



Science and Technology Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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From Stephen Metcalfe MP, Chair

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Evidence-based policymaking in the Cabinet Office

My Committee recently asked the public for suggestions for future Science and Technology Committee inquiries. We received over 70 submissions, and nine people were asked to pitch their idea to us in person in February.

One of these topics was the use of evidence by the Cabinet Office in its policymaking. After hearing this pitch from Bob Ward (Policy and Communications Director, Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment) the Committee agreed that I should write to you to draw the points made to your attention and ask for your comments.

Mr Ward highlighted two examples of what he saw as a lack of attention to evidence in actions taken by the Cabinet Office:

- The decision to announce an “anti-lobbying clause” into new Government grant agreements. He highlighted a lack of consultation with academics and learned societies before announcing this change—relying instead on a paper published by the Institute of Economic Affairs—and queried whether the Government’s Chief Scientific Adviser (GCSA) had been consulted. My predecessor as Chair corresponded with the Business Secretary at the time to raise concerns about the clause, and was pleased to see that changes were made in response. However, the fact remains that this should not have been announced in the first place, and raises questions about the range of evidence and input reviewed before making the decision.
- The National Flood Resilience Review, and a decision taken not to consider risks from surface water flooding. Mr Ward told us that this was despite the fact that “Several experts told Mr Letwin [who chaired the review] that surface water flooding threatens more properties than either river or coastal flooding, and that in cities like London it could pose a threat to life, particularly for people living in basement dwellings”. We heard that Mr Letwin had told a meeting in March 2016 that the risk of surface water flooding was not being considered because the most recent flooding event in winter 2015-16 had mainly arisen from rivers.

More broadly, Mr Ward noted the Cabinet Office does not have a dedicated Chief Scientific Adviser who could have provided advice for these cases. I have corresponded recently with Sir Mark Walport as GCSA regarding the resilience of the CSA network and will be pursuing this further with his successor.

Mr Ward also drew our attention to GO-Science's 2015 publication *Chief Scientific Advisers and their officials: an introduction*, which states that: "Departments are expected to produce and publish high quality science, research, and evidence strategies that link science to departmental objectives, and on which plans for future research investment should be based".

On the strength of the points raised above, I would be grateful if you could set out for me:

- What lessons the Cabinet Office has learned from the "anti-lobbying clause" incident in terms of departmental processes;
- Whether the Cabinet Office has a "science, research and evidence strategy" as GO-Science expects;
- What processes are in place to ensure that policymaking in the Cabinet Office is suitably informed by evidence, including how the GCSA is involved in this; and
- Given a response to my Committee's predecessor in 2011 that "the Government Office for Science location in BIS does not inhibit close and effective cooperation between the staff of the GCSA and the Cabinet Office", whether you are confident that this is still the case in the light of the examples Mr Ward provides.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Ben Jones

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Stephen Metcalfe", written over a horizontal line.

Stephen Metcalfe MP
Chair