, 2025).

Figure 5: Asked of respondents whose departments had run a voluntary exit scheme, do you believe that on average people leaving through the voluntary exit scheme are…



Source: *Re:State* and *Civil Service World*, Alternative People Survey 2026 (Re:State, 2026).

This was also a theme of the free-text comments respondents gave:

> "Our voluntary exit scheme was terribly communicated and has resulted in top performers leaving. Our department is around 10% smaller but workloads are unchanged."

> "VESs in previous central dep[artment] very poorly executed, paying talented people to leave. Talented folk who stay have low morale."

> "Headcount reduction is being pushed, but the ones leaving are the talented ones scouted elsewhere. What stays are the poor performers, the lazy attitudes to work and [the] cliquey culture."

2.1.6 Specific question results

Q11 – To what extent do you agree with the following statements relating to talent and performance management in the civil service?

"The civil service takes talent and performance management seriously".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	4%	4%	4%	3% (+1)
Somewhat agree	25%	24%	25%	26% (-1)
Neither agree nor disagree	17%	17%	17%	14% (+3)
Somewhat disagree	31%	31%	31%	28% (+3)
Strongly disagree	23%	23%	23%	29% (-6)
Don't know	<1%	1%	<1%	<1% (0)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"Talented people rise to the top of the civil service".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	2%	2%	3%	2% (0)
Somewhat agree	25%	23%	25%	23% (+2)
Neither agree nor disagree	15%	16%	15%	15% (0)
Somewhat disagree	34%	34%	33%	33% (+1)
Strongly disagree	22%	24%	23%	27% (-5)
Don't know	2%	1%	1%	<1% (+2)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"The civil service in general manages poor performance well".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	1%	1%	1%	1% (0)
Somewhat agree	6%	7%	7%	7% (-1)
Neither agree nor disagree	13%	14%	14%	11% (+2)
Somewhat disagree	31%	30%	30%	27% (+4)
Strongly disagree	45%	45%	45%	52% (-7)
Don't know	4%	3%	3%	2% (+2)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"Managers are incentivised to move poor performers to another role or department, rather than manage them out of the civil service".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	30%	30%	31%	26% (+4)
Somewhat agree	33%	32%	32%	36% (-3)
Neither agree nor disagree	13%	14%	13%	14% (-1)
Somewhat disagree	9%	9%	9%	9% (0)
Strongly disagree	8%	8%	8%	9% (-1)
Don't know	7%	7%	7%	6% (+1)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"I have a good line manager and feel supported by them to progress".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	38%	36%	36%	32% (+6)
Somewhat agree	30%	30%	31%	31% (-1)
Neither agree nor disagree	11%	12%	11%	12% (-1)
Somewhat disagree	9%	10%	10%	11% (-2)
Strongly disagree	11%	11%	11%	13% (-2)
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	<1% (+1)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"There are opportunities to progress which makes a future career in the civil service an exciting prospect".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	8%	8%	9%	9% (-1)
Somewhat agree	31%	30%	30%	29% (+2)
Neither agree nor disagree	13%	14%	14%	16% (-3)
Somewhat disagree	25%	24%	24%	21% (+4)
Strongly disagree	23%	24%	23%	24% (-1)
Don't know	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1% (0)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"The pay bands in my department appropriately reflect differences in responsibilities and workload".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	4%	3%	3%	3% (+1)
Somewhat agree	23%	22%	22%	17% (+6)
Neither agree nor disagree	11%	11%	11%	12% (-1)
Somewhat disagree	29%	29%	29%	27% (+2)
Strongly disagree	32%	34%	34%	39% (-7)
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	3% (-2)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"There is an appropriate range of civil service grades in my department".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	12%	12%	13%	11% (+1)
Somewhat agree	33%	33%	33%	30% (+3)
Neither agree nor disagree	13%	13%	13%	18% (-5)
Somewhat disagree	25%	25%	25%	19% (+6)
Strongly disagree	15%	15%	14%	20% (-5)
Don't know	2%	2%	2%	3% (-1)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"I am aware of disciplinary issues where action should have been taken but has not".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	26%	28%	27%	29% (-3)
Somewhat agree	29%	30%	30%	26% (+3)
Neither agree nor disagree	14%	13%	13%	13% (+1)
Somewhat disagree	11%	10%	10%	10% (+1)
Strongly disagree	10%	10%	11%	10% (0)
Don't know	10%	9%	9%	12% (-2)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"I understand the role the HR function in my department plays".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	17%	17%	17%	16% (+1)
Somewhat agree	36%	36%	36%	31% (+5)
Neither agree nor disagree	12%	12%	12%	16% (-4)
Somewhat disagree	18%	18%	18%	18% (0)
Strongly disagree	16%	16%	16%	17% (-1)
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	2% (-1)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q12 – What proportion of people in your directorate do you feel are poor performers?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Under 10%	47%	46%	47%	40% (+7)
10-30%	31%	32%	32%	34% (-3)
30-50%	5%	5%	5%	8% (-3)
More than 50%	1%	2%	2%	3% (-2)
Don't know	16%	15%	14%	14% (+2)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q13 – Are you a line manager?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Yes	55%	53%	55%	58% (-3)
No	45%	47%	45%	42% (+3)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Questions 14 and 15 were asked only of respondents who said they are line managers.

