



# Co-ordinating children's policy across government

Summary of Institute for Government research and private roundtable discussion – September 2023

## Introduction

The biggest policy problems facing the UK rarely fit neatly into the siloed structures of government. From net zero to regional inequality, public safety to public health, government's ability to co-ordinate policy between departments, tiers of government and other sectors is critical to its effectiveness. It is also politically important to both the Conservative and Labour parties, in light of the government's 'levelling up' programme and the opposition's 'five missions' for a would-be Labour administration.

The Institute for Government (IfG) has a long-term interest in methods of cross-cutting policy making, conducting research for more than a decade on topics which include: the role of cabinet and joint ministers; machinery of government changes; special units; the role of the Treasury and its spending processes; public service targets; and the role of independent scrutiny.

In September 2023 the IfG partnered with a coalition of five leading children's charities to host a private roundtable event on the topic of **co-ordinating children's policy across government**. Nearly every department, tier of government and public service have a stake in and responsibility for children's policy, making it a prime example of the need to be able to organise policy and delivery across organisational boundaries.

This roundtable brought together experts with diverse experience of cross-cutting policy programmes with leaders in children's policy, including former senior civil servants, academics and civil society leaders, to discuss what lessons should be drawn from similar agendas and how best to approach co-ordinating children's policy.

This note summarises the findings of the roundtable discussion within the context of, and drawing from, past IfG research on the mechanisms of cross-cutting policy making. It is structured in two parts: lessons on planning children’s policy, and lessons on delivering children’s policy.

### Main takeaways in brief

Four overarching messages were emphasised throughout the discussion, which serve as a useful context from which to understand the more specific findings described below:

1. **Senior political leadership**, usually from the prime minister or chancellor, is a prerequisite for effective cross-cutting policy making, although the exact shape of this might change over time.
2. Successful cross-cutting programmes require a range of **planning, budgeting and delivery ‘levers’ to pull in the same direction** – no single mechanism is, on its own, sufficient.
3. The **fundamental impact of economic trends and, especially, living standards** on social policy such as children’s cannot be underestimated and, so the government’s – and in particular the Treasury’s – role in the economy should not be neglected.
4. **Place is a powerful basis** around which to organise collaboration between institutions. This partly explains why cross-cutting policy making can be better co-ordinated at regional or local government level.\*

## Part 1: Planning children’s policy across government

### Defining the problem and agreeing the goal

The first stage of developing any policy programme is to define the problem to be addressed and set the goal the government is trying to achieve. There are many ways this can be done that draw on political and policy documents, data, engagement and targets.

#### Manifestos signal intent and build momentum

Political manifestos do not equate to practical strategy that can be implemented in government. Rarely do they comprehensively prioritise among competing plans, or even offer a sense of direction for how commitments will be achieved.<sup>1</sup> But manifestos do provide a valuable means by which an incoming or incumbent administration can signal its intent for cross-cutting policy, helping government to define the problem, providing political capital and injecting momentum into the organisation of a policy programme.

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\* While co-ordination at a local level is addressed below, this note, and the discussion it reflects, focused primarily on co-ordination at UK government-level.

### **Setting the vision promptly is important to maintain momentum**

Cross-cutting policy programmes require prioritisation and momentum across government to move from conception to delivery amid the competing pressures of each department. Any government seeking to define a cross-cutting problem therefore has an incentive to do so quickly, before political momentum wanes.<sup>2</sup>

Repeated delays to the *Levelling Up* white paper during Boris Johnson's government demonstrate the 'opportunity cost' of failing to keep up momentum. By the time the white paper set out the government's definition of levelling up and its plans for it in February 2022, Johnson had been prime minister for two and a half years (and would only continue for another five months).

Roundtable participants reflected that setting the vision for a cross-cutting programme quickly can be easier where there is less existing policy to be navigated, and where no senior ministers already 'own' ongoing efforts. New Labour's Sure Start programme was cited as an example of such circumstances benefiting the policy planning process.

