

Rt. Hon. Nick Thomas-Symonds MP  
Minister for the Cabinet Office  
His Majesty's Paymaster General

25 February 2026

Dear Nick,

I am writing to provide our second update on the Civil Service Commission's progress since taking on the function to provide advice on applications under the Business Appointment Rules for senior civil servants and special advisers. My update focuses predominantly on progress in transparency, audit and timeliness.

### **Transparency**

We have progressed our commitment to transparency by publishing 21 cases on our website to date, as well as updated guidance on the process applied by the Commission in considering applications. Our new website will launch at the start of the 2026/27 financial year. This will serve as an enhanced source of information about the process and expected outcomes for applicants, as well as a timely and transparent source of published advice. It will also help those considering a career in the Civil Service to understand the rules to which they will be subject.

### **Audit**

We have progressed our new BARs audit function to understand how the Rules are applied across departments for civil servants at grades below SCS Pay Band 3. We have completed initial engagement with 14 departments and the Scottish Government. Full departmental audits are scheduled to launch in April, which will include a review of the 2025–26 application data to identify and address any regional or departmental inconsistencies.

### **Timeliness**

Measured from the receipt of an application to the issuing of provisional advice, the Commission is currently processing Level 1 cases, for unpaid and other appointments where the risks to government integrity are lower, in approximately 8 working days (with 19 days of the wider application lifecycle spent with other bodies). All other appointments, known as Level 2 cases, are currently progressed in 11

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working days (41 days with other bodies). While I am content that the Commission is managing cases efficiently, our data demonstrates that there remains a way to go in ensuring all elements of the process are operating promptly. As referenced in your original request to the Commission, extended wait times can discourage applicants from engaging with the process. I would be grateful for any support you can provide in addressing this.

Elsewhere, we have:

- Scoped a strategic review of the BARs as they apply to senior civil servants. Initial steps will involve engagement with former applicants, benchmarking against international systems and testing of our positions against specific case studies. I would be grateful for a discussion on your advice and opinions on this issue in the coming weeks.
- Implemented a formal feedback loop with applicants to gather information on their experience of the process. I will share regular updates of these results as response numbers build.
- Progressed continuous testing of AI-driven tools to further streamline processes as well as maintain consistency based on precedent. We plan to share learnings and demonstrate these more widely in the next quarter.
- Developed and applied a new methodology which permits the consideration of retrospective applications in line with the approach set out in your original request to the Commission.

I look forward to continuing our work in this area and to exchanging approaches and perspectives with the other organisations administering advice under the BARs as appropriate.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gisela Stuart".

**Gisela Stuart**  
First Civil Service Commissioner