Q14 – Have you ever had to manage someone out of the civil service for poor performance or disciplinary reasons?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Yes	40%	43%	45%	38% (+2)
No	60%	57%	55%	62% (-2)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q15 – To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

"I feel supported by my leadership team to manage poor performance and disciplinary matters".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Strongly agree	9%	10%	10%
Somewhat agree	31%	31%	32%
Neither agree nor disagree	17%	15%	16%
Somewhat disagree	20%	21%	20%
Strongly disagree	20%	20%	20%
Don't know	3%	3%	2%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"I feel supported through my training to manage poor performance and disciplinary matters".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Strongly agree	5%	6%	6%
Somewhat agree	28%	27%	27%
Neither agree nor disagree	14%	14%	14%
Somewhat disagree	27%	27%	27%
Strongly disagree	25%	25%	25%
Don't know	1%	1%	1%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"The processes for managing poor performance or disciplinary issues are straightforward and efficient".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Strongly agree	2%	3%	3%
Somewhat agree	9%	10%	10%
Neither agree nor disagree	9%	9%	9%
Somewhat disagree	31%	30%	30%
Strongly disagree	45%	45%	45%
Don't know	4%	3%	3%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"I do not feel the need to go around or operate outside the usual HR processes to hire, manage or remove poor performers".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Strongly agree	15%	17%	16%
Somewhat agree	27%	25%	26%
Neither agree nor disagree	22%	23%	22%
Somewhat disagree	18%	17%	19%
Strongly disagree	10%	10%	10%
Don't know	8%	8%	7%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q27 – Has your department run a voluntary exit scheme in the last two years?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Yes	58%	54%	55%
No	30%	33%	32%
Don't know	12%	13%	13%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Questions 28 and 29 were asked only of respondents who said their department had run a voluntary exit scheme in the last two years.

Q28 – Do you believe that on average people leaving through the voluntary exit scheme are…

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
High performers	28%	29%	29%
Average performers	26%	26%	28%
Poor performers	7%	7%	7%
Don't know	39%	38%	36%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q29 – Which of the following statements most accurately reflects the way voluntary exit schemes are being applied? Please select one:

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
The voluntary exit scheme is being applied in a strategic and targeted way	40%	41%	39%
The voluntary exit scheme is untargeted	60%	59%	61%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q30 – Have you been involved in running a recruitment exercise in the last two years?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Yes	52%	50%	53%
No	48%	50%	47%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q31 – To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Civil service recruitment processes reward the kind of skills and abilities which candidates need to do well in their jobs.

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Strongly agree	2%	2%	2%
Somewhat agree	21%	21%	21%
Neither agree nor disagree	14%	14%	14%
Somewhat disagree	30%	29%	30%
Strongly disagree	29%	30%	30%
Don't know	4%	4%	3%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q32 – How well are civil service job advertisements understood and received by external candidates?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Very well	1%	1%	1%
Fairly well	17%	17%	17%
Neither well nor poorly	12%	12%	12%
Fairly poorly	31%	32%	33%
Very poorly	20%	20%	20%
Don't know	19%	18%	17%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q33 – Do you believe that on average civil service recruitment processes are biased towards internal candidates?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Yes, they are strongly biased towards internal candidates	22%	21%	22%
Yes, they are somewhat biased towards internal candidates	36%	35%	36%
No, they are neither biased towards internal nor external candidates	22%	23%	22%
No, they are somewhat biased towards external candidates	7%	7%	7%
No, they are strongly biased towards external candidates	3%	4%	3%
Don't know	10%	10%	10%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q34 – Do you believe that internal promotion processes lead to the right people being promoted?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Yes	16%	16%	17%
No	66%	67%	67%
Don't know	18%	17%	16%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q35 – To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Civil service pay rises should be based on performance.

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Strongly agree	23%	23%	23%
Somewhat agree	39%	38%	38%
Neither agree nor disagree	13%	13%	13%
Somewhat disagree	14%	14%	14%
Strongly disagree	10%	11%	11%
Don't know	1%	1%	1%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

2.2 Departmental performance and Civil Service culture

As with last year's Survey, this year's Survey finds that most civil servants know what their department is trying to achieve, but they doubt its ability to achieve it. The gap between intent and delivery is a longstanding criticism of the Whitehall machine.

2.2.1 Departmental performance

73 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement "I am clear about what my department's priorities are" – though only 27 per cent strongly agreed, down six points on last year – and 18 per cent disagreed.

However, 51 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement "my department possesses the capability and capacity needed to deliver its priorities", and just a third agreed. The figures were worst at the Ministry of Defence, where 71 per cent disagreed – one of the Government's priority areas.

As was the case last year, confidence falls as seniority rises: 60 per cent of Grade 6 and Senior Civil Service respondents disagreed, against 42 per cent of Executive Officers and administrative staff. This means that the people most responsible for delivering departmental priorities, and who are best able to judge departmental capability, are the least convinced that their department is equipped to succeed.

This connects to a wider frustration with how Whitehall works. 71 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement "I often feel that processes get in the way of me performing my job". Among Grade 6 and Senior Civil Service respondents, agreement reaches 79 per cent, or almost eight in ten.

Under Sir Keir Starmer's premiership, the Government had committed to "sludgebusting", aimed at "strip[ping] back the burdensome, disproportionate processes to speed up decision making and delivery across government".[8] Respondents' comments show this must remain an urgent priority for Whitehall:

> "Too much process, sign offs. Too little time and resources. Constantly cutting delegated grades while SCS seems to grow."

> "Far too many layers and hierarchies preventing real progress and innovation. Far too many clogging up an inefficient machine and although the desire appears to be there to adopt change, it gets lost amongst all of the red tape and layers."

