

Catch up with Perm Sec

05/03/2018

Severe weather

Few escaped the Beast from the East last week as parts of Scotland faced the most severe weather seen for some time. I know it impacted on people's working and travel arrangements - thank you for heeding advice to avoid travel where possible, and for showing both flexibility and resolve to keep government working.

Many thanks to emergency services colleagues and to individuals and voluntary organisations for work that was often above and beyond the call of duty. And I want to say a particular thank you to colleagues at Transport Scotland, Resilience, Communications, Security and Business Continuity for operating an excellent 24-hour service. We are also indebted to Front of House and Control Room teams who ensured our buildings were safe and accessible.

This kind of event puts our detailed planning and processes to the test and, as ever, we shall learn from this experience - but I am proud of our efforts and those of our partners.

Cyber Resilience

I met with Ciaran Martin, Chief Executive of the National Cyber Security Centre, when he was in Edinburgh last week. Ciaran has said publically that a major cyber-attack in the UK is a matter of 'when, not if'. This kind of attack has the potential to disrupt public services and critical infrastructure and is something we must be prepared for as an organisation and right across the public sector. Please read up on protecting yourself online and our Cyber Resilience Strategy for Scotland: Public sector action plan 2017-2018.

Scottish National Investment Bank

Last week also took us one step closer to the creation of a Scottish National Investment Bank following publication of the Implementation Plan. This publically-owned bank will be a cornerstone of the Scottish economy – taking a 'mission-oriented' approach to stimulating innovation and promoting inclusive growth across the country. Please contact [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] if you are interested in attending a policy workshop on the SNIB.

Openness and transparency

In keeping with my commitment to open and accessible government, I will be publishing these weekly blogs externally. I use this column to highlight and share thoughts on key issues facing us as an organisation and as a civil service, and this remains primarily a blog from me to you.

International Women's Day 2018

This Thursday we will be coming together at VQ to discuss action within SG to ensure true gender equality and how we can continue to drive progress. This is open to all - please book online and join the conversation with inspirational women from across the organisation. In this centenary year of women's suffrage – let's continue to #pressforprogress.

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Published 12/03/2018

International Women's Day

Last week I was joined by inspirational women (and men) at VQ to mark International Women's Day (IWD) and discuss how we continue to press for true gender equality within our organisation and indeed across society. We heard from modern apprentices and new starts as well as leaders and change makers within SG and from the wider public sector.

It was a fresh, frank and stimulating session – here are several themes that resonated with me:

- with so much progress visible we must continue to press for progress
- don't be hard on yourself, work hard on yourself
- what you permit, you promote – we all have a role to challenge and be moral leaders
- barriers to progress can often be superficial or self-inflicted – take a risk
- mentoring, both ways, is a powerful force for change

██████████ who recently came through our Modern Apprenticeships programme, co-hosted the session with Nicky Richards, SG Director of People, and will share her reflections on Saltire soon in more depth. We heard powerful insight from Penelope Cooper, Chief Executive at the Scottish Public Pensions Agency, Uzma Khan, Deputy Director Economic Strategy & Champion for SG Race Equality Network, and Lorna Gibbs, Chief Executive of Disclosure Scotland and Champion for SG LGBTI Network.

I was also honoured to be in Belfast the following day to speak with Northern Irish civil service colleagues at their very first IWD event.

Lobbying Register

As part of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016, a new public lobbying register goes live today. I am covered by the terms of this Act and welcome this development which provides greater transparency around lobbying. It ensures a publicly accessible record of face-to-face lobbying of Ministers, MSPs, Special Advisers and me as the

Permanent Secretary. Operating the register is the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament, with the obligation to register relevant lobbying activity resting with external bodies or individuals. For more information please contact the Parliament and Legislation Unit.

Modern Apprenticeship Week

Modern apprentices make a significant contribution to the SG - bringing new ideas, experiences and positive challenge to our organisation. As part of Modern Apprenticeship Week I caught up with several of the 150 MA's we've recruited this year and heard their perspectives on starting their working lives and shaping the SG of the future.

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Published 19/03/2018

Joint Ministerial Committee

I supported the First Minister at the Plenary meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) in 10 Downing Street last week, where the Prime Minister briefed other heads of administration on her recent statements to the Commons on national security, and Ministers discussed the EU exit process.

There remain areas of difference between the UK Government and the devolved administrations on the EU (Withdrawal) Bill. The First Minister described these as significant but not insurmountable, and said she is committed to working sincerely and seriously to resolve them. As the next phase of Brexit negotiations approach, it's more important than ever that we support effective intergovernmental relations through the JMC and invest in and maintain, strong, constructive relationships with our UKG civil service counterparts.

Blavatnik School of Government

I was recently sharing, with an audience in Northern Ireland, my determination to leave the SG more diverse in thought and culture, and more capable of change, flex and improvement (more open, capable and responsive) in readiness for the uncertainties ahead.

Challenging and testing SG policy thinking, implementation and impact is part of this process, so I was looking forward to starting my fellowship programme at Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government aimed at strengthening relationships between policymakers and public policy researchers and developing dialogue between government and academia.

Last week Paul Johnson, DG Education, Communities and Justice, Lesley Fraser, Director of Housing and Social Justice, and Michael Chalmers, Director of Children and Families joined me and several academics, to identify where best to focus our

joint efforts. One area where we will be maximising the impact is in relation to the refreshed National Performance Framework – more to come on this.

Tech Talent Charter

As part of our celebration of International Women's Day last week Sarah Davidson, DG Organisational Development and Operations, signed the Tech Talent Charter on behalf of SG.

The Charter commits us to increasing the diversity of our digital workforce, including measures such as actively encouraging diverse talent to apply for roles and ensuring inclusive employment practices and policies are in place. We will continue to work with other signatories to address the gender imbalance in digital roles in government and across the Scottish public sector.

The Kiltwalk

For my fundraising event this year I'm taking part in The Kiltwalk in Glasgow on 29 April to help tackle child poverty in Scotland. All donations will go to the STV Children's Appeal, which supports projects across the country helping to make a positive difference to children and families who need it most.

If you would like to donate, my fundraising page is now live. And please stop by my office in SAH to guess the number of sweets in the jar (£1 a guess) to be in with a chance to win a mystery prize! And for those of you further afield here's a photo so you don't miss out (post your guess below and pop a pound in the virtual jar).

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Published 26/03/2018

Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures

You have heard me talk about the Year of Young People and the role I have undertaken 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.

Last week I spent two days at the inaugural International Advisory Board for the Institute for Inspiring Children's Futures. We focused on complex system change, participation and inclusion and international children's rights, and heard compelling evidence and stories from around the world. There is much interest in how Scotland is addressing these issues. However I found the evidence on some children's experiences in Kenya (high HIV levels, children as head of households, recruitment to militia, routine teenage pregnancy and unqualified carers) put our challenges into proportion. The Institute is the brainchild of Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland and will be agreeing a programme of activity based on where it can add most value, to improve the lives and experiences of children especially those in care.

Social Security Scotland

The social security programme is the largest, most complex programme of change in the history of Scottish devolution which will see £3bn of benefits to be paid each year to 1.4 million people who rely on them. 2018 sees us move into the delivery phase of these significant new powers and by the end of the year Social Security Scotland will be making the first payments of devolved benefits.

It was great to see the first round of Social Security Scotland recruitment go live last week. These are the first of at least 1,900 jobs, offering various working patterns, that will be created by the time the agency is fully operational.

B Band recruitment

In line with our SG2020 ambition to become the organisation we want and need to be, we have launched a significant external recruitment drive - the first in 10 years - inviting B Band applications. This underlines the changing character of our organisation and provides a valuable opportunity to attract fresh talent and build a more diverse workforce for the future.

End of Year Reviews

We are approaching the End of Year Review period – a time for all of us to reflect on our performance over the past twelve months and consider objectives for the year ahead. End of Year Reviews are an important part of the reporting cycle where we recognise success as well as areas where we can develop and improve. Have a look at People Director Nicky Richards' tips on preparing for End of Year Reviews and take this time to invest meaningfully in your development.

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Published 16/04/2018

Young People

The Year of Young People 2018 is an opportunity to celebrate and promote young talent in Scotland – including within our own organisation.

Corporate governance may appear dry, detached and frankly, a bit of a distraction. In fact it is quite the opposite. Governance is about how an organisation operates – the decisions taken and who takes them. I want to bring the voice of young people into our decision making structures, to hear the fresh ideas, challenge and vision they bring to our organisation.

So I am inviting young SG colleagues (under 25) to become members of our corporate boards – giving them the opportunity to share their ideas and influence key decisions, and in turn, improving the scrutiny and diversity of Board business.

Two young board members will sit on each of the four boards (People, Place, Performance and Economy) for a one-year term, with scope to extend. The young board members will also benefit from being mentored by the DG Chair of their Board for the duration of their appointment.

People, Place, Performance and Economy