

Celebrating success

04/12/2017

The Permanent Secretary Leslie Evans looks back on the week

Civil Service Awards

My #proudpermsec hashtag was put to good use last week when I accompanied shortlisted SG colleagues to the Civil Service Awards to recognise their outstanding work and achievements. The Transport Scotland team won the 'Project Delivery Excellence Award' for the impressive Queensferry Crossing. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) team won in the 'Use of Evidence' category for their innovative work on making data useful, accessible and applicable in communities across Scotland.

Congratulations to all nominees and winners – you have set a formidable example of civil service excellence and secured the best Scottish showing ever at these awards. And I have my fingers crossed for further success this evening with eight teams nominated across five categories at the Scottish Public Service Awards.

Busy times

December is a busy month with the publication of the Scottish Government Draft Budget on 14 December. It's an intense time for the budget team, and for the organisation as a whole, not least as – with the deployment of new tax powers and pressure on the public purse continues – public and parliamentary interest builds and scrutiny of decisions, priorities and delivery deepens. Many of you will have end of year deadlines too. Our focus on delivery and meeting commitments is important – but so is making the time to challenge, improve, learn and share as we go.

Social Media

Recent research conducted via the People Panel shows that we are increasingly using social media for work purposes to connect, share and communicate with speed and impact. This is an important and effective channel of communication and one I make use of myself - @PermSecScot. As civil servants we must always be aware of how our words could be interpreted by different audiences and even at different times - so please refresh your understanding of our social media guidance. And do post with care. If it feels wrong, open to misinterpretation or mischief or just risky - don't post or endorse.

Elsie Inglis Centenary

I attended the centenary commemoration for Dr Elsie Inglis last week to celebrate the great contribution she made to medicine, patient care during WWI and women's suffrage. Her qualities - resilience, creative thinking, kindness and sheer determination to make a difference - are as relevant today as they were 100 years ago. When Dr Inglis asked the War Office if female doctors and surgeons could serve in front-line hospitals during WWI she was told 'my good lady, go home and sit still'. Thank goodness she refused.

Catch up with Perm Sec

11/12/2017

Public Service Awards

Following the best ever Scottish showing at the Civil Service Awards, we had another opportunity to celebrate civil service excellence at the Scottish Public Service Awards.

Well done to [REDACTED] and to the whole team for their work on finding digital solutions for public sector challenges. The 'North Ayrshire Inclusive Growth Pilot', a partnership between the Scottish Government and North Ayrshire Council, was awarded the Policy Development Award for their excellent inclusive growth pilot. And Transport Scotland's Forth Replacement Crossing Employer's Delivery Team scooped The Project and Programme Management Award – another deserved accolade for the team.

We worked hard to identify and present some of our most innovative and impactful projects and programmes for awards this year. It's never too early to start thinking about next year - will your work qualify?

Catch ups

As we approach 2018 and the Year of Young People, I met with Jackie Brock, CEO of Children in Scotland. Empowering young people to achieve their potential is an issue close to my heart and will be a priority for me next year as I champion this cause and challenge both our own organisation and stakeholders to think differently, step up and invest in children and young people.

I was also in London for my regular catch up with colleagues at the UK Government and devolved administrations. These regular visits mean a 4.30am rise, the vagaries of travel and being out of the office for a full day. But the benefits of sharing, learning and promoting our organisation and its interests are clear. I encourage you all to keep up and invest in relationships with your civil service counterparts.

Away Day

I was with DGs at a half-day session off site last week. We focused on our individual roles and responsibilities for leading, managing and supporting change as part of SG2020. How does each DG, and the team as a whole help the organisation become a more open, responsive and capable organisation? We also discussed the new function of DG Scottish Exchequer. Alyson's role is about bringing strategic coherence and challenge to the Government in meeting the needs of further devolution of fiscal powers, and the continued fiscal accountability this brings. Over 50% of expenditure is to be financed by tax revenues by 2019/20 – this makes demands of each of us, including increased understanding and economic literacy right across the organisation.

Social Bite

On Saturday I joined many hundreds of people sleeping out overnight in Princes Street Gardens to raise funds to tackle homelessness. I was proud to see so many SG staff braving the cold for the night and raising money to help make a difference. It was freezing

and uncomfortable but we each knew we had a home and a bed to return to. Homeless people face isolation, fear and insecurity every day - there's still time to donate and help to end homelessness in Scotland.