The Cabinet Secretary has made innovation a key focus of her vision for a high-performing Future Civil Service ("being curious, embracing new ideas"), and on this the Survey provides grounds for cautious optimism.[9] 34 per cent agreed with the statement "my department actively encourages and rewards civil servants who try to innovate", which, while far too low, is

[8] Lord Hermer, *Sludgebusting: Simplifying Government Processes to Drive Delivery* (Attorney General's Office, 2026).
[9] Antonia Romeo, *A Message from the Cabinet Secretary*, 29 May 2026.

nonetheless ten percentage points up on last year. However, less encouragingly, more people disagreed than agreed, at 44 per cent.

> "The bureaucracy stifles any innovation and it needs to be addressed. Trust your staff to do the work and let them get on with it."

> "Many times I have made suggestions which I think would improve certain processes. Whilst I have been told these are good ideas and that these would be adopted this hasn't happened. No point suggesting anything anymore."

Attitudes to risk, a key factor in innovation, have not moved. 40 per cent agreed that "when taking decisions my department considers the risks of 'doing nothing' to the same degree as the risks of taking action". A third disagreed and the remainder could not say. A Civil Service that does not properly weigh inaction will find it harder to adopt the technologies and methods that raise productivity and performance.

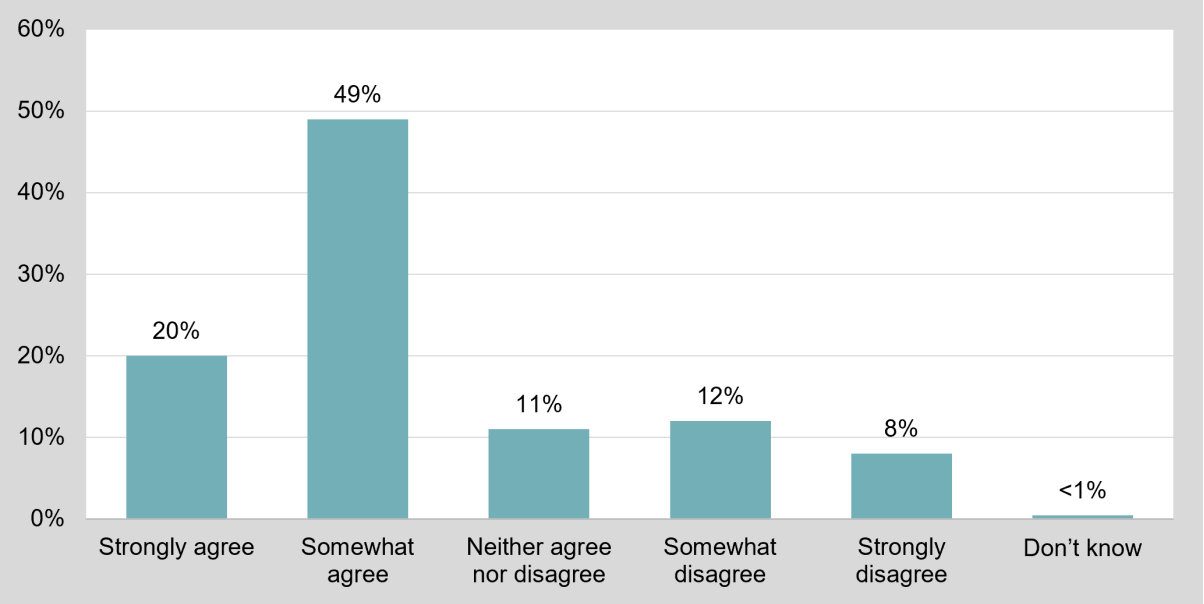
Civil servants are now more likely to feel encouraged to look for savings. 52 per cent agreed that "I am encouraged to identify ways to cut waste and improve efficiency in my everyday work", a sizeable increase from the 37 per cent last year. But not all are convinced this will translate into results:

> "I think it is highly unlikely we will hit efficiency targets with the current approach. We lack the culture to drive real change and are too focused on protecting the status quo which is likely to lead to more layoffs as that will be the only option to find those savings."

Evaluation remains the weakest result in the section. Just 25 per cent of respondents agreed that "my department consistently evaluates policies and projects and then consistently applies these lessons to future policymaking and implementation", against 53 per cent who disagreed. That is an seven-point improvement on last year, but it still means only one civil servant in four believes their department learns systematically from what it has already done, despite the presence of the Evaluation Task Force and the Evaluation Registry. One respondent succinctly captured the problem: "Impact is not prioritised, measured or evaluated."

One result that has shifted significantly over the past year, in a positive direction, is the use of technology, including AI. 69 per cent of respondents now agree that "my department provides me with sufficient access to data and technology, including AI, to do my job", a big increase on last year's 48 per cent. Departments have made real progress on the tools available to their staff, even as the processes around those staff remain much as they were.

Figure 6: To what extent do you agree with the statement that "My department provides me with sufficient access to data and technology, including AI, to do my job"?



Source: *Re:State* and *Civil Service World*, Alternative People Survey 2026 (Re:State, 2026).

