

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SELECT COMMITTEE
Public engagement in policy-making: Issues and Questions Paper

The Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) is conducting an inquiry into public engagement in policy-making, particularly the use of digital platforms to promote direct public participation.

The Committee would like to receive your answers to the following questions in particular, but if you wish to comment on related issues please feel free to do so. Do not feel obliged to respond to all of the questions if you have a specific interest. **Please send in your response by no later than noon on Friday 19 October 2012.** Details on how to submit your response can be found at the bottom of the call for evidence.

You may find it helpful to read the background below before responding.

1. **How do the models of policy-making currently used in Government promote or discourage members of the public from getting involved?**
2. **What advantages and disadvantages would greater public engagement in policy-making bring?**
3. **What are the best tools and methods for enabling public engagement in policy-making?**
 - **How should the Government measure the success or failure of different public engagement models?**
 - **How should the Government ensure that its spending on increasing public engagement in policy-making delivers value for money?**
 - **How can you ensure transparency and prevent conflicts of interest when opening up policy making to outside sources?**
4. **What role should the permanent civil service play in policy-making in the modern world?**
5. **Will “contestable” (out-sourced) models of policy-making provide greater opportunities for public engagement in the process?**
6. **What lessons can be learned from abroad, and how can they be applied within the UK?**
7. **How should Government ensure that policy shaped by public engagement reflects the chosen strategy of the Government; and national strategic imperatives?**

Background

The Civil Service Reform Plan

The 2012 *Civil Service Reform Plan* states that “Open policy making will become the default. Whitehall does not have a monopoly on policy-making expertise”.¹ Problems with the policy-making process identified by the Government in the Reform Plan include:

- Policy is drawn up on the basis of a range of inputs that is too narrow;
- Policy is not subject to sufficient external challenge before it is announced;
- The policy development process, and the evidence and data underlying it, is insufficiently transparent;
- Policy insufficiently reflects the reality experienced by citizens; and
- Policy is often developed with insufficient input from those who will have to implement it.

The Plan pledges two separate actions to open up policy-making:

- **The establishment of a “clear model of open policy-making”.** This action is about using technology and social media to engage the public in debates about policy and in the policy-making process itself. As well as referring to “web-based tools, platforms and new media” the Plan mentions “crowdsourcing” questions to define particular problems (instead of consulting on solutions) and using “policy labs” to test policies with a range of people and organisations before implementation.
- **A pilot of “contestable policy-making”** through the establishment of a central match-fund that can be used by Ministers to commission policy development from external sources, particularly where relevant expertise is lacking within the civil service. This has been characterised as “outsourcing”.

Open policy-making can be distinguished from consultation by means of the stage in the policy-making process at which it is engaged. Consultation tends to be conducted on the basis of a particular policy proposal or proposals, after the initial stages of policy development have been completed. Open policy-making is engaged before any policy proposals have been formulated. The same applies to outsourced, or “contestable” policy-making.

¹ Cabinet Office, *Civil Service Reform Plan* (June 2012), p.14

Current Government initiatives

“Open” and outsourced policy-making are at a formative stage in the UK and, consequently, there are not many current Government initiatives.

The Government has appointed Jimmy Wales, co-founder of Wikipedia, to act as an unpaid adviser to the Government in support of its agenda to open up policy-making. He will advise Government on developing innovative new ways technology can be used to give the public a greater say in the policy-making process.

On 1 August 2012, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Francis Maude, announced the first award from the Government’s Contestable Policy Fund. External bodies have been invited to bid to conduct a review of how other governments and multilateral organisations are structured and how they operate. The winning bidder will be asked to make policy recommendations for how these approaches might be applied by the UK.² The recommendations made by the review will be used to inform the next phase of civil service reform.

Previous experiments with direct public engagement in policy-making in the UK

As part of the Spending Review process in 2010, the Treasury operated a “Spending Challenge” website, which asked first the public sector then the public for ideas on how the Government could spend money more effectively, save money and reduce waste.³ Over 100,000 suggestions were submitted to the site, with an additional 10,000 suggestions submitted by means of correspondence.

Every submission to the Spending Challenge website was reviewed. “Spending Challenge Champions” summarised compliant ideas into policy proposals, which were then submitted to departments for consideration. The 2010 Spending Review announced 25 policies that were generated by the Spending Challenge.

HM Treasury’s website states that the website cost £19,300 to design and maintain and that the cost of reviewing and processing submissions was met from existing budgets. It states that “the ideas announced as part of the Spending Review will help deliver more than £500 million of savings”.⁴

The House of Commons Treasury Select Committee considered the Savings Challenge as part of its Report, *Spending Review 2010*. It concluded that “seeking the views of public servants and the general public can produce some worthwhile suggestions for savings and income generation. This has to be set against the resources required to manage and review tools such as the ‘Spending Challenge’. Short-term e-consultation can be useful but it cannot be a substitute for longer-term engagement with public

² Cabinet Office press notice, 1 August 2012, CAB 073-12

³ See http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spend_spendingchallenge.htm

⁴ http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spend_spendingchallenge_faq.htm

sector employees and responsiveness to input from stakeholder groups”. It also expressed some scepticism about the extent of the savings made as a result of the Challenge.⁵

Relevant PASC work

In its April 2012 Report, *Strategic Thinking in Government: without National Strategy, can viable Government strategy emerge?*, the Public Administration Select Committee recommended that both Government and Parliament need to engage with the public continuously to develop a deeper understanding both of how the public perceives our national interests and of what sort of country the public aspires for the UK to be.

How to respond

Responses should be submitted **by no later than noon on Friday 19 October 2012**, by e-mail to pascev@parliament.uk. If you do not have access to e-mail, you may send a paper copy of your response to the Clerk of the Public Administration Select Committee, Committee Office, First Floor, 7 Millbank, London SW1P 3JA.

Each submission should:

- be no more than 3,000 words in length;
- begin with a short summary in bullet point form;
- have numbered paragraphs; and
- be in Word format or a rich text format with as little use of colour or logos as possible.

Submissions should be original work, not previously published or circulated elsewhere, though previously published work can be referred to in a submission and submitted as supplementary material. Once submitted, your submission becomes the property of the Committee and no public use should be made of it unless you have first obtained permission from the Clerk of the Committee.

Please bear in mind that the Committee does not investigate individual cases.

The Committee normally, though not always, chooses to publish the written evidence it receives, either by printing the evidence, publishing it on the internet or making it publicly available through the Parliamentary Archives. If there is any information you believe to be sensitive you should highlight it and explain what harm you believe would result from its disclosure; the Committee will take this into account in deciding whether to publish or further disclose the evidence.

For data protection purposes, it would be helpful if individuals wishing to submit written evidence send their contact details in a covering letter or e-mail. You should be aware that there may be circumstances in which the House of Commons will be

⁵ Treasury Select Committee, Sixth Report of Session 2010-12, *Spending Review 2010* (HC 544) para 38.

required to communicate information to third parties on request, in order to comply with its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.