### **Data is integral to planning – and government's data capabilities are improving**

Defining the policy problem(s) to be addressed requires the rich picture enabled by data. The range of data available to policy makers, including on children's policy, has increased rapidly in recent years, as have government's data skills and infrastructure.

The importance of data means that early policy making processes cannot be the sole responsibility of policy officials. In addition to involving those with frontline delivery expertise, incorporating digital and data experts into multidisciplinary teams is critical. As is designing in the infrastructure necessary to pool data between public sector organisations at speed and with ease.

This has not been, and is not, always the case. Participants reflected that New Labour's Sure Start programme was hindered by a lack of data infrastructure in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme during its initial implementation. Recent IfG research into data sharing between public services during the pandemic found that technical difficulties arising through incompatible IT systems undermined efforts to share data in support of the public sector's Covid response.<sup>3</sup>

Participants also questioned whether data privacy requirements, defined in legislation, make it disproportionately difficult to share data between public services in such a way as to support cross-cutting policy making. Though the same IfG research into data sharing found that current legislation (including the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR) was "firm but sufficiently flexible to allow government to respond quickly" to the crisis, provided a clearly articulated purpose for the data sharing was agreed between partners.<sup>4</sup>

## Targets are a flawed but powerful tool

Public service targets have been used to define the objective of policy priorities in UK government for more than a century. The inflexibility of targets can and often does create perverse consequences as a result of ‘gaming’<sup>5</sup> – see, for example, the reclassification and manipulation of NHS data in the early 2000s to meet Tony Blair’s targets for hospital waiting times. In some cases, an excessive focus on targets has contributed to unacceptable public service failures, as happened at Mid Staffordshire NHS Hospital Trust. They can also be used to entrench centralised approaches to policy making.

But targets nevertheless remain a means by which a government can send a clear signal through the system as to its priorities, and provide an objective around which different parts of government can cohere. The UK’s net zero targets, and previous targets on child poverty, are examples of where targets have acted effectively as a rallying call for intergovernmental collaboration. Furthermore, IfG research has found that targets *can* improve the performance of public services, but are more adept at raising minimum standards than enabling excellence.<sup>6</sup>

Whether and how targets measure inputs (the allocation of resources including money and people), outputs (measures of activity such as GP appointments) and outcomes (the end result for people and society, such as life expectancy, educational attainment or overall crime rates) matters. Participants emphasised that an understanding of outcomes is required to define the eventual policy goal to which the government is aiming. In other words, a successful children’s policy requires some sense of the ways policy is intending to improve children’s lives.

Outcome frameworks can, therefore, act as a powerful means of rallying partner institutions, organising around a common purpose and judging performance over time. Participants cited the outcomes introduced in the 2003 Every Child Matters initiative (later clarified as legislative targets in the 2010 Child Poverty Act) as an effective example that contributed to (mostly) falling child poverty rates in during the 2000s. Internationally, other examples include the UN sustainable development goals, New Zealand’s Living Standards Framework and the US-based non-profit Social Progress Imperative’s ‘social progress index’.

A combination of input and output metrics need to be tracked to clarify how the resources and activity of the government are helping achieve those outcomes. This is integral to agreeing, testing and adjusting a coherent theory of change. Though it is vital policy makers recognise that cross-cutting policy programmes operate within complex economic, social and environmental systems which mean there is never a direct causal relationship between the government’s inputs, outputs and outcomes.<sup>7</sup> They must also design targets carefully to reduce this risk of creating perverse incentives.<sup>8</sup>

## Utilising political sponsorship

### Senior political leadership is a prerequisite

Cross-cutting policy priorities require the commitment and collaboration of different parts of government, not least the main departments and by extension their secretaries of state. To achieve this, political leadership from the centre of government is essential. Ultimately, that leadership and authority must come from the prime minister and/or the chancellor, even if practical leadership is then delegated through the system to a lower level. The power of prime ministerial leadership for such programmes can be seen in the waning political salience of Johnson's levelling up agenda under Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak.<sup>9</sup> Or, before that, in the championing of child poverty targets by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

The prime minister's focus and engagement will inevitably fluctuate over time, so having another senior leader who can act as their representative, with their authority, can maintain momentum. For example, with the prime minister's authority, the chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster can act as a powerful broker from the Cabinet Office. Sometimes, a powerful secretary of state can undertake that broker function instead, if endowed with the authority to make policy decisions by the prime minister. This was arguably the case, briefly, with Michael Gove's leadership as levelling up secretary under Johnson. It is unrealistic to expect political sponsorship of any form to remain wholly consistent throughout a cross-cutting, long-term programme. So it is wise to build in systemic means of keeping attention focused on a programme as far as possible, such as through regular evaluation processes, reporting to parliament and sources of independent scrutiny.