2.2.2 Civil Service culture

Beyond individual departments, two new questions this year looked at *The Civil Service code*, which sets out the Civil Service's four core values. The code is under review: the Cabinet Secretary has committed to revising it,[10] and *Re:State* has proposed a redraft adding the values of excellence, ownership, courage, and openness.[11]

57 per cent of respondents said they could recall the four values from memory, leaving more than two in five who could not. Asked whether integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality are sufficient to drive the behaviours needed in a modern Civil Service, 56 per cent said yes and 44 per cent said no. A substantial minority, in other words, believe the foundational statement of civil service conduct is insufficient. As *Re:State* has argued, the current values say little about the positive behaviours a high-performing organisation needs, a gap that needs addressing.[12]

Taken together, these results point in a consistent direction. Departments have improved the tools available to their staff, and are doing more to encourage innovation and efficiency. But there has been little progress on the fundamentals, and doubts extend to *The Civil Service code* itself. Civil servants remain fairly clear about their department's priorities, but no more confident that it has the capabilities and processes to deliver them. As one respondent put it:

> "The way the Civil Service is run feels a bit turgid and self-justifying. The response to every challenge is more committees, more meetings, more process. I rarely see senior leaders taking tough decisions to prioritise and accept trade-offs."

[10] Romeo, *A Message from the Cabinet Secretary*.
[11] Matthew Feeney et al., *A New Civil Service Code* (Re:State, 2026).
[12] Feeney et al., *A New Civil Service Code*.

2.2.3 Specific question results

Q16 – To what extent do you agree with the following statements relating to your department?

"I am clear about what my department's priorities are".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	27%	28%	28%	33% (-6)
Somewhat agree	46%	44%	44%	41% (+5)
Neither agree nor disagree	9%	10%	9%	7% (+2)
Somewhat disagree	12%	11%	12%	10% (+2)
Strongly disagree	6%	7%	7%	8% (-2)
Don't know	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1% (0)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"My department possesses the capability and capacity needed to deliver its priorities".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	6%	6%	6%	7% (-1)
Somewhat agree	27%	27%	27%	28% (-1)
Neither agree nor disagree	14%	14%	14%	11% (+3)
Somewhat disagree	30%	29%	30%	29% (+1)
Strongly disagree	21%	22%	21%	24% (-3)
Don't know	2%	2%	2%	2% (0)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"I often feel that processes get in the way of me performing my job".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	29%	30%	31%	32% (-3)
Somewhat agree	42%	41%	41%	38% (+4)
Neither agree nor disagree	12%	13%	12%	14% (-2)
Somewhat disagree	12%	12%	12%	12% (0)
Strongly disagree	4%	4%	3%	4% (0)
Don't know	1%	<1%	1%	<1% (+1)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"My department provides me with sufficient access to data and technology, including AI, to do my job".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	20%	19%	19%	9% (+11)
Somewhat agree	49%	48%	49%	39% (+10)
Neither agree nor disagree	11%	11%	10%	13% (-2)
Somewhat disagree	12%	13%	13%	20% (-8)
Strongly disagree	8%	9%	8%	18% (-10)
Don't know	<1%	<1%	1%	1% (-1)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"When taking decisions my department considers the risks of 'doing nothing' to the same degree as the risks of taking action".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	10%	10%	10%	9% (+1)
Somewhat agree	30%	30%	30%	30% (0)
Neither agree nor disagree	19%	19%	19%	17% (+2)
Somewhat disagree	19%	19%	20%	21% (-2)
Strongly disagree	14%	14%	13%	16% (-2)
Don't know	8%	8%	8%	6% (+2)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"My department actively encourages and rewards civil servants who try to innovate".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	7%	6%	6%	4% (+3)
Somewhat agree	27%	27%	28%	20% (+7)
Neither agree nor disagree	20%	20%	19%	21% (-1)
Somewhat disagree	27%	26%	27%	25% (+2)
Strongly disagree	17%	18%	18%	27% (-10)
Don't know	2%	3%	2%	2% (0)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"I am encouraged to identify ways to cut waste and improve efficiency in my everyday work".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	12%	13%	13%	8% (+4)
Somewhat agree	40%	38%	39%	29% (+11)
Neither agree nor disagree	18%	18%	17%	18% (0)
Somewhat disagree	18%	18%	18%	23% (-5)
Strongly disagree	12%	13%	13%	22% (-10)
Don't know	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1% (0)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"My department consistently evaluates policies and projects and then consistently applies these lessons to future policymaking and implementation".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	4%	4%	4%	4% (0)
Somewhat agree	21%	21%	21%	14% (+7)
Neither agree nor disagree	17%	18%	17%	18% (-1)
Somewhat disagree	30%	30%	31%	28% (+2)
Strongly disagree	23%	23%	23%	31% (-8)
Don't know	5%	4%	4%	5% (0)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q17 – Could you recall from memory the four values of the Civil Service Code?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Yes	57%	56%	57%
No	43%	44%	43%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q18 – The Civil Service Code includes four values: integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality. Do you believe these values are sufficient to drive the behaviours needed in a modern civil service?

