

Management Board

Review of inter-departmental groups

Paper by the Senior Management Groups Secretary

Purpose

- 1.1 This paper proposes new arrangements for inter-departmental groups consistent with the responsibilities of Director Generals.

Conclusion and Decisions

- 1.2 Director Generals should be responsible for establishing the inter-departmental groups necessary to achieve delivery of outcomes for which they are responsible. The Head of the Office of the Chief Executive (OCE) could also establish inter-departmental groups to support her responsibilities (e.g. internal communications), in which case the points below would also apply to her. A separate review will be required of the two joint Board sub-groups (JBSB and PEB).
- 1.3 Inter-departmental groups should report to Director Generals, rather than the Management Board.
- 1.4 There should be a comprehensive review of existing inter-departmental groups by the relevant group owner—see Annex A.
- 1.5 Director Generals should involve the Head of the OCE in decisions to create all inter-departmental groups to ensure coherence.
- 1.6 Groups should be established (or re-established) by the end of May.
- 1.7 As an interim measure, Director Generals should ensure that, by no later than the start of April, membership of existing inter-departmental groups is consistent with the new House Service structure.
- 1.8 The Board is invited to:
 - a. agree these proposals
 - b. agree the list of owners of current second and third tier groups (see Annex A).

The current position

- 1.9 At present there are 24 second and third tier inter-departmental standing groups reporting to the Board, its Chairman or to the Board's groups:
 - 2 sub-committees of the Commons and Lords Services' Boards;

- 4 second-tier groups reporting to the Board, plus 11 third-tier groups reporting to them;
 - 7 other groups reporting to the Board or its Chairman;
- 1.10 There is a considerable resource cost associated with these groups, which have some 260 Commons Service and PICT members. As a very rough estimation, assuming each group meets monthly for one hour, this amounts to a combined 32.5 working days each month (assuming an 8-hour working day). This rough calculation excludes additional work outside of the meetings, such as pre-meetings, reading papers and checking draft minutes, as well as secretarial work. As well as the opportunity cost, there is also a considerable financial cost given that many of the members of these groups are in pay bands A or SCS.

Findings of the Tebbit report

- 1.11 In his report, Sir Kevin Tebbit said that “the proliferation of co-ordinating groups detracts from the efficient conduct of business”,¹ making it “more complicated than it should be, as well as taking up a great time of time for the staff involved”.² He concluded that “co-ordination between Departments to deliver House-wide cross-cutting business, and implement agreed policies and practices, though good in itself, still requires elaborate and time-consuming consultation and negotiation”.³
- 1.12 Sir Kevin was not against the principle of inter-departmental groups where they were “worthwhile”.⁴ For example, he supported the continuation of the Human Resources Group,⁵ and praised the work of the Group on Information for the Public.⁶
- 1.13 Sir Kevin recommended that “co-ordinating and cross-cutting groups should be reviewed with the objective of reducing their number and maintaining control over growth in future”.⁷

Standing groups in the new environment

- 1.14 The structure and number of standing groups that Tebbit commented on was perhaps necessary to support the Board of Management and the previous structure of the House Service. However, there were two negative features in particular that sometimes arose:
- group members pursuing outcomes appropriate to their department rather than the House Service;
 - lack of clear responsibility.

¹ Tebbit report, para 62, p21

² Tebbit report, para 119, p33

³ Tebbit report, para 62, p21

⁴ Tebbit report, para 119, p33

⁵ Tebbit report, para 157, p41

⁶ Tebbit report, para 198, p53

⁷ Tebbit report, para 119, p33

- 1.15 On the first point, this “parochial” approach sometimes led groups to agree an outcome acceptable to everyone, i.e. a “lowest common denominator” consensus outcome. To address this issue, Tebbit recommended that there should be:

“increased authority from the Management Board to the leaders of cross-cutting groups to deliver objectives and processes (to overcome the need for voluntary consensus from all Departments)”.⁸

- 1.16 There are two aspects to the second point concerning responsibility. First, where groups reported to the Board, it has been reported that, sometimes, groups would pass difficult decisions up to the Board to make. Also, group Chairs could only direct actions to relevant staff but did not have responsibility for delivery.
- 1.17 Further, if the current approach to inter-departmental groups were to continue unchanged, it could perpetuate existing poor practices where they exist, and so risk hindering the creation of a truly unified House Service.

