



Our Ref: MCO/0909

Stephen Metcalfe MP
Chair, Science and Technology Committee
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

3 April 2017

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your letter of the 6 March highlighting the points made by Bob Ward on the use of evidence by the Cabinet Office in its policymaking.

Mr Ward proposed that there had been a lack of attention to evidence in the announcement of the anti-lobbying clause. The clause in question was developed in consultation with departments across Whitehall, taking into account feedback received from departments in relation to existing practice. In particular, its development took into account feedback from colleagues in DCLG, who had been using the clause in their grant agreements over a period of months, without encountering significant negative reaction.

The clause was announced with a significant lead-in period, during which departments were tasked with developing internal guidance and discussing the policy with grant recipients, to ensure shared understanding of the requirement. It was during this period that objections were raised by grant recipients and their representative organisations. In response the Cabinet Office engaged with departments and external stakeholders to understand the concerns in the context of particular sectors, and to consider changes to ensure the policy was workable. This was achieved through delivering the policy intent via a wider policy: to introduce minimum standards for government grants - increasing flexibility, transparency and preventing unintended consequences.

Key learning has been focused on recognising the challenges presented when implementing a uniform policy in a diverse grants landscape as well as the need to engage with external stakeholders as well as departments as early as possible, to ensure any unintended consequences are fully understood.

Mr Ward suggested that the National Flood Resilience Review represented a lack of attention to evidence because it did not include surface water flooding. I disagree: river and coastal flooding operate through very different mechanisms than surface water flooding, and so it makes sense to consider the potential mitigations for each separately. Our assessment of reasonable worst case risks indicates that while more homes are vulnerable to surface water flooding, river and coastal flooding has more severe impacts, so it was sensible to consider river and coastal flooding first. The National Flood Resilience Review committed to further work to address the surface water flooding risk in 2017, and the Government is in the process of determining the scope for this work.

In response to your broader points on the processes within the Cabinet Office, which ensure that policymaking is informed by evidence. The Cabinet Office has been at the forefront in developing innovative ways of accessing evidence for policy. The What Works Network, the Behavioural Insights Team and Policy Lab all draw on the latest in scientific evidence to inform policy making. That said, the Cabinet Office is primarily a coordinating department, which means it has a different operating mode to many other departments across government. It is our view that an evidence strategy, as applicable to other departments would not be appropriate for the CO. There is very extensive joint and collaborative working between the Government Office for Science and the Cabinet Office in practice. For instance, they provide a joint secretariat to the Cabinet Secretary's advisory group on horizon scanning (CSAG). The Government Office for Science also works to provide scientific advice and support to the work of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, both in emergencies (where the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, SAGE, might be convened), and in development of the National Risk Assessment. This reflects the role of the Government Chief Scientific Adviser in providing advice to the PM and Cabinet on matters related to science.

It remains the government's view that GO-Science's position within BEIS in no way hampers its effective working with the Cabinet Office and there are a number of benefits to a strong relationship between GO-Science and the department responsible for delivering policy for science.

Yours ever,
Chris

CHRIS SKIDMORE MP