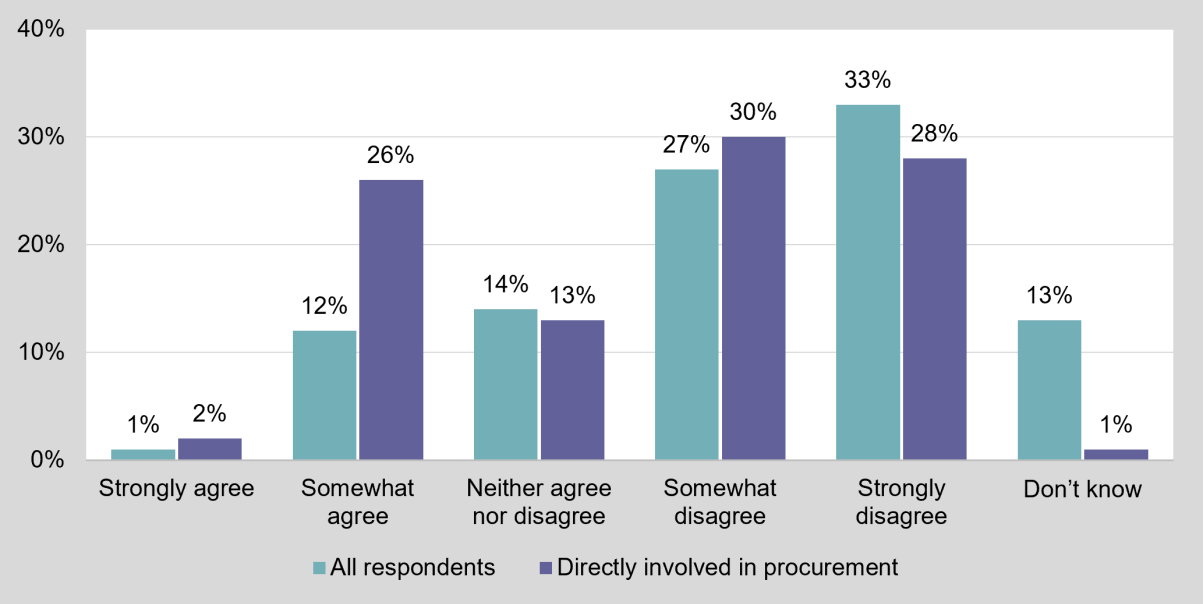
Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Yes	56%	57%	56%
No	44%	43%	44%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

2.3 Procurement

Better public procurement has been a stated ambition of successive governments. Government spends around £400 billion a year buying goods and services, a figure large enough to shape the public finances, the quality of public services, and the economy. In 2024, the head of the National Audit Office named procurement as one of five main areas of financial opportunity.[13] Government procurement also has a long record of expensive failures, from the pandemic PPE contracts, which left the Government disputing contracts worth up to £2.7 billion,[14] to the Home Office's asylum accommodation contracts, whose expected cost has more than tripled, from £4.5 billion to £15.3 billion.[15]

A quarter of respondents said they are directly involved in the procurement of goods or services, slightly more than last year. Across all respondents, the verdict remains very poor. 13 per cent agreed that "the civil service procures goods and services effectively from the private sector", up one point from 2025, while 60 per cent disagreed, up from 58 per cent. Only 1 per cent agreed strongly. Among those directly involved in procurement, agreement is higher, but still just 28 per cent, with 58 per cent disagreeing.

Figure 7: To what extent do you agree with the statement that "The civil service procures goods and services effectively from the private sector"?



Source: *Re:State* and *Civil Service World*, Alternative People Survey 2026 (Re:State, 2026).

On whether "the civil service values the partnerships it has with the private sector", 40 per cent of respondents agreed and 18 per cent disagreed, a modest improvement on last year – though just 7 per cent strongly agreed, the same as last year. As in 2025, the most striking feature is how many respondents had no view: 42 per cent either sat on the fence or did not

[13] Gareth Davies, 'Improving Productivity Could Release Tens of Billions for Government Priorities', Speech, National Audit Office, 16 January 2024.
[14] Public Accounts Committee, *Management of PPE Contracts* (House of Commons, 2022).
[15] National Audit Office, *The Home Office's Asylum Accommodation Contracts* (National Audit Office, 2025).

know. Among those directly involved in procurement, 20 per cent disagreed, but agreement rose to 60 per cent.

Responses to the free-text question provide some indication of where that lack of confidence comes from, focusing on the cost and the terms of what is bought.

> "I bought an iPhone charger cable via Banner for £18. The same item at Asda cost £2. Where is the logic in buying things via Banner?"

> "In general we have too much reliance on external consulting firms and most programmes are predominantly run by external consultants. They are not better than civil servants either in qualifications, skills or even output of their work. Yet, we pay them a lot of money."

> "We have a big issue with procurement of contingent labour/resource suppliers. I have seen consultancies that: regularly bring in people without the right skills or experience, who we train up, only for them to be rolled off or re-supplied at a higher rate."

This year's Survey also asked a question specifically on the procurement of technology, an increasingly important aspect of public procurement. The picture here should be deeply concerning to civil service leaders. Just 11 per cent of respondents agreed that "the civil service has the right approach to procuring technology", with almost half, 49 per cent, disagreeing. Of those directly involved, 15 per cent agreed and 53 per cent disagreed. At a point when departments are being asked to adopt AI and automation at pace, the people involved in buying the technology have little confidence in the processes for doing so.

Two new questions were also asked about the *Procurement Act 2023*, which came into force in February 2025. The most striking result is how many respondents could not say whether it had made any difference, despite it being a key and widely applicable piece of legislation.

Across all respondents, 18 per cent said the *Act* had changed the way procurements are done, while three-quarters, 76 per cent, did not know. Even among those directly involved in procurement, less than half, 44 per cent, said it had changed things, 12 per cent said it had not, and 44 per cent could not say either way. Asked whether the *Act* had improved public procurement, 22 per cent of those directly involved in procurement said it had, 12 per cent said that it had made matters worse, 24 per cent said that it had made no noticeable difference, and the largest share, 42 per cent, again did not know.

Both the Government that passed the *Act* and the one that brought it into force were confident of the effect it would have. Baroness Neville-Rolfe promised it would "slash through red tape", replacing 350 EU regulations "with one simple and flexible framework".[16] On the day it took effect, Georgia Gould said public procurement could "now fully deliver on the Plan for Change – unleashing local growth, opening up opportunities and embedding transparency and accountability".[17] More than a year on, the fact that more than two in five specialists cannot

[16] Baroness Neville-Rolfe, 'It's Time to Give Smaller Companies a Bigger Slice of the Procurement Pie', *The Times*, 28 November 2022.
[17] Georgia Gould MP, *New Public Procurement Rules to Drive Growth, Opportunities for Small Businesses and Exclude Suppliers That Fail to Deliver* (Cabinet Office, 2025).

say whether it has made any difference, and only one in five believes it has improved matters, points to a distinct lack of impact.