Perm Sec - round up of 2017

18/12/2017

What a Year

This is a good time to reflect on what we've achieved and delivered as an organisation. 2017 has been intense, uncertain, and frequently pretty testing but I have been proud to witness the professional, ambitious, creative and innovative response of the civil service throughout. The video below captures some of my personal highlights - you and your team will have your own. Do make sure you celebrate and mark them before the year is out.

Meantime these are my 'stand out' achievements:

The devolution of new powers heralds real opportunities to grow as an organisation and as a country. Implementing new social security powers has demanded creative thinking and fresh policy design, including a focus on the individual and hearing at first hand the experiences and views of some of our most vulnerable citizens. Colleagues are going the extra mile to shape a service that meets the needs of its users. That journey continues next year, working towards the new agency being fully operational and open in Dundee and Glasgow by 2021.

We have pursued organisational readiness for the UK to leave the EU, across all policy and service areas. Our ability to anticipate, prepare, respond and adapt in a constantly changing and uncertain landscape is evident here, and work continues.

I've been struck by the slick and collaborative approach we embody as an organisation. Teams from across SG worked together to deliver a strong and ambitious Programme for Government focused on outcomes. The Draft Budget 2018/19 has been the most demanding yet, reflecting our move to a tax raising administration. Financial and economic planning and forecasting dovetailed with tough and intensive analysis and scrutiny undertaken by directorates. Ministers have praised the quality, pace and application of the civil service work evident in this process.

The opening of the Queensferry Crossing was a major milestone in 2017 and the team has rightly been recognised with several awards. The Crossing is a key element of Scotland's infrastructure, as well as a catalyst for employment and business opportunities. I was one of the lucky 50,000 people to walk the bridge before it opened to traffic.

SG2020 has continued in order to make us a more open, capable and responsive organisation - just as you asked to do in the original visioning exercise. We have shaken up our governance structures to ensure greater transparency and better accountability in our decision taking. We have matched resources to priorities with 50% of social security vacancies staff resourced from SG or SG Agencies. We are investing £19 million in new workspaces and have reduced non-staff expenditure by 26%. And we are seeing some of the impact of SG 2020 within the People Survey, with Leadership and Managing Change improving 3%.

I was so pleased to take part in Pride Edinburgh and hold our first annual conference on race and ethnicity - both events echo our values as an organisation. And those values matter - we've risen 163 places in two years on the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index,

and we've achieved the highest possible recognition the UK-wide Disability Confident Scheme - ensuring our workplace is welcoming and inclusive to disabled applicants and colleagues. You all play a part in shaping this organisation and defining 'who we are'.

Social Bite

I took part in Social Bite's Sleep in the Park last weekend. Thank you to everyone who sponsored me, made or bought cake or simply passed on their good wishes. I raised over £2,500 in all due to your generosity and support.

Finally

Thank you for all your hard work this year. Enjoy time off over the holidays with family and friends - I hope to undertake some walking, baking and sleeping, not necessarily in that order. I very much look forward to working with you in 2018.

Signing off with some festive fun - this pic from the Civil Service Awards needs a caption - your (printable - I know what some of you are like...) suggestions below please!

Catch up with Perm Sec

15/01/2018

Year of Young People 2018

The Year of Young People is now officially underway. In my role as Senior Government Champion for children and young people during this year, I attended the first Strategic Forum of 2018, hosted by Children in Scotland with stakeholders from 17 organisations around the table.

I shared my intention to be visible in my role, to challenge on behalf of young people, to champion and celebrate their achievements, and to collaborate in order to bring about change – not least to ensure policy meets the needs of children and young people, not the system. Views around the table were that SG has a way to go before it is truly joined up and responsive in policy making and implementation, and we need to be in order to achieve real change and better, sustainable outcomes for children and young people. So 'co-producing' and implementing sustainable policy solutions is vital.

More on YOYP in coming weeks. In the meantime, three questions for all teams:

- 1) How does your work impact on and reflect the needs of young people?
- 2) How can it help improve the lives of children and young people?
- 3) How will you know?

