

## Ask ET – Wednesday 23 June 2021 – Transcript

**[redacted] (compere):** I think we're pretty much ready to start so welcome everybody and good morning to you all.

A great turnout here today for this virtual Ask ET session. I'm **[redacted]** for those of you that don't know me. I work in **[redacted]** and I'll be compering today's session. As you'll see in the side chat bar there please note that this session is being recorded and a video of the recording will be made available on Saltire soon.

Please be aware that this could also be disclosed under FOI so it could go into the public domain. There's no specific theme for today's Ask ET session so you may wish to focus on some of the bigger issues affecting the government, coronavirus, economic recovery, a whole range of things. Please feel free to ask about any topics that are important to you.

So before we get started let me talk you through how we will work this today to make sure that this runs as smoothly as possible.

So as you know we're working on Teams and if you're looking to ask a question or make a comment then please raise your hand. The chat bar function is available in this session but if you're looking to specifically ask a question then please raise your hand and I will look out for it and we will get through as many hands as we can possibly get through in the time that we've got allocated.

Once you've asked your question just so it's easier for us on our end if you can lower your hand as well that will avoid any confusion. You're perfectly entitled to ask more than one question and we'll try and get through as many people as possible and we'll try and hear from as many different voices as we possibly can as well. I would ask though if you can try and be as succinct and as short as possible while you when you're asking your questions so that we've got as much time as possible for answers and of course to the panel as well when giving the answers if you can be a short and succinct as possible as well.

If everybody that's not speaking can please remember to put themselves on mute that will avoid any noise that's not necessary and we'll try our best to go through the questions as quickly as we possibly can. The session can't overrun this morning so we absolutely need to be finished by 11:45 so a few minutes before that I'll try and draw the session to a close.

Finally I'd just like to remind everybody that as civil servants we need to act within the propriety guidance and within the Civil Service Code. So all of that in mind let's get started and while we wait for colleagues to think about their questions I just wanted to introduce the panel, some of them won't need an introduction, and some of them may be new to you completely.

So we have with us today the Permanent Secretary Leslie Evans, alongside DG Corporate Lesley Fraser, alongside DG Health and Social Care Caroline Lamb, and alongside that we have DG for Education and Justice Joe Griffin.

So just in terms of getting us started many of you will be aware this week we launched our new vision and core values 'In the Service of Scotland' and you will see on many of our backdrops today it being branded. I just wanted to kind of kick off the discussion by asking the panel what this vision means for you and in your view how will this vision change how we work as an organisation? So over to you Perm Sec.

**Permanent Secretary:** Thanks. Hello everybody, thanks very much [redacted] for that great introduction. For me actually I think what's the great thing about this and I know that many people have been involved and were consulted on the vision and the values is that this isn't a huge change of direction for us.

Particularly if you look at the content of the values and the spirit of the, and that's Police Scotland doing their business very well outside my house sorry about that, if you look at the spirit very much of what's embodied in the vision I think this is more an intensification of what we've already been doing. So if you look at the national performance framework and the ask of the organisation in working in a more joined up way and across the whole of Scotland for the whole of Scotland actually I think this very neatly encapsulates that in in one simple phrase. So I don't think this is a new direction I think this is a fresh chapter in the same journey.

And for the values briefly I've seen these values on show demonstrated every day several times a day actually over the years I've been Permanent Secretary but particularly over the period of covid so it's a real delight for me to see these embodied both in terms of what's being asked of us by the Deputy First Minister, very close match there in the pace and inclusion and cross-cutting work that he's asking off us, but also in terms of what we've already seen in covid. So for me these values I'd like to see them more consistently applied at an individual and a collective level but actually these values embody us at our best and I've seen this in so many instances over the past few months and years so this is a fresh chapter and an intensification of what we already do and I look forward to hearing other people's views about what the vision and values mean to them, the people on this call actually.

**Compere:** Great thanks for that Perm Sec. Lesley Fraser what does it mean for you?

**Lesley Fraser:** I think what Leslie's just been talking about you know that collective approach you know and how we really make a difference for the people of Scotland that absolutely resonates for me in the way that the vision and values for the organisation has been framed.

I guess [redacted] I'm really looking forward to seeing how we apply that in practice through lots of the work that the new corporate family for the Scottish Government is going to be working in the course of the next year so I think about how we return to the workplace, all the work that we do on recruitment and retention and all of the work that we will be doing to improve the basic systems and platforms you know whether that's finance or HR.

We want to be developing all of that work in a way that enables us of course to be productive and to serve Ministers and serve the people of Scotland to the best of our ability but in a way that enables everybody to make their contribution fully we are a big wonderful diverse organisation with lots and lots of skills and expertise and I really want the corporate family, and I know that's what my colleagues all tell me they want to do, we want to make sure that the corporate family is able to respond and

give people you know the kind of underpinnings that will enable them to do that work in the best possible way. Thanks.