2.3.1 Specific question results

Q19 – Are you directly involved in the procurement of goods and/or services?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Yes	25%	24%	25%	22% (+3)
No	75%	76%	75%	78% (-3)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Questions 20 to 22 were asked of all respondents. The final 2026 column in each of the following tables shows results for the 361 respondents who said they are directly involved in the procurement of goods and/or services (Question 19). Comparable 2025 figures are not available for this group.

Q20 – To what degree do you agree with the following statements relating to procurement?

"The civil service procures goods and services effectively from the private sector".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)	2026 results, involved in procurement
Strongly agree	1%	1%	1%	1% (0)	2%
Somewhat agree	12%	11%	11%	11% (+1)	26%
Neither agree nor disagree	14%	14%	15%	13% (+1)	13%
Somewhat disagree	27%	27%	26%	27% (0)	30%
Strongly disagree	33%	34%	34%	31% (+2)	28%
Don't know	13%	13%	13%	16% (-3)	1%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"The civil service values the partnerships it has with the private sector".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)	2026 results, involved in procurement
Strongly agree	7%	7%	7%	7% (0)	16%
Somewhat agree	33%	31%	32%	27% (+6)	44%
Neither agree nor disagree	24%	25%	24%	26% (-2)	16%
Somewhat disagree	12%	12%	12%	12% (0)	14%
Strongly disagree	6%	7%	7%	8% (-2)	6%
Don't know	18%	18%	18%	20% (-2)	4%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"The civil service has the right approach to procuring technology".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results, involved in procurement
Strongly agree	1%	1%	1%	2%
Somewhat agree	10%	9%	9%	13%
Neither agree nor disagree	19%	19%	19%	15%
Somewhat disagree	25%	25%	25%	26%
Strongly disagree	24%	26%	26%	27%
Don't know	21%	20%	20%	17%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q21 – To the best of your knowledge, has the Procurement Act 2023, which came into force in 2025, affected the way procurements are done?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results, involved in procurement
Yes	18%	17%	17%	44%
No	6%	6%	7%	12%
Don't know	76%	77%	76%	44%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q22 – To what extent do you believe the Procurement Act 2023 has improved public procurement?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results, involved in procurement
Improved significantly	1%	1%	1%	2%
Improved somewhat	8%	8%	8%	20%
No noticeable impact	13%	13%	14%	24%
Made somewhat worse	4%	4%	4%	9%
Made significantly worse	2%	2%	2%	3%
Don't know	72%	72%	71%	42%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

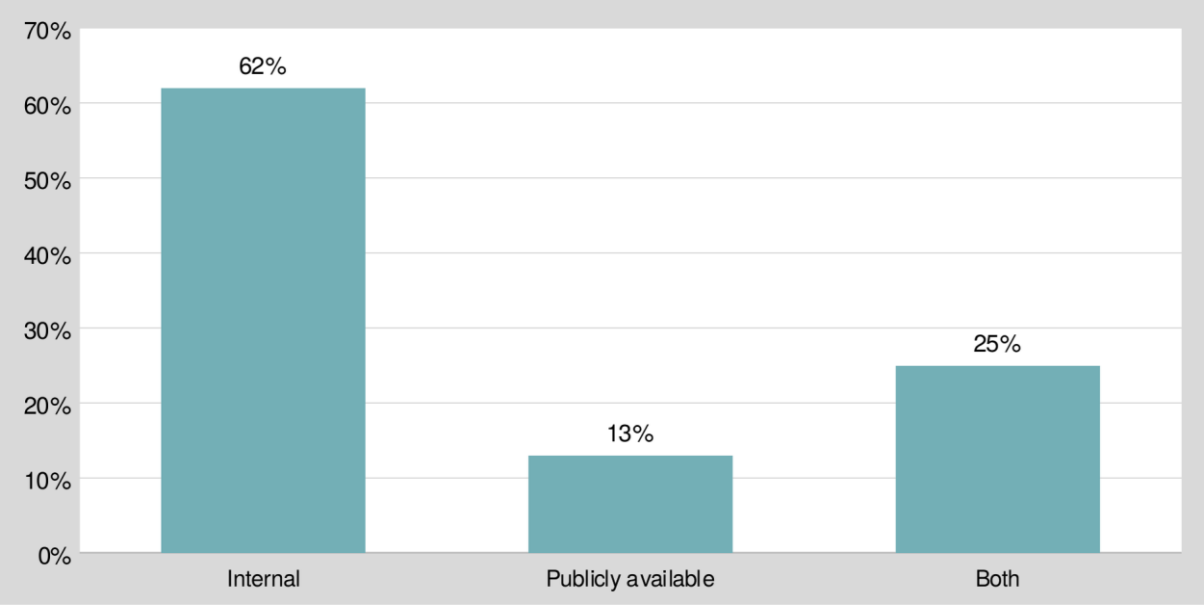
2.4 Technology

The digital centre of government created after the 2024 election has already been reorganised. The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology was disbanded in the machinery of government changes announced in July 2026, and an AI Taskforce now sits in the new Office for the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. As *Re:State* has argued, automation and adoption of AI are essential to driving an efficient and effective modern State. *Re:State* papers, including *Getting the machine learning: scaling AI in public services*,[18] call for a strategic approach which drives automation in the big areas of cost in order to target sizeable productivity improvements.