### Ministerial churn can make political sponsorship difficult

Cross-cutting policy programmes benefit from stable political leadership. Naturally, political instability – manifesting often in ministerial turnover – can disrupt the policy process. This was particularly the case in 2022, following the fall of Johnson's government and Truss' short-lived premiership. The impact of this can be seen in the fate of the high-profile schools white paper, *Opportunity for All*, launched just before this period, in March 2022.<sup>10</sup> Between its publication and the December 2022 scrapping of the Schools Bills – which would have implemented many of its proposals<sup>11</sup> – there had been no fewer than five education secretaries. Each minister will bring their own priorities to the role, may view particular issues differently and, at the very least, will take time to get to grips with their new portfolio.<sup>12</sup> It is therefore difficult to retain momentum for cross-cutting policies when ministerial churn is so high.

### Policy makers must work with the grain of politics

If senior political leadership is important to the success of cross-cutting policy, it is also true that those policy programmes must work within the bounds of the Overton window – of what is politically possible. Pursuing proposals incompatible with the government's fiscal framework, for example, or that are in conflict with other priorities, will inevitably result in progress being blocked. Repeated failures to introduce reform to social care financing demonstrate this.

## Setting the strategy

### Strategy should, in some form, be written down

Government pursues a range of written and unwritten strategy, and to varying degrees of coherence. But cross-cutting strategies do need to be defined, and written down, to ensure that different parts of government can work to a coherent plan.

There are various ways to do this. Strategy documents and white papers are a common and flexible way for different parts of government to agree a shared vision. Participants reflected on the success of Every Child Matters as a strategy capable of cohering different parts of the public sector. Depending on the work being undertaken, legislation can be useful for embedding a strategy across government. The Climate Change Act 2008 is an example, with the UK's net zero targets subsequently amended through legislation in 2019.

Effective strategies can take different forms but share common components.

A good strategy should:

- define the problem in question and the goal(s)
- set, where appropriate, targets by which progress can be judged
- build upon a foundation of rich data, including from relevant lived experience
- outline a theory of change as to how the government believes its actions and resources can make a difference
- align action to budgets across government
- detail the delivery landscape and system in which the strategy is operating, including an appreciation of the complexity at play
- allocate responsibility between partners
- set out processes for co-ordination, evaluation and performance reporting.

### The strategy should provide a theory of change

Together these should offer an explanation of how the government intends to allocate its resources and organise its work to achieve a particular result.<sup>13</sup> By doing so, it can link its short-term activity to medium-term plans, and long-term goals. Clarifying this plan in a strategy, even while acknowledging the contingencies and complexities within which that strategy operates, is important to avoid two risks.

First, the danger of pursuing a target without a practical plan. IfG research has previously identified gaps in the government's net zero strategy where, for instance, plans for the transformation of agriculture do not match the scale of ambition in the UK's net zero targets.<sup>14</sup> And second, the danger of ticking off a long 'to do list' without a sense of the government's overall goal.

## Directly engaging children is important for forming relevant plans

IfG research has consistently found that problems with policy making – including a tendency for Whitehall parochialism – can be addressed by departments making much more extensive use of deliberative methods to give the public a greater stake in policy making.<sup>15</sup> This is as true for children’s policy as other areas of domestic policy.