**Compere:** Thank you for that Lesley. Joe how would you like to add in to that. What does the 'In the Service of Scotland' mean to you?

**Joe Griffin:** Thanks very much [redacted]. So I like Leslie Evans reference to the national performance framework because I think the language that we've got here, particularly in the mission, is a brilliant distillation of what it's all about and I think sometimes we forget how radical it is.

For hundreds of years governments were quite happy to sit around and push bits of paper and administer things and not really worry too much about what kind of impact that had on the people that they were there to serve. And there's an alternative to football based viewing at the moment they are doing reruns of 'Yes Minister' on one of the channels and that's the kind of antithesis I think of what we're all about you know it's that very clever but ultimately self-serving cynical approach to things that looks above all else to keep things the way they are.

And what the NPF says to me and what the mission distillates really well - we work together to improve the lives of the people of Scotland - is the opposite of that. It's about collaboration, it's about openness and it's about that passion. We're all here because we want to make people's lives better. So to have a government that is founded on that core ideology and to bring that out in the new set of materials I think is just wonderful and radical. Thank you.

**Compere:** Thanks for that contribution Joe. And Caroline how would you like to respond to that?

**Caroline Lamb:** So I think for me, and I absolutely agree with what both Leslies and Joe have said but building on that a little bit, so I think for me and given one of the hats that I wear as Chief Executive of NHS Scotland, that piece about working together to improve lives is absolutely fundamental because we know that 80 percent of the determinants of good or poor health have got nothing to do with what we do within the NHS it's all to do with the circumstances in which you grow up, it's

to do with education, it's to do with employment, it's to do with poverty. And therefore for me that working together is absolutely critical in terms of I guess you know my ask would be that across government we're thinking about health and well-being and the ability to improve health and well-being in every single policy decision that we're making and proposing but equally health and social care have a lot to bring to this table as well.

We are the biggest employer in Scotland. We spend a huge amount of money on procurement so there's ways in which we need to be thinking about how we employ people in ways that creates opportunities and that therefore creates that sort of virtual circle of improving people's lives so that's absolutely what it's about.

And the second thing I would say is that the piece about people, about people being at the very heart of this and there was a session at the NHS event yesterday afternoon focusing on the early stages of development of the national care service and really, really moving testimony from some of the users of services about the difficulties of trying to respond to services that are too often set up with the interest of services at their heart rather than the interests of the people that we're trying to serve.

So for me this is absolutely as well about as we think about how we want to coming out of a pandemic, how we want to redesign the way in which we offer our health and social care services, this is about those services being grouped and arranged and aligned around people rather than people having to run between services to try and find out how they can possibly get the support that they need. Thank you.

**Comperre:** Thanks very much for that Caroline. So I think some really strong themes emerging there particularly around people. Talking about people let's move to our first question of the session and I believe **[redacted]** you've had your hand up. **[redacted]**?

**[redacted]:** Thank you. Yes I wonder I'm actually on the subject of people if I could ask a question so with a new fresh set of Ministers eager to get going and staff who frankly are simply exhausted, at breaking point and desperate for a break over the

summer, how do you demonstrate leadership and manage expectations of Ministers particularly around 100 days and summer tours?

**Compere:** Thanks for that [redacted]. Perm Sec do you want to go first on that one and then perhaps pass on to others?

**Permanent Secretary:** Sure. Good question [redacted] and actually it's one thing that we've been talking about at some of the SCS sessions. I think some people are tired and some people are exhausted and there's a difference. I think we need to be really careful as managers to spot not just those in our teams that differentiate between those but also in ourselves actually and sometimes that's a really hard thing. You need to listen to other people telling you about how you're doing and how your stress levels and how your resilience levels are holding out.

So I'd say a couple of things. I think firstly, although they're only just in through the door actually the Cabinet Secretaries feel quite tired as well. Some of them have got good reason to they've already had to wrestle with some extraordinary issues, policy difficulties challenges and so on and the teams many of you on the call are doing a terrific job at guiding them through and navigating what really counts at this time and particularly over the summer.

So what is really a priority over the summer and what can wait? Some of those things are in the 100 days undoubtedly and actually we're doing pretty well on the 100 days, so far, but there's no room for complacency so I think the Ministers themselves are reliant upon us and let's not forget that the First Minister I was very glad to hear when she talked about this new administration she talked about the collective endeavour of Ministers and the civil service and we know that at our best that's what makes the organisation work really well. So I think we've got some Cabinet Secretaries who understand and are hearing but who also needs to be guided by us about what really counts over the summer.

I think the other thing that I would say is we must all ensure that we get a break and if you feel any one of you that that is compromised then you must speak to your manager or you speak to your manager's manager. So you must give yourself

permission first of all to take a break and you must also ensure that your manager and your team support you in that aspiration.