There has been a marked shift in usage over the past 12 months. A full 82 per cent of respondents said they are personally using AI in their work, up from 30 per cent last year.

The tools have changed as well. 62 per cent of those using AI reported they were using only internal government tools, up from 41 per cent, while the proportion using only publicly available products has fallen from 24 per cent to 13 per cent, with a further quarter using both. The concern raised in last year's report about heavy reliance on public tools has therefore begun to resolve itself, as departments have made their own tools available. This fits with the finding in section 2.2 that 69 per cent of respondents now say they have sufficient access to data and technology.

Figure 8: Are you using internal government AI tools, publicly available AI products, or both? (Asked of respondents who use AI in their work)



Source: *Re:State* and *Civil Service World*, Alternative People Survey 2026 (Re:State, 2026).

To understand how AI is being used, this year's Survey asked several new questions. Among those reporting that they use AI, 74 per cent use it to draft and edit documents and 59 per cent to search for information. 16 per cent use AI to help automate processes at work, and only 7 per cent to write code. Asked in what circumstances they would experiment with AI,

[18] Sean Eke and Joe Hill, *AI and the Productivity Revolution in Government* (Re:State, 2025); Joe Hill and Sean Eke, *Getting the Machine Learning: Scaling AI in Public Services* (Re:State, 2024).

respondents most often cited summarising or analysing large amounts of information (59 per cent), tasks which are time-consuming (55 per cent), and tasks which are repetitive (50 per cent).

Respondents are also largely working this out for themselves. Asked what they would do when given a task they had never done before, 58 per cent said they would experiment to see whether AI could complete it, while just 7 per cent would ask their manager or team first. Just over a third said they would only consider AI if they "could not do the task" themselves. Only 31 per cent described their own use as following guidance from a manager or team. Adoption has happened quickly, and has largely been based on the personal judgement of individual civil servants about which tasks are suitable, rather than an organisational view. While this kind of experimentation is important, AI can get things wrong, and civil servants handle sensitive information every day. As *Re:State* has argued, adoption needs clear guidance and oversight, not just individual judgement.[19]

Users continue to believe the tools help them. 78 per cent of those using AI agreed with the statement "the AI tools I use help me do my job better", the same proportion as last year, and 83 per cent said AI saves them time. The proportion of respondents who strongly agree with this has held up too, at 29 per cent against 25 per cent last year, despite the much wider group now using AI.

Respondents were slightly less positive about what their departments are doing. 56 per cent of those using AI agreed that "my department is adopting AI in a way which will drive efficiency", while 21 per cent disagreed. One respondent provided insight into their experience in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG):

> "There is a large frustration with the way AI is handled in MHCLG. Internal AI is somewhat helpful at summarising but not too helpful in other areas, especially analysis. Analysts and data scientists do not have access to useful AI tools that could augment work and capture the value AI has to offer."

Some respondents expressed scepticism about the direction of travel, raising concerns which the Survey questions did not cover, but which are important for senior leaders to consider:

> "The obsession with AI will lead to a collapse in critical thinking and drafting skills which will hurt the CS in 3-5 years' time."

> "The current focus on 'driving AI adoption' makes me quite nervous. Is this approach environmentally sustainable? Does this risk incentivising adopting AI without thinking critically if it's the most efficient tool to use in a given situation?"

Last year's report raised the question of whether Whitehall's leaders should be concerned about the high levels of use of publicly available AI tools. That question has largely been answered, as departments have brought most of that activity in-house. Two questions now take its place. The first is whether a workforce which has adopted AI this quickly is using it in appropriate cases and in line with best practice. The second is whether departments can turn 74 per cent of civil servants using AI to draft documents and search for information into the

[19] Sean Eke and Joe Hill, *AI and the Productivity Revolution in Government* (Re:State, 2025).

productivity improvements the Government is counting on. On that, just over half of users are convinced their own department is on track.

2.4.1 Specific question results

Q23 – Do you use AI in your work?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Yes	82%	80%	81%	30% (+52)
No	18%	20%	19%	70% (-52)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Questions 23a to 23e were asked only of respondents who said they use AI in their work.

Q23a – Select the top three tasks you use AI for most frequently.

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
To write emails and messages	37%	39%	38%
To draft and edit documents	74%	74%	74%
To search for information	59%	59%	60%
To conduct deep research on a topic	31%	29%	30%
To learn a new skill	8%	9%	8%
To generate new ideas for a project	22%	22%	22%
To write code	7%	7%	6%
To generate and edit images	8%	8%	8%
To generate and edit videos	1%	1%	1%
To help automate processes at work (by creating new tools, software etc.)	16%	16%	17%
Other (please specify)	10%	10%	10%
None of the above	<1%	<1%	<1%

Q23b – Imagine you were given a task you had never done before. Which of the following would best describe your approach at the first instance? Select one.

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
I would ask my manager or team about whether to use AI	7%	7%	7%
I would experiment and see whether AI could complete the task	58%	57%	58%
I would only consider using AI if I could not do the task myself	35%	36%	35%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q23c – Which of the following best describes how you are using AI?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
I am only using AI in accordance with guidance from my manager or team	31%	32%	30%
I am actively experimenting with AI to identify useful applications	33%	32%	33%
I have identified useful applications through experimentation and use AI routinely in my work	26%	25%	26%
None of the above	10%	11%	11%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Question 23d was asked only of respondents who said in Question 23c that they are actively experimenting with AI or use it routinely.