Looking ahead (long-term): a new approach to groups

- 1.18 In the new environment, it is proposed that Director Generals should become responsible for establishing the inter-departmental groups they consider necessary to help in the achievement of their objectives. It is also proposed that the Head of the OCE should also be able to establish such groups to support her responsibilities; if so, the following would also apply to her.
- 1.19 All groups should report to the relevant Director General, instead of the current arrangement of reporting to the Board; this would help reinforce the responsibility of Director Generals for delivery. However, this would not prevent the Director General delegating the role of Chair of a group. Director Generals should be responsible for the secretarial arrangements for their inter-departmental groups.
- 1.20 It should be the aim to have fewer standing groups—instead, there should be an increase in targeted consultation, and inter-departmental project boards or working groups to take forward particular issues which are then disbanded upon completion.
- 1.21 An inter-departmental group should be established when a Director General:
- a. considers it necessary to achieve the delivery of an outcome for which they are responsible; and

⁸ Tebbit report, p5

- b. judges it likely to be superior to other means (e.g. consultation) in terms of achieving the outcome in the most efficient and timely manner possible.
- 1.22 It is recommended that each Director General should undertake a comprehensive (zero-based) review of the existing inter-departmental groups for which they are responsible—ownership of the existing inter-departmental groups can be found in Annex A. Such a review should run concurrently with the broader consideration by Director Generals of the set-up of their new departments, although this may mean that the existing structure of groups substantially continues in the interim (see section 7).
- 1.23 Given the functional alignment of departments, there is likely to be a reduced need for inter-departmental groups. However, as a check and balance on the number of inter-departmental groups, it is proposed that Director Generals should involve the Head of the OCE in decisions to create inter-departmental groups (both standing and temporary e.g. project boards). As a target, reviews should aim to be completed and groups established by the end of May.
- 1.24 After the review, Director Generals should also discuss with the Head of the OCE proposals for any additional standing and temporary inter-departmental groups.
- 1.25 The involvement of the OCE would help fulfil Tebbit's recommendation that the number of such groups should be controlled.⁹ It would also allow a coherent list of groups, their terms of reference and their memberships to be kept centrally, and allow the Office to provide advice on groups, for example to suggest members and ensure liaison between groups where appropriate.
- 1.26 To ensure that the new groups are operating as intended, it is proposed that the OCE should undertake a review of the inter-departmental groups next winter with the following terms of reference:
- “to examine whether inter-departmental groups are contributing to a unified House Service and appropriately supporting their Director General”.
- 1.27 If some current standing groups are to wound up, consideration should be given as to how this should be handled. For example, it could be highlighted to group members that their work has been appreciated and that their expertise might be called upon in the future.

Groups in the short and medium-term

⁹ Tebbit report, para 119, p33

- 1.28 In the short-term (until the end of March), existing groups could continue in their current form. This would allow continuity at a time of change elsewhere and for groups to continue to benefit from existing relations between members.
- 1.29 In the medium-term (March until May), the membership of existing groups should be revised along the new departmental lines. By this time, members would have become more integrated into their new departments and have a clearer understanding of the key issues.
- 1.30 An indicative timeline of the proposed changes to groups can be found in Annex B.

Tim Jarrett
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ANNEX A

Owners of current second and third tier groups

Group	Owner
<i>Sub Committees of the Management Board</i>	
Joint Business Systems Board (JBSB)†	Board
Parliamentary Estates Board (PEB)	Board
<i>Board second-tier management groups</i>	
Human Resources Group (HRG)	DG-R
Business Planning Group (BPG)	DG-R
Group on Information for the Public (GIP)	DG-IS
Services Information Group (SIG)	H-OCE
<i>Other groups reporting to the Board or its Chairman</i>	
Accommodation Strategy Working Group (ASWG)	DG-F
Contingency Planning Group (CPG)	DG-F
Data Protection Contact Group	DG-R
Internet Strategy Board	DG-IS
Intranet Strategy Board	DG-IS
Parliamentary Visitors Board (PVB)	DG-IS
Printing and Publishing Management Group	DG-CCS
<i>Groups reporting to HRG</i>	
Internal Communications Group (ICG)	H-OCE
Learning and Development Group (LDG)	DG-R
Diversity Forum (DF)	DG-R
Officer Status Working Group (OSWG)‡	—
Health and Safety Committee	DG-R
Human Resources Practitioners Group (HRPG)	DG-R
<i>Groups reporting to BPG</i>	
Finance Practitioners Group (FPG)	DG-R
Procurement Practitioners Group (PPG)	DG-R
<i>Groups reporting to GIP</i>	
Exhibitions Advisory Group (EAG)	DG-IS
Image Library Subgroup	DG-IS
<i>Groups reporting to SIG</i>	
Network for Communicating with Members	H-OCE

† review might be deferred to become part of the PICT health check
‡ HRG agreed that the OSWG should be wound up, although issues of access would continue to be reviewed.

ANNEX B

Review timeline