I suppose the thing I would say about that is sometimes for some people, and you'll see that we're missing a colleague Ken on the call today we've got you know particular issues going on in the covid world at the moment which needs active management, for some people it will mean not just not being there but ensuring that you've got somebody who is watching your back and your work while you're not there. So we've encouraged people to think about who they need to buddy up with and also if there is at that time a shift system required to get over that particular issue or over those weeks then that is what is put in place.

So I would call out if people feel that that's not being done in their area or they're not being given enough encouragement and support and resources to be able to take a time off then they need to call that out because we need to take responsibility individually for this but this is a collective endeavour and the organisation has been through a lot over the past year or so.

**Compere:** Thanks very much for that Perm Sec. Lesley do you want to add anything to that on personal resilience?

**Lesley Fraser:** Yeah I think planning you know looking ahead spending time agreeing with the team and with the Minister what will be done and therefore what won't be done and how we will face things is spot on. And I mean just I know myself you know how what the tell-tale signs are and my team are really good at telling me what the tell-tale signs are and you know just step away you know when you need a break and you know we are a big organisation, we can manage this, we do know how to do this.

We've learned a lot actually you know managing covid and Brexit and over a Christmas, New Year period with winter weather as well you know we've we people really put their shoulders to the wheel of course but we really planned our way through that and you know spending, listening to yourself having those monthly conversations and planning that's it for me. Thanks.

**Compere:** Thanks for that Lesley and yeah I guess that that collective endeavour you know the collective spirit within teams really important there and looking out for each other. Really important. We'll move to another question there and I believe it's [redacted] has had her hand up?

[redacted]: Yeah, hi there. I'm going to ask about and kind of recruitment and particularly blind recruitment so the practice of and removing kind of key personal information and about people when they and recruit and I'm just conscious of the previous question and you know it's been obviously a huge year for HR and working in [redacted] I'm really conscious of you know all the recruitment and work that HR has had to do over the last year and you know very, very appreciative of all that. I know new systems and new approaches take a huge amount of work.

So I had two particular questions so one is be quite interesting to hear from the panel whether you would like to see blind recruitment introduced into the SG? I was very pleased to see that the race recruitment and retention plan had the SCS trial but it does feel a little bit like SG's a bit behind the curve. The rest of the civil service introduced this in 2015 or started to at least. When I spoke with HR about it it seems a bit more emphasis of wanting to have positive evidence that it works rather than seeing it is and you know part of a wider, wider process and for me personally I can't see the particular downsides of this approach.

And then a slightly more specific operational question which is just a flag that when we recruit from candidates who have applied for civil service jobs we see a lot more information than we do for internal SG candidates. So for example we can see their addresses, their immigration status, how they identify their citizenship, their home address, their national insurance number and I've raised this quite a lot with HR and I understand this problem with systems and you know the system's not talking to each other. However I feel this has been a problem for quite a few years now and just wondering if that's on your radar and if you're also concerned about just the level of information we can see?

**Compere:** Thanks very much [redacted]. Very important questions there particularly around blind recruitment, the race recruitment retention plan and then some kind of

some data issues as well. Lesley Fraser can I come to you first and then and then bring in bringing you Joe? Would that be ok?

**Lesley Fraser:** Yeah. Great questions thank you very much [redacted].

So the point about blind recruitment and how that fits in our overall recruitment and retention plan is a really, really good one and you're quite right we are really thoughtful about the impact here and the outcome that we want to get to and what are the best mechanisms for doing that.

So it's been it's been really useful to have the trials but we want to make sure that whatever processes we do introduce really get us to the outcomes that we're seeking to achieve which is you know increased diversity in the organisation at all levels and then an organisation where everybody understands that they've got a great opportunity to progress and to bring all of their skills and to and to really thrive in the organisation.

So the reason why we are pausing on things like blind recruitment is to make sure that if and when we do it we're going to do that in a way that really gets us to those outcomes.

I'm really pleased to be working with a great group of colleagues on race and disability recruitment and retention group that's overseeing all that we're doing in this space and that is looking at you know the culture that we're creating, the practical steps that we're taking and to improve the way that we undertake recruitment and then to look at the data and the evidence that you're rightly pointing out here is so critical so that we can see precisely where the blockages are in our systems are not enabling you know really great candidates to come through all the way through the processes.

We are beginning to see some early signs of success so I'm really, really pleased to see that and there's more to do and more for us to do to get to the target so I'm you know hugely grateful to you and other colleagues who are really helping us and do this but you know that laser-like focus on the on outcomes and then what's the best possible steps that we can take looking right the way across the system is the way

that I'm determined to keep going and you know absolutely critical in that to have colleagues you know direct personal experience as it's happening.

It's something to hear and see the data on a spreadsheet, it's quite another thing to hear how that's landing with colleagues so you know hugely grateful to colleagues in the networks for example who are really helping us understand how this is working in practice. Thanks.

**Compere:** Thanks Lesley and on the networks Joe do you want to come in on that point?

**Joe Griffin:** Yeah so it's a great point **[redacted]** thanks for raising it and it's something that in the Race Equality Network we've been kicking around for four years actually so I think it's brilliant that as part of the plan we're having a really good stone cold look at it, the pros and cons, understanding the evidence and then I'm confident that we'll make a decision informed by all of that about the best way forward.

Intuitively one imagines that there are lots of advantages to doing it but I think we do have to look at the evidence like we would in any other area of what we do and policy but I think the partnership between People Directorate, HR, and the Race Equality Network on the plan I think is really good so there's representation from the network on the implementation of the plan now and just the fact of having a plan, having all of this written down, systematically we're going to look at each of these things we're going to consider the evidence and ET's already had I think two presentations on progress as well so this is all in a much, much better place than several years ago.

And those of us who really care in particular about racial diversity I think feel much more encouraged that we're that we're looking at this. So where we end up on the specific I think will be a good evidence-based conclusion. I don't want to pre-empt that. We'll have to see where we get to but it's a really important point for us to consider.

**Compere:** Thanks very much for that Joe. Can I just remind colleagues continue to stick your hands up. We are monitoring the hands as they go up. Bringing in, now moving to **[redacted]** I believe you've got a question?

**[redacted]:** Hi there. Thanks for this session. I'm really interested in the 'In the Service of Scotland' vision and values and I wanted to ask a question that's a bit personal which is about how we're all human and we all inevitably on occasion don't live up to our values and you will know what your triggers are, I know what my triggers are, and we see it in other colleagues.

So I want to ask the question how do you feel we should deal with when we don't live up to our values both in ourselves and when we see it?

**Compere:** That's a very, very good question **[redacted]**. Perm Sec can I come to you on that and then perhaps bring you in Caroline?

**Permanent Secretary:** It is a really good question. Actually you could devote the rest of this session and more to it.

Well I would say I would differentiate between what I do as an individual and what the organisation does so I think where if I don't live up to the values then I hope somebody will call me out on this as well as my own reflections and you know like all of us I look back on what I've done over this week or over this day or over this year, particularly as I've just had my end of year review, and think did I do that as well as I could have done or was I embodying civil service values importantly but increasingly now of course the values that we we've also adopted and adapted for our own purposes?

So I think there's something about holding yourself to account on this and also seeing it as part of your objectives you know how you are held to account by others.

Feedback, I think that's always a good way of checking that that you're doing all you think you are or rather that your impact is as you had intended it to be because quite often I think we have the best intentions about how we're expressing ourselves, how we're doing something but actually the way it lands feels quite distinctly different.

So having people around you who can sometimes say 'you know how you said that in that meeting, that wasn't too good, that didn't work out that way'. I think you've got to be able to listen to that you've got to be able to mature about that as an individual.

So I think reflecting and holding yourself to account on those as you go and as part of our performance management and how we work, team discussions, and so on feels important. I think on the collective endeavour I think if the organisation is not seen to be holding itself up to uphold the values to which we are about that that's a really serious matter.

Now it's serious if I don't of course or you don't as an individual but the more of us that don't that then becomes by default a collective ignorance of the values and I think there will be occasions where we have not been as strong in the way that we've espoused or demonstrated our commitment to the values and for me, final point on this, it's fine having them written down but actually the only way we'll know that these values have any meaning or resonance is when you experience them in your day-to-day life and work and that's as much about what we do in our job but particularly how people out there, the people that for whom we are serving, who we serve day and daily how they notice and that goes back to Caroline's point actually about how kind and wrap around our services are, how our policies are inclusive from the very beginning.

So these values, yes let's hold them up to ourselves to account on this and you're quite right to remind us of that and for us to have high standards of that individually but for me the really important thing is the collective endeavour here about how our national performance framework and how this, the new vision and values are experienced, understood and felt by wider Scotland.

And there are processes to hold us to account. The parliament is one of those. Of course the way in which we seek feedback and advice on how our services and policies actually impact. But one of the best ways is to get out there yourself and listen to people. How does it feel for you living in Scotland just now and do you recognise what we're describing here as vision and values, does that does it feel like it for you when you receive contact with the Scottish Government or indeed policies that are developed at the hand of people in the Scottish Government like ourselves.

**Compere:** Thanks very much for that Perm Sec. Caroline, your views on this?

**Caroline Lamb:** Yeah thank you that's a great question and I love the way in which you framed it starting off with we're all human because we are all human and we all have times when we're operating under immense stress and to sometimes quite unreasonable deadlines and there's things that we have to get done.