Q23d – Under what circumstances would you experiment with AI? Select all that apply.

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Any circumstance - I am experimenting with any task in front of me [exclusive]	26%	26%	26%
If the task is time consuming	55%	54%	54%
If the task is repetitive	50%	50%	50%
If I have seen colleagues use AI for the task	22%	21%	22%
If I know AI will do a good job	32%	32%	32%
If the consequences of errors are low	32%	31%	31%
If I am working under time pressure	29%	28%	28%
If I need to summarize or analyze large amounts of information	59%	58%	58%
If I want to improve the quality of my work	29%	29%	28%
If the task does not involve sensitive or confidential information	43%	44%	43%
If the task requires brainstorming or creative thinking	29%	29%	29%
If the task requires research or information gathering	49%	48%	48%
If I need help getting started on a task	40%	40%	38%
Other (please specify)	2%	2%	2%
None of the above	<1%	<1%	<1%

Q23e – Thinking about the tasks you use AI for, to what extent do you think AI saves or adds to the time you spend on those tasks?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Saves me a lot of time	23%	23%	23%
Saves me some time	60%	60%	60%
Has no impact on the time I spend	10%	10%	10%
Adds some time to the tasks	5%	5%	5%
Adds a lot of time to the tasks	2%	2%	2%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q24 – Are you using internal government AI tools, publicly available AI products, or both?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Internal	62%	63%	62%	41% (+21)
Publicly available	13%	12%	12%	24% (-11)
Both	25%	25%	26%	35% (-10)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q25 – To what extent do you agree with the following statement?

"The AI tools I use help me do my job better".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Strongly agree	29%	28%	28%	25% (+4)
Somewhat agree	49%	49%	49%	53% (-4)
Neither agree nor disagree	14%	14%	14%	17% (-3)
Somewhat disagree	6%	6%	6%	3% (+3)
Strongly disagree	2%	3%	3%	1% (+1)
Don't know	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1% (0)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

"My department is adopting AI in a way which will drive efficiency".

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Strongly agree	15%	14%	15%
Somewhat agree	41%	41%	41%
Neither agree nor disagree	20%	19%	18%
Somewhat disagree	15%	15%	15%
Strongly disagree	6%	7%	7%
Don't know	3%	4%	4%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Q26 – Are you aware of other civil servants using publicly-available AI tools in their work?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2025 results (change to 2026 in brackets)
Yes	64%	65%	65%	57% (+7)
No	36%	35%	35%	43% (-7)
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Question 26b was asked only of respondents who said they were aware of other civil servants using publicly-available AI tools.

Q26b – What proportion of civil servants do you think are using publicly-available AI tools?

Answer	2026 results (unweighted, excl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (unweighted, incl. op delivery profession)	2026 results (weighted, incl. op delivery profession)
Almost all civil servants are using them	4%	4%	4%
Most civil servants are using them	19%	18%	19%
About half of civil servants are using them	26%	26%	26%
A minority of civil servants are using them	29%	30%	29%
Almost no civil servants are using them	1%	1%	1%
Don't know / Not sure	21%	21%	21%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

3. Conclusion

This second Alternative People Survey paints a picture of a Civil Service which in some ways – largely through technology and AI – has been better equipped over the past year, but has not been better managed. Where the Government has invested in AI tools, civil servants have noticed and are using them, reporting positive results. However, the people picture remains deeply concerning: on the management of talent and poor performers, as well as recruitment, very little has changed and respondents are highly critical.

The improvements are real and should be acknowledged. The proportion of civil servants using AI in their work has risen from 30 per cent to 82 per cent in 12 months, the largest movement anywhere in the Survey. The proportion saying their department gives them sufficient access to data and technology has risen from 48 per cent to 69 per cent, and the proportion who feel encouraged to identify ways to cut waste from 37 per cent to 52 per cent. Agreement that departments encourage innovation is up ten points, and that they evaluate and learn from what they do is up seven. These are not small changes, and they suggest that where government sets a clear direction and provides the means to follow it, departments respond.

Against that, the findings on managing people are as poor as last year and in places worse. 76 per cent still disagree that the Civil Service manages poor performance well, against 79 per cent in 2025. Only 23 per cent believe recruitment rewards the skills candidates need to do the job. Just 16 per cent believe internal promotion leads to the right people being promoted. 60 per cent say voluntary exit schemes are untargeted, and four times as many respondents described those leaving as high performers than as poor performers. Departments are paying the people they most need to retain to exit.

One result has moved backwards. The proportion strongly agreeing that they are clear about their department's priorities has fallen six percentage points to 27 per cent, even as broad agreement holds at 73 per cent. Meanwhile, among Grade 6 and Senior Civil Service respondents, the group best placed to change how departments work, 79 per cent agree that processes get in the way of doing the job.

The machinery of government has been reorganised again since these responses were given. But the instruments for managing performance have not changed. The mutually agreed exits scheme, intended to give managers a route to address substandard performance, has been largely unused.[20] Meanwhile, the voluntary exit schemes being used to reduce headcount are, in the view of respondents, untargeted and likely to result in the loss of high performers the Civil Service needs to help drive change.

The Government has set out an ambitious agenda for rewiring the State, and has already begun reshaping the centre. But the findings of this Survey suggest that structural change alone will not be enough. Unless it is accompanied by reform of how the Civil Service is run day-to-day, and the culture that sets behaviours, the gap between ambition and delivery will remain.

[20] National Audit Office, *Government Exits and Redundancies*.

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