Blavatnik School of Government

As a Fellow of Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government I have asked them to work with us on the next chapter of our National Performance Framework and Outcomes, and the collaborative and collective leadership this entails. Four of us video-linked with Oxford this week to agree how to make best use of their expertise, starting with their attendance at the Scottish Leaders Forum later this month.

ET off-site

DGs now hold regular off-site sessions to consider senior leadership challenges and organisational change. Last week Alyson Stafford shared her thinking on aspects of her role as DG Scottish Exchequer and her asks of us as leaders, as policy professionals and as a team, to ensure whole government awareness of, and engagement in, the Exchequer function. Alyson's role encapsulates the seismic shift heralded by our new fiscal powers, and the responsibilities and accountability these bring to all of us to secure fiscal sustainability for the future.

Back to business

We're now back into the full rhythm of government business. Many of you will have made a new year resolution. In that spirit I'd like us to pause and set the tone for the year ahead. What helps you to be at your most creative and productive? How do you protect time for your own development? How do you look after your own resilience and that of your team? What habits help – and which hinder?

Catch up with Perm Sec

22/01/2018

Scotland's Place in Europe

Last week SG published a piece analysing the economic impact of leaving the European Union and the potential impact on jobs and living standards in Scotland. Scotland's Place in Europe: People, Jobs & Investment is an important publication and great piece of cross-government work. I encourage everyone to read this report - Scotland's future relationship with Europe is relevant to all policy areas.

In Scotland, more young voters supported Remain than the population as a whole. Leaving the EU will arguably be felt most acutely by younger generations. The Minister for UK Negotiations on Scotland's Place in Europe has been hearing directly from young people and their representative groups. I'm pleased that more engagements are planned during the Year of Young People, as part of strengthening the voice of young people in government overall.

As part of my role during the Year of Young People, I am challenging each of you to listen to the views of young people and involve them directly in policy making and delivery. In that spirit, I shall be offering up some of my 2018 weekly blog spots to young people to hear directly about the issues that matter to them – stay tuned.

National Performance Framework

Directors had a helpful update last week about work underway to refresh the National Performance Framework. 10 years on, we are renewing our commitment to the National Performance Framework and our focus on national outcomes, ensuring they are central to SG policy making and implementation. The new Framework will launch in the summer.

#WednesdaymeansWhitehall

My journey to attend the first Perm Sec meeting of 2018 in London began with a snowy start here in Edinburgh. My thanks to colleagues and partners responding to the winter weather.

The London meeting heard from young UK start up companies harnessing entrepreneurial and digital talent, to deliver creative solutions to public service challenges - much like the success of our own CivTech programme.

Burns Night

How are you celebrating Burns Night? I usually hold a big Burns Supper party with lots of people (25 one year - the deck chairs came out), traditional and veggie haggis and full recitations - but this year it's going to be a small family affair. Do add your story to the celebrations using #CheerstoRabbie.

Catch up with Perm Sec

05/02/2018

Civil Service in the news

The Civil Service has been in the headlines recently – not a common or comfortable place for us to be. The Civil Service Code demands that we must be honest, impartial, objective and act with integrity in our work for the Government of the day. I witness this behaviour daily by civil servants in the Scottish Government, and in my regular and close contact with the UK Government, and am proud of the high standards to which we hold ourselves.

Youth takeover

There are few voices more powerful than a young person talking freely and unfettered on an issue they care about. Last week I handed over my blog spot to 15 year-old [REDACTED] to tell us about her experience of mental health issues. As an organisation we need more direct and unfiltered contact with young people.

I met recently with Communic18 (the youth group co-designing the Year of Young People), to hear about their aspirations for 2018. The messages I took away were:

1. Sometimes we just need to "shut up and listen!" instead of approaching everything with a defined agenda.
2. "Challenge is not a hostile act" - and when we dampen our defensive tendencies we can collaborate and respond with more meaning and impact.
3. Get better at 'closing the feedback loop' - informing people we have consulted on what we did and why.