Different parts of government are already demonstrating the value of varied methods of directly engaging children and young people. Recent research commissioned by the Scottish government used a range of experimental qualitative methods to improve support for pupils with complex needs.<sup>16</sup> In local government, Camden Council have used a youth citizens assembly to consider approaches to violence against women and girls, and a “hyper-local” engagement project in Euston to commence the borough’s new “wellbeing index”.<sup>17</sup>

Roundtable participants reflected that directly engaging children can also be of use to cross-cutting programmes in particular, because users of public services do not see organisational, bureaucratic boundaries in the same way policy makers do. So the process of engagement can force policy makers to view problems differently, prompting more cross-departmental collaboration. It was stressed that this engagement should go beyond limited methods of retrospective consultations, including more deliberative techniques earlier in policy making.

## Cohering departments

One of the barriers to cross-cutting policy making is the difficulty of ensuring policy coheres between departments and across the state. There are several methods commonly used to cohere policy, including cross-departmental plans and policy impact assessments.

### Plans need to be cross-departmental

The first, recent iteration of cross-departmental plans came in the form of New Labour’s Public Service Agreements (PSAs) in the late 1990s. PSAs evolved over the 2000s and at their most effective focussed on a relatively small number of outcomes, all of which were cross-departmental, and were owned and invested in by the Treasury.

Cross-departmental plans have evolved since PSAs. Today’s equivalents take the form of cross-cutting priority outcomes within departments’ outcome delivery plans (ODPs). However, only a minority of priority outcomes are cross-departmental and IfG research in 2022 found that the cross-departmental potential of ODPs was not being realised because it was not leading to adequate ongoing co-ordination between departments jointly responsible for priority outcomes.<sup>18</sup>

Whichever form they take, cross-departmental plans should be reflected in the government’s overall performance framework, as was done by incorporating the levelling up ‘missions’ into the existing ODP framework in 2022. This can avoid the construction of competing ‘fiefdoms’ and the duplication of performance reporting across government.

## Impact assessments are of limited use on their own but can help policy coherence in conjunction with other techniques

Policy impact assessments, checks and tests have been used extensively to support cross-cutting policy agendas including net zero, equality, human rights, the family – and children’s rights.

IfG research into impact assessments found that recurring flaws can undermine their usefulness. In particular, the quality of assessments can be inconsistent and often poor. This is especially true where the output of assessments is not transparently published, as was found to be the case with David Cameron’s ‘family test’.<sup>19</sup> Tests usually only apply to new, rather than existing policy. They are only enforced when considered important by decision makers including ministers in departments and the Treasury. Participants also reflected that they occur at the end of the policy making process, to coincide with formal decision making, and so too late to meaningfully influence policy. They can also be open to politicisation.

Impact assessments can, nevertheless, be a productive tool for policy coherence as part of a wider approach. Some participants reflected that policy tests can act as a backstop check on policy, capable of at least identifying and evidencing incoherence between policies. Past research has found this to be the case, for instance, with environmental impact assessments – which have reportedly helped to improve the consideration of environmental consequences in policy making.<sup>20</sup>

## Aligning budgets and the role of the Treasury

### Treasury support is critical

Cross-cutting policy priorities tend to be long-term problems that require ongoing public spending. Often, these priorities are rooted in a ‘spend-to-save’ case for preventative policy. Both are true for children’s policy.

The Treasury, as the UK’s finance ministry, can and will block spending proposals if they do not fit within the government’s fiscal framework or they do not enjoy the support of the chancellor and the prime minister. Again, the repeated failed attempts to reform the financing of social care demonstrate this.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast, Treasury support and engagement can bolster momentum behind a policy programme. Gordon Brown’s Treasury led on the Every Child Matters programme in the 2000s and was cited as an example of where such support proved critical. This has also been the case for net zero in recent years, with the Treasury publishing its ‘net zero review’ alongside the government’s overarching strategy in 2021 and, at the same time, the Treasury listing net zero as one of its (joint) priority outcomes in its public-facing ODP.



## Plans need to be made through the Treasury's sending review and budget processes

Treasury support is vital in part because many of the most powerful levers at the government's disposal for addressing social policy issues sit within it. By setting departmental budgets, and through macroeconomic policy, it controls powerful levers for determining children's living standards and the public services they have access to.

