The Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) is undertaking an inquiry into the role of the Head of the Civil Service. The inquiry will cover the implications for the Civil Service of the recent announcement on the reorganisation of the highest level of Civil Service management following the retirement of Sir Gus O’Donnell on 31 December 2011. This paper sets out the issues and outlines key questions that those wishing to submit evidence are invited to consider. The deadline for submitting written evidence is noon on Friday 4 November 2011.

**Background:**

On 11 October 2011 the present Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service, Sir Gus O’Donnell KCB, announced that he will retire on 31 December. He also announced significant changes in the organisation of the apex of the Civil Service:

- The post of Head of the Civil Service is in future not to be held by the Cabinet Secretary but to be held by another Permanent Secretary, to be appointed following a competition
- The post of Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Office is in future not to be held by the Cabinet Secretary or by the Head of the Civil Service
- There will no longer be a separate Permanent Secretary for No. 10 Downing Street

The Head of the Civil Service is to be responsible for “providing professional and corporate leadership to the Civil Service”, combining this role with his or her existing departmental role. ¹

The Cabinet Secretary “will continue to be the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister’s most senior policy adviser and to act as Secretary to the Cabinet, responsible to all Ministers for the running of Cabinet Government.” ²

The Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary “will report to the Minister for the Cabinet Office and support the Head of the Civil Service on all Civil Service management roles.” ³

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¹ The roles of Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service were combined in 1983. The Cabinet Secretary — the most senior civil servant in the UK — is head of the Cabinet Office, with the remit to support the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, and Government as a whole.

² As Head of the Civil Service, the Cabinet Secretary has been responsible for making sure that the Civil Service is organised effectively and has the capability, in terms of skills, values and leadership, to deliver the Government’s objectives.

³ The present Cabinet Secretary is also the senior Permanent Secretary in the Cabinet Office.
Issues:

The Committee made the case for stronger leadership of the Civil Service in its 13th Report, *Change in Government: the agenda for leadership*, published in September 2011. It indicated in that report that it planned to investigate the role of the Head of the Civil Service, and cited as particular areas for investigation:

- arrangements for cross-departmental working
- the implementation of a change programme involving the top management of all departments, including the centre of Government, to identify the barriers to change
- the establishment of a centre for the operation of Government which is truly world-class and properly equipped to support delivery departments throughout the reform process and beyond.

Sir Gus O’Donnell acknowledges that this is a time of significant change for the Civil Service, and cites this as a reason for the reorganisation. This confirms the legitimacy of the Committee’s earlier concerns and the need for an inquiry into the subject.

Questions:

*The role of Head of the Civil Service*

What role and responsibilities does the Head of the Civil Service have? What should be the objectives of the role?

What should be the powers and functions of the Head of the Civil Service, and to whom should he or she be directly accountable?

What resources should be available to the new Head of the Civil Service in that role?

To what extent should the Head of the Civil Service be able to direct and control the Civil Service as a whole and the way it is organised? What remit should the new appointee have to drive change across Government? How can he or she drive change across other Departments in the same way as across his or her own Department?

How should the Head of the Civil Service be appointed? Should there any outside or Parliamentary supervision of the process? Should the appointment be subject of a pre-appointment hearing by a Select Committee or by the Liaison Committee?
The proposed changes

What are the potential advantages or disadvantages of establishing a post of Head of the Civil Service separate from the positions of Cabinet Secretary and Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Office?

How are the proposed changes expected to contribute to the more effective operation of the Civil Service? How will they contribute to better alignment between each delivery departments and between delivery departments and the heart of Government?

Can the Head of the Civil Service function effectively in what will be in practice a part time role? What percentage of the post-holder’s time should be allocated to this role? What effect will the appointment of a Permanent Secretary to hold the post concurrently have on the department which that Permanent Secretary heads?

What is the role of the Cabinet Office in respect of the responsibilities of the Head of the Civil Service and, in particular, what is the role of the Minister for the Cabinet Office? How should the Permanent Secretary, Cabinet Office work with the new Head of the Civil Service?

Who should be in charge of future appointments of Permanent Secretaries?

What will be the effect on the independence and standing of a Cabinet Secretary who is no longer also Head of the Civil Service?

How to respond

Responses should be submitted by noon on Friday 4 November 2011 by email to pasc@parliament.uk. If you do not have access to email, 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.
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 required to communicate information to third parties on request, in order to comply with its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.