And I suppose for me particularly it's a reflection there about how kind I am in dealing with both you know people who work with for me within and with me within the DG but also really importantly the organisations that we rely on to deliver for us so particularly our NHS boards and I think that critical to that relationship is people being able to say to you 'actually Caroline that didn't learn very well' or 'actually Caroline I got five requests from different parts of your DG on the same day and that's really unhelpful' and for me to also be able to say I'm sorry and what can we do to try and fix that so yeah let's just accept that we're not all perfect but that if we're not open to listening to feedback then we're not going to get it make it better either, so I think those feedback loops are really, really critical in helping us all to hold to the values.

**Compere:** Thanks very much for that Caroline, really important stuff here. Moving to the next question **[redacted]**, have you you've got your hand up?

**[redacted]:** Yes, thanks **[redacted]**, and hello to everyone on the call.

So my question is around harassment complaints and so this week the SG very comprehensively responded to the harassment reviews. The response focuses on handling of complaints about Ministers, but I wanted to ask what plans there are in place if any, to look at the application of the fairness and work procedure for staff and improving the experience of staff who do, you know come forward and call out unacceptable behaviours?

**Compere:** Thanks for that **[redacted]**, really important question yet again. Lesley Fraser do you want to kick us off?

**Lesley Fraser:** Yeah, thanks very much, well for the question, and it is I guess it's been one of the really most testing and difficult things I've done at all as a as a civil

servant, and as has been working over the past couple of years on all the work for the organisation and the learning for the, in terms of how we handled the harassment complaints.

I just want to say at the outset how very, very proud I am of a number of colleagues and who have really borne the brunt of some very difficult and unfair, you know, media speculation in terms of all of this, but who throughout have behaved impeccably and professionally and with kindness and lived the values.

So I guess it is very much I guess us demonstrating and having up the opportunity for the first time in a number of years to be able to say now what it is we want to be able to do as an organisation to recognise the imbalance of power that there could be in a number of circumstances, not just between civil servants and Ministers for example.

Of course that's the focus of the new procedure and process that we will put in place with an external panel for example to be able to take that forward.

But also that you know, that kind of power imbalance can apply in different instances. I do think we'll want to look at due course at how this will play through for fairness at work which is our main grievance procedure that protects all of us in the civil service when things do go awry.

There's lots of learning here. I've been hugely grateful to colleagues in the trades union movement for example, who have really contributed and been very thoughtful and are working with us not just on the long-term wins about you know changes to process but actually what we might be able to do, to be able to, for example you know, make processes work more quickly but still fairly and robustly.

So there's lots of work for us to do I think, what we've published today does set a really important direction of travel it absolutely brings us back to that 'In the Service of Scotland' and the values that underpin that and really, really keen to work with colleagues.

And in terms of those, the things that we can do relatively quickly but also the medium and longer term changes that will flow from all of the rich learning that we've

had as an organisation over the past few years. Perm Sec Leslie might want to add something on this as well. Thanks.

**Permanent Secretary:** Yeah thanks Lesley, and actually I would pay tribute to you in terms of some of the leadership that you've had to demonstrate and some tough choices that you've had to make in the past few years.

So I think a couple of things first of all, I mean we need to get our procedures right whatever they are and what ever kind of harassment or inappropriate behaviour we're dealing with, getting your procedures right is fundamental, you know that's one thing we have learned over the past few years, and I have learned.

So the work that's ongoing in all of that is incredibly important. However we need to make sure that we're only using those procedures in those circumstances where it's absolutely essential because we've taken every preventative measure that we might need to ensure that these things don't happen.

So the two things that I would say are particularly instrumental in this is the culture, the organisation, and that is something which we all create. So every single person on this call and all of those who aren't on the call have a role and a responsibility in creating the right kind of culture in the organisation. This is not something that we can dictate through a strategy.

And the second thing is people feeling confident that when something does go awry they know what to do, they know where to go, who to turn to, what to say, and they have the confidence to call it out. If we get the culture and the confidence right the procedures will kick in, the right procedures will kick in at the right time. But without that culture and confidence and trust, and trust is a really important word here, then we're constantly going to be on the back foot, and I want to leave this organisation soon and you know my contract comes to an end soon, I want to leave this organisation more confident, more flexible, more agile, a whole range of other things, but more confident as well and trusting in the culture of the organisation, and the inclusive and diverse nature of the organisation too.

**Compere:** Great, thanks for those responses and really important points particularly on the kind of culture in the organisation that we're trying to build, and the role that we all have to play in that, and certainly forums like today are part of that you know being honest with each other and building that trust absolutely.

Moving on to the next question and I believe it's **[redacted]**?

**[redacted]:** Thank you and hello to all the panellists. I've got two questions which I guess could be somewhat loosely linked around our value of being inclusive.

The first one is based around working practices. I was wondering given that we've been working at home for a year now, and I noticed in the chat actually that someone referred to people who were on boarded during lockdown and I actually joined the Scottish Government on **[redacted]**, and I'm just curious given that when I was initially joining I would have been expected to travel through to Edinburgh every day, and for context I currently live in **[redacted]**, and it's quite a long round trip.

If there's any plans to start advertising jobs as being available anywhere in Scotland I think that having never stepped foot in the office I've been able to perform my job quite adequately without ever going through to Edinburgh and it somewhat concerns me that there's perhaps people who would be very good for the jobs who are not applying given the location advertised.

And my second question again bearing in mind the sort of value of inclusiveness but also in this case perhaps also 'kind' as if there's ever been any discussions around the inclusion of pronouns and email signatures.

I noticed there was quite a lengthy discussion on this on Saltire recently and **[redacted]** it's quite an important way of getting discussions around gender normalised within the workplace, and is also a very effective way of preventing misgendering, which can be really distressing for those who do not identify as the gender of their birth or prefer gender neutral terms.

And I was just wondering if there's any ideas for those on the panel for how we can help normalise this and make this a part of our culture in Scottish Government?

**Compere:** Thank you [redacted], really important questions there yet again and we'll take we'll take both of them separately. Firstly on job locations and being based I guess anywhere virtually in Scotland, Lesley, do you want to go on that first and then perhaps we can bring in Caroline on that for a different view, and then we'll take the second one on pronouns and gender, and Perm Sec, we'll come to you first on that.

**Lesley Fraser:** Thanks [redacted], and thanks very much indeed.

[redacted], really thoughtful and important questions and you speak to my heart as somebody who used to work in housing and social justice where we had a policy of location neutral.

I really understand and value the importance of colleagues being able, you know us as an organisation, being able to be flexible and to support colleagues to be able to work as far as possible in a way that suits them and to deliver the business effectively for Ministers and for the people of Scotland.

As far as possible I think is the bit that needs a bit of unpacking here and for me that goes to the business need, you know, what do Ministers and the country, what do they need us to be doing and can we do that individually as well as and we need to working from, you know, our choice of location.

In many instances that does work, in some instances that doesn't work. So, I there's that element of it, and I guess the other bit is that sense of our collective effectiveness, you know, we can't always choose, you know, and Caroline will have some really good reflections on this as well.

A lot more than 50% of us in the Scottish Government are now in operational delivery roles. That really caught me short when I realised that because I've come in as a policy person and kind of assumed that was the organisation that we still are.

Lots of people working in Social Security, in Marine Scotland, in parts of the Health Service, and in resilience, you know, there's a lot of us actually with operational roles that don't stop.

So, it's that combination of business need and operational effectiveness. But within that scope I think there's we've lots we've learned in the course of the last year, lots we will want to build into the future of the organisation, and we will never look quite the same as we did in March 2020 again, it will be different, we will be looking at hybrid working models. Hugely grateful finally for all of those who are filling in the survey that's live until tomorrow on Saltire.

We're doing a lot of what we're calling working out loud. It's a fast-moving world, we're still keeping pace with a very difficult virus here. So please tell us both in the short term and in the medium term, what would suit you, and we are feeding that in then, and matching that up with what the First Minister was talking about yesterday in terms of next steps likely for the country as we work through the covid pandemic. Thanks very much indeed.

**Comperre:** Thanks for that, Lesley. Caroline, location control.

**Caroline Lamb:** Yeah, absolutely, so i would agree absolutely with Lesley that this is all about the business need. So I think that if we had imagined back in January, February 2020 that we would all be able to work like this then we would have been a little bit surprised and sometimes when we reflect back you think my goodness why did it take a pandemic to make us realise that we can actually do things differently.

So, over the last few weeks, just in terms of the DG, over the last few weeks I've been running sessions that have been focused on ways of working, and what's been good, and what we want to hang on to, and what people want to get away from, and anecdotally, and it is you know this isn't a scientific calculation, but there are probably more people who are saying that actually the way of working during the pandemic has really suited them, there's been some downsides to it, but they, you know, they they've appreciated particularly not having to do the commute into work.

Whereas absolutely at the same time there are some people who found it really difficult, and actually really want to get back into an office environment, have colleagues around them, and a bit more structure, and also that separation between work and life which can get a bit confused when we're all working like this.

I'm also struck by what we have managed to achieve in Health and Social Care Services. So in terms of absolutely trying to reduce face-to-face contact and therefore minimise the risk of infection, the roll out of near me has been mind-blowing frankly, and it's also saved 28 million miles of travel which is quite an impact on our carbon footprint as well. So there are lots of positives I think, but at the same time there are always going to be jobs that actually, where people have to travel and have to be in a workplace, and certainly that applies to a huge amount of what we do across Health and Social Care.

And therefore, I just think we need to be very mindful that as far as possible, clearly I think we would want to try and accommodate preferences and the way in which people find that they're able to be the most productive, but bearing in mind that that's never going to be possible for absolutely everybody because of the roles that people play and what we need them to be able to do.

**Compere:** Thanks very much for that, Caroline. Before we move on to pronouns and the gender points that were raised by **[redacted]** Perm Sec, just to remind everybody we've got 15 minutes left so get your questions in, get your hands up. Perm Sec, on pronouns and then we'll bring in Joe as well.

**Permanent Secretary:** Yeah and Joe will probably want to say something about the fact that we had a very thoughtful and thought provoking discussion at Executive Team yesterday about this actually. I'll leave that with that bit with him.

I mean I suppose I was both heartened and disappointed by what I saw of the Saltire comments and I didn't see all of them about this issue. Heartened in some respects about people leading into this and seeing this isn't a really important part of their responsibility in creating the culture I was talking about earlier on.

Disappointed about the fact that some people whilst having every right to express a view we're doing it in a way which was not I would say in keeping with the values that we've just been talking about particularly not kindness or inclusion and I think we need to be really thoughtful about what that means for us as an organisation.

I was equally thoughtful when I spoke and wrote in Saltire not that long ago about Black Lives Matter. Some of the response that produced in the organisation was to use a civil service term disappointing.

This is a reminder that we are a reflection of wider society. People have every right to express their views but on this particular issue I would say there is a polarity of views and a polarity of language and belief which has become quite corrosive and I would like to feel that we do not get drawn into that element, not least some of this is about government policy as well as personal issues.

So on the specifics I would say that we need to look at our procedures and where it is most helpful in signalling an inclusive and culturally supportive organisation but going back to what I said before what we write down on paper, what we say, what we write around our name and so on is good and helpful but it doesn't actually necessarily get the culture of the organisation to live and breathe in the way that we need it to so I think some of these steps and some of the procedures and some of the changes we may introduce are good and are important signals and important procedures.

Actually though as an organisation we tend to rely a little bit on those procedures and those signalling rather than the heart of the culture and what it means and final point for me is this is something I feel pretty passionately about both as a feminist but also somebody who's got some family experience of gender assignment and also somebody one of my trans colleagues shadowed me not that long ago about 18 months ago and it was really for me a very important experience and learning experience to hear directly about what it felt like to be in the organisation.

Jackie Gavin another friend of mine who I look up to who has shared her experience at Director's sessions and so on about what it has felt like being in the civil service from her point of view and her life experience. So we need to keep listening to this stuff and though we take steps on our procedures actually what will change is when we reflect the experience that people are telling us about in the culture and in the inclusion of the organisation we serve.

**Compere:** Thank you for that Leslie. Joe?

**Joe Griffin:** Yeah thanks [redacted] and thanks for bringing it up [redacted].

It's a really important subject. So to talk about ET yesterday we had a presentation from colleagues who are working on preparations for the gender recognition act and clearly there are lots of complex issues, difficult challenging issues, that are raised by that.

It's highly political as well and I think especially for me the interface between trans issues and women's rights and what women can reasonably expect by way of safety and so on. That needs to be worked through and it needs to be worked through in a respectful way. It needs to be worked through based on evidence and as Leslie has said particularly pretty profound listening and empathy actually on both sides. So I think dialogue is essential here.

What is much less difficult and much less complex is the need to respect the fact that nobody but nobody deserves to have their identity challenged in a workplace environment. We don't do that for race. We don't do that for disability.

It sometimes feels to me as though trans issues somehow occupies a different space whereby people feel free to challenge the fundamentals of somebody's identity and use language in a way that we wouldn't on any other aspect of people's characteristics and I feel incredibly strongly about this and as Leslie said it's us thing it's not a them thing you know we all have friends and relations with experience of gender reassignment or transition issues and just yesterday I was talking with colleagues who were so upset by the experience last week and some of the comments back and forth on Saltire that they were in tears at the time, they were in tears again yesterday, so this isn't this isn't hard. There is a way to have a dialogue, there is a way to be respectful to seek understanding and nobody but nobody in a workplace environment should have the fundamental aspect of their identity challenged in the way that we did see some of that last week.

**Compere:** Thanks for that Joe. Ok moving on we've now got a question from [redacted].

[redacted]: Hi, thanks very much. [redacted] here, [redacted].

I have a question about networks quite predictably so we've talked a lot about culture today and I think that we all recognise the culture of the office is going to look quite different because of all the different stages and things that will be different when we go back to the office and also this shift towards probably a hybrid model of working that means we won't all be in all the time in a way that we used to be so you wonder what thought is being given to the contribution of staff networks in helping to sort of rebuild that office culture in that physical space and adjusting for the hybrid model given the way that the network's cut across teams and bands and provide that safe space for support across so many different characteristics across the organisation? Thank you.

**Compere:** Thanks very much for that **[redacted]**. So on staff networks Lesley Fraser do you want to kick us off and I'm sure others will have will have a view on this?

**Lesley Fraser:** Yes indeed. I think all of us on the Executive Team are really delighted to be allies with and colleagues and you know with colleagues in the networks the networks do the most extraordinary job **[redacted]**.

I am firm believer in the power of the networks to be able to help us do precisely what you're saying **[redacted]** to help us build that positive culture and you know I think as we unpack 'In the Service of Scotland' and the values and the work that's been put in place that's led to the development of the mission for the organisation so the networks could really help us turn that into practical difference and change on the ground and that goes for creating the spaces where people can talk about you know difficult things just as we've been discussing, places where change ideas can be first of all identified, what needs to change, but also then very practical suggestions can come to the fore and I think for example for what you know what we've been able to do on recent disability recruitment and retention that really practical partnership between People Directorate and networks is something I'm really keen to see replicated.

So I'm a huge fan, I'm really grateful and I do think there's a powerful role for networks in terms of how we rebuild the culture and the working environment of the organisation in what will be a different future. Thanks very much.

**Compere:** Excellent Lesley. I think there was also a comment in the chat bar around some of this and I believe it was from **[redacted]** on the point of new ways of working and he wonders where business needs allow there are opportunities for us to look asynchronous working both in individual teams and as an organisation. Any comments on that? Perm Sec do you want to come in here and then we'll move to the others?

**Permanent Secretary:** Sure I mean I'll bow to Lesley and the work that Brian and others are doing on, and their twin tracking their work at the moment actually looking at the hybrid models of what we want in the future and I think any opportunities for people to lean into that work and to give their views about what would what would work for them is really helpful, including from the networks but from individuals, so yes **[redacted]** let's take that away.

But secondly to make also sure that in the shorter term that we're looking at what it means to be socially distanced and the physical distance requirements that we're still working under at the moment albeit that we've had some welcome news in the recent days from the First Minister about when we would expect that distancing to reduce.

Can I just say one thing before I hand back to you **[redacted]** and that is let's hear it for the networks. I'm really so proud of the networks that we have in the organisation. They are they have grown in strength and confidence, they hold us to account, and I would say keep doing that, keep challenging us, keep holding our feet to the fire.

They have a quality and a perspective which is which we couldn't find anywhere else and all the networks that I've been involved in and I think it's just about all of them, one way or another, I have been so impressed by their energy, commitment, passion, but also just their spirit of wanting to make things better for those that they work with and those who come after them in the organisation.

If I was to say a very unfair comparison I really like the home baking that I've experienced at the Women's Network on the occasions I've been down there in

Victoria Quay but you know I can't be held to account on that necessarily but Joe you've had direct contact with the networks for more years than most of us have been around so you may want to say something as well about that.

**Joe Griffin:** Yeah first of all I was going to congratulate **[redacted]** on asking the most 2021 question so far with all different aspects in that and to reflect the fact actually that as god-awful as covid is it's actually opened up such a sense of possibility in how we work that lots of people and organisations have been talking about for some time but it really feels like it's starting to land in big bureaucracies like ours as well and I think as others have said we should be really open-minded about what are the ways that can best contribute, allow people to contribute their creativity, their different thinking and achieve a kind of work-life balance that that is just profound to everything that we do so it's a great question.

On the networks, I actually took the opportunity of my induction, I wouldn't say honeymoon period I'll say induction period, to meet with all the networks and to hear how it's going and it is a remarkable effort really.

I think so many of them are still probably one or two individuals who feel particularly fired up about things and I think go above and beyond to try and pull together colleagues to try and establish that relationship with decision makers in the organisation and it's just tremendous. You know invariably it's not reflected in objectives. It's people doing things, stretching the work day in order to be able to do that thing is because they care you know and it's because they care about their colleagues and they care about the success of the organisation.

I guess I would say I think we found some success in the Race Equality Network over recent years in thinking about the model and moving away from the idea that it's sort of one person trying to hold everything together to sort of share out, in particular, the leadership a bit more so on race now we have me as the ET ally, we have Stephen Pathirana and **[redacted]** as the two champions and then we have co-chairs of the network as well **[redacted]** and a vacancy currently so if you're interested do get in touch and actually growing that leadership capacity and being able to share around the work a bit more I think is really effective.

So I'd love to see that maturity sort of develop in in all of the networks really because I think that the impact that colleagues can give us in making us more diverse and effective is really, really important.

**Compere:** Ok thanks for that. A real big shout out to the network so congratulations to everybody who's on them and part of them and building them.

We're almost out of time now actually so apologies if you had your hand up. I know there was a few of you that we were planning to get to.

The discussion has been really lively, really exciting, really interesting and really important and there will be lots more opportunities like this. So we are unfortunately out of time and I'd just like to say thank you to the panellists and indeed to everyone that's joined today for all your questions and contributions.

As we said the session was recorded so you may have the chance to go back and hear responses again and follow the conversation or share it with other colleagues. Really important that you do that and any points that you want further follow up on then please do get in touch but thanks very much for today's discussion and thank you to the panel. Thanks.

**Permanent Secretary:** Thanks for some great chairing as well.

**Compere:** No problem.