For this reason, and so that cross-departmental budgets can be 'baked in' to the government's plans, cross-cutting plans must be resourced through the normal Treasury spending processes. If these plans are not reflected in departments' budget allocations it is much more likely they are deprioritised at the expense of other plans more squarely in departments' control and budgets.

This also means that departments' ability to successfully negotiate with the Treasury is important. Understanding and harnessing the *Green Book's* 'five case model' (the strategic, economic, commercial, financial and management dimensions) is key to building a good case. While it is true that departments must be able to set out a coherent economic and financial case, the Treasury has emphasised that the strategic case is equally important. These must appraise social or public value in such a way that

"includes all significant costs and benefits that affect the welfare and wellbeing of the population, not just market effects. For example, environmental, cultural, health, social care, justice and security effects [should be] included".<sup>22</sup>

## UK government still struggles to share budgets

The vast majority of spending allocation is still undertaken on a department by department basis. The Treasury claims to encourage and support joint spending bids, with departments required to identify which priority outcomes their spending bids will support, including those that sit between multiple departments. The Shared Outcomes Fund was created to enable innovative cross-government working, but totalled only £200m across three years from 2021/22.<sup>23</sup> Most budgets remain within departmental siloes.

The difficulty of achieving shared budgets is understandable given the bilateral negotiations between departments and the Treasury on which most spending decisions are based. And because shared budgets would first require a clear view of how existing budgets apply to cross-cutting policy between departments – something that is not easy to calculate. But shared budgets would help to improve cross-cutting planning and the difficulties would not be insurmountable with sufficient support from the prime minister and chancellor.

## Part 2: Delivering children's policy across government

### Machinery of government

#### Machinery of government changes can help bring focus

Prime ministers have almost complete control over the structures of Whitehall and so often opt to use machinery of government (MoG) changes as a way of entrenching their most important, often cross-cutting priorities. This can be helpful in various ways.

MoG changes can increase the government's focus on a particular area of policy. As was arguably the case with the creation of the Department for International Development (DfID) in 1997. MoG changes can also bring together previously disparate policy functions under one department, with one budget and one decision-making structure. This was the aim of the creation of the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology in February 2023, or before that the creation of the Department of Energy and Climate Change in 2008.

#### But MoG changes are disruptive and risky

However, MoG changes are not always helpful for progressing cross-departmental policy. For every two policy functions that are united in a newly created department, two previously united functions will be divided. Sometimes new departments are created to send a signal through Whitehall but without the remit required to deliver its objectives. This was the case with the creation of the Department for Exiting the European Union in 2016.<sup>24</sup>

They are also expensive – both in terms of literal cost of merging or creating departments, and in terms of the opportunity cost caused by the disruption of the change. IfG research found that the ongoing disruption of the reunification of DfID and the Foreign Office in 2020 to form the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office was still undermining the work of the department when the UK evacuated all its troops from Afghanistan in 2021, and when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.<sup>25</sup>

Participants also reflected that it is impossible to cohere all government policy within one department for many cross-cutting priorities. This includes children's policy, which spans, at very least, DfE, DCMS, DLUHC, DWP, HMT, DHSC and the Home Office. It would be extremely difficult to unite all these functions under one department without causing problems elsewhere in the system.

## Cabinet and the ministerial ranks

### Shifting cabinet responsibilities brings similar trade-offs to MoG changes

Uniting disparate policy functions within one cabinet minister's portfolio can help to simplify responsibility for that policy area and, as a result, enhance focus on it at least at the political level. But changes to cabinet responsibilities bring similar risks to MoG changes described above.

With regards to children's policy, participants argued that, because relevant levers sit across so many existing departments, creating a single cabinet minister responsible would run one of two risks. Either it would necessitate a disruptive MoG change, to bring the relevant policies under the direction of the cabinet minister. Or it would leave a dedicated secretary of state without the institutional heft a department provides to enact their political priorities. Participants suggested this would not be considered a politically desirable role.