Stonewall – Workplace Equality Index (WEI)

Equality for LGBTI colleagues in our workplace is something I am passionate about. The latest Stonewall WEI ranked SG at 101 out of 439 participating employers - a drop from last year when we ranked firmly within the top 100 at position 50. We can do better than this - and we must. I welcome Stonewall's challenge for continual improvement and a strong focus on transgender policies and practice. Colleagues are meeting with Stonewall this week to receive detailed feedback on our performance and this will inform future work. We will continue to engage with Stonewall and our LGBTI networks to ensure a supportive and positive workplace for our trans, non-binary and intersex colleagues. This issue is firmly on my radar. I want to see the SG demonstrate our unwavering commitment to equality for all.

Perm Secs away day

Thursday evening and all day Friday was spent with UKG Perm Sec colleagues in London. I gave a pretty frank presentation on behalf of all three devolved administrations about our experience of working with UKG on EU exit and the challenges and opportunities ahead. I look forward to continuing this discussion when I welcome all Perm Secs to Scotland House in a few weeks. We also considered how the civil service is equipped to respond to a changing world, and where/how we Perm Secs prioritise our precious time together.

Catch up with Perm Sec

12/02/2018

New guidance on harassment

I wrote to you all in November following media reports of alleged sexual harassment in Westminster and the Scottish Parliament, referring to work I had commissioned to ensure SG internal policies and procedures in this area were sufficiently robust and effective.

As part of the ongoing review of our Fairness at Work policy a new process has been created to support colleagues raising sexual harassment complaints, including where these involve ministers. This is designed to ensure we listen to, take seriously and support anyone with a harassment complaint and provide clear routes for taking action.

Of course, policies and procedures can only be effective in an open, inclusive and positive workplace culture. That's why it's vital for us to talk about this issue, and for each of us to feel confident to challenge unacceptable behaviour – 'what you permit, you promote'.

If you have any questions about the new guidance or suggestions for further improvement please contact [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] in our HR Professional Adviser team. I also encourage you to submit your views on tackling harassment via the UK wide civil service survey this week.

#Vote100

2018 marks the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, giving women over 30 who owned property the right to vote, and opened the door to full women's suffrage in 1928.

I was in London with Lorna Gibbs and [REDACTED] last week to celebrate women's contribution to the civil service. There have been great strides forward on equality in this past century but there is more to do to, particularly in relation to women in leadership roles.

Kiltwalk

I am keen to support young people to achieve their potential and to highlight this during the Year of Young People 2018. In April I'll be taking part in The Kiltwalk in Glasgow to raise awareness and funds to tackle the serious issue of child poverty in Scotland. I'm sure we can pull together a Team SG - who wants to join me?

Catch up with Perm Sec

19/02/2018

FOI performance

Freedom of Information (FOI) has been in the news over the last few months. As an open and accessible organisation the SG takes its responsibility for FOI seriously. We have a statutory duty to comply with the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act but also value the clear intrinsic public benefit of a transparent and accountable Government.

In 2017 SG received a record 3,046 FOI requests – 41% more than the previous record of 2,155 in 2015. We answered 83% of those on time – a marked improvement on the 76% achieved in 2016. We also handled 256 FOI reviews. These are significant achievements that reflect the care and time that colleagues are putting into FOI.

But our performance on turnaround times needs to improve. We are taking steps to address this. For example we have agreed with the Scottish Information Commissioner that we will achieve 85% of responses on time for April to December last year, 90% in 2018 and 95% by 2020. These targets are challenging - but they are achievable if we maintain momentum from 2017.

Thank you for your hard work to date. The improvement we need during 2018 will require each of us to demonstrate our commitment, craft and professionalism. The FOI Unit can help - but please involve the team as early as possible, especially in complex or sensitive cases. Meeting these tough targets is essential to ensure our compliance and to protect our reputation - but also to help citizens understand the role and impact of the Scottish Government.

For information on handling FOI requests, contact the FOI Unit

Met Office

Last week I was at Met Office HQ in Exeter. Their expertise, data and operation was very impressive to see at first hand. SG has established a very effective partnership with the Met Office on resilience. We agreed a number of actions on how we strengthen areas of common policy interest including mitigation of climate change and realising economic opportunities from their data collection.

Honours

I meet regularly with colleagues in London to discuss honours nominations. It is important that Scotland's talent and achievements are reflected in the honours list.

Do you know someone who is worthy of receiving an honour - a colleague or someone with whom you work outside the SG?

If so, do nominate them - the process is straightforward and colleagues in the Protocol and Honours Team can offer guidance.