### Joint ministers can be an alternative but run different risks

Joint ministerial roles have been used to provide ministerial focus and leadership to an issue that spans multiple departments. And they can be successful at doing so. For example, Baroness Warsi reflected positively to the IfG's Ministers Reflect Archive that her own joint ministerial role (between the Foreign Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government) forced her to think and work in a cross-cutting way.<sup>26</sup>

But other former joint ministers have flagged unforeseen problems. Nick Boles described the unnecessary additional bureaucracy that arose from having two departments, private offices and associated support.<sup>27</sup> George Freeman explained that his two departments – of Business and Industrial Strategy, and Heath – refused to share some documents with him because he was also a minister in the other.<sup>28</sup> Damien Green noted that junior ministers must sometimes serve different and competing interests of their secretaries of state, as he had to navigating between the home and justice secretaries.<sup>29</sup>

## Co-ordinating delivery

### The centre of government is well-placed to co-ordinate between departments

Brokering policy between departments is a long-standing function of the Cabinet Office and its secretariat teams, who support cabinet and its committees by co-ordinating and resolving disputes between departments. The Cabinet Office also sometimes plays a more direct co-ordination and delivery role through special 'units' or equivalent (described below).

The Cabinet Office's brokering can, but does not always, work well. Too often it is forced into lowest common denominator compromise.<sup>30</sup> Overcoming this requires both political and official leadership at the centre – from the prime minister, to signal an issue is a cross-government priorities, and from the cabinet secretary and other civil service leaders, to set the terms for and expectations of cross-departmental collaboration.

Co-ordination of delivery within UK government does not have to occur at the centre of government. For instance, under Boris Johnson co-ordination of the levelling up agenda was delegated to Michael Gove as secretary of state for levelling up. This can work, but only if the politicians and teams responsible for brokering policy across government have the authority to make decisions.<sup>31</sup>

### **It is important to set up leadership structures**

Often, and traditionally, this means using cabinet committees to reflect the government's key priorities. But in setting up leadership structures for cross-cutting programmes there are impactful decisions for the prime minister to make, each of which force trade-offs.

These include the chair of the committee, often either the prime minister, chancellor, chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster, or the lead secretary of state. The level of decision-making power delegated to which layer of the leadership structure, ranging from models of delegated collective agreement to more centralised approaches in which more decisions flow up to cabinet. Membership of the committee is also important. Beyond the interministerial politics of committee membership, government's preparations for Brexit and response to Covid-19 showed that there is value in opening membership beyond ministers to include, for example, senior civil servants and representatives from other tiers of government.

There is no reason that membership of leadership structures could not also include other key leaders from public sector institutions and beyond. Participants reflected on the effectiveness of the Criminal Justice Board, and its local equivalents, in the 2000s during the time of the Office for Criminal Justice Reform, which brought together political, official and expert leaders from different organisations on a regular basis.

The governance of these leadership arrangements matters. Participants reflected that, beyond the organisation of leadership committees, it is important for leaders working on a cross-cutting programmes have a clear, shared understanding of how decision making responsibility is organised and delegated, so that partner institutions are enabled to play their part without excessive bureaucracy or slowed decision making.

Consistency of collaboration at the leadership level is important. Participants cited New Zealand's Beehive, the executive wing of New Zealand parliament buildings in which all ministers work, as an example of another means by which cross-departmental collaboration between politicians has been successfully encouraged, even if that model brings other drawbacks (such as separation between ministers and their official teams).

### Special units can be an effective tool for co-ordination

Prime ministers have used special, cross-departmental units to drive progress towards their priorities for decades. In recent years they have been created to cover policy areas such as Covid-19, race disparity, rough sleeping and social exclusion. They can be extremely effective at co-ordinating work between multiple departments and the centre of government but there are lessons to be learned from the history of special units to understand how they work best:

- Units work best when they are used to bring outside expertise into government, as was done through the first iteration of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit and units on social exclusion and rough sleeping.
- Special units should be formed of multi-disciplinary teams, preferably comprising a combination of organisations and sectors, as a means of bringing together disparate talent and cohering sectors around a common mission.
- Like cross-cutting policy programmes more broadly, special units built to co-ordinate them require the political sponsorship and engagement of the prime minister, so that they can represent the prime minister in their dealings with departments.
- Even if units are 'homed' at the centre of government, they require a strong relationship with the relevant lead department and should not be seen to be replacing it.
- The value of special units wane over time. So they ought to be designed with a legacy plan in mind, mainstreaming the unit back into regular Whitehall structures.
- This includes a plan for institutional memory. Too much information on former special units has been lost after their dissolution.<sup>32</sup>

### Cross-cutting co-ordination can be easier in local government

This note mostly covers the levers of co-ordination between central government departments. However, participants also reflected that co-ordinating between organisations has proven easier and more effective at a local level and around a place. Sure Start was cited as an example where much of the effective inter-institutional collaboration happened at a local and regional level, incentivised but not always led by Whitehall.

Participants reflected that central government can support and incorporate place-based collaboration in its approach to cross-cutting programmes. The Child Poverty Act 2010 was cited as an example. This placed a duty on councils to manage child poverty strategies developed in partnership with the voluntary sector. Another recent example includes the levelling up programme's attempts to incorporate place-based policy making techniques, including more spatial data, into Whitehall processes.

## Monitoring, evaluation and adjusting delivery

### A 'rhythm' of delivery is needed to monitor progress and change course

A regularly, timed process of performance reporting is required to ensure that each part of government with a stake in a cross-cutting programme has a shared, consistent view of the progress being made towards objectives, and can identify and overcome problems. Regular checkpoints at which delivery is assessed are a useful means to flag problems to political sponsors and use that political leadership to overcome them.

There are, again, different approaches to establishing that rhythm of delivery: which politicians and officials are involved; what information and level of detail is required; how many matters are delegated to which levels of the system and what is held centrally. There is no single 'right' model, though participants reflected on Blair's 'stocktakes' of his top priorities (captured in PSAs) as being an effective approach. These stocktakes included both political and official leaders and subject matter experts. Critically, they were supported with timely and specific data.

### Investing in shared data and public evaluation makes delivery more robust

Shared data is integral to monitoring and evaluation. Creating a shared, single version of the truth that is as close as possible to live, pooled data between organisations will make analysis easier and more fruitful. Investing in that data infrastructure in the early design process will prove useful later into delivery.

As will ensuring there are both plans and sufficient resource for live evaluation of delivery, that can then be fed into performance reporting and policy making across government. In recent years the work of the new Evaluation Task Force between the Treasury and Cabinet Office has made progress in setting expectations for departmental evaluation of policy, but these laudable standards need protected resource.

## Oversight and scrutiny

### Public, independent scrutiny improves policy

Independent scrutiny can make policy proposals and implementation more robust and plans for how policy will be scrutinised should be considered in the early design of a programme. The creation of the Committee on Climate Change through the Climate Change Act 2008 is a prime example of where this has been achieved, through legislation. Independent scrutiny can also act as a safeguard against the risk of political salience waning from a programme, as the leading politicians' attention fluctuates over time. This will inevitably be the case, but independent scrutiny can increase the incentives that government continue its focus on a given issue.

Effective independent scrutiny relies on several factors. First, enough analysis, evidence and advice on the policy and its delivery being made available for scrutiny, preferably by transparent publication. Second, relatedly, a means of the government reporting to

parliament on regular progress can set clear terms for both parliamentary and other, independent scrutiny. And third, sources of independent scrutiny require an institutional form and resources with which to work.

But those independent institutions of scrutiny do need to retain the political support required for their existence regardless of inherent value<sup>33</sup> – as demonstrated by the unpicking, through the 2010s, of the statutory commitments made in the Child Poverty Act.

## Conclusion

The biggest policy problems facing the UK rarely fit neatly into departmental siloes and require co-ordination across government. But there is a reason cross-departmental working has tripped up so many governments over such a long time. It is hard. It takes time and concerted effort to lead cross-cutting policy programmes. And it requires careful consideration and, arguably, training for politicians and officials alike. This note draws on the varied expertise of practitioners, and compares best practice from previous cross-cutting programmes, to identify lessons for more effective policy making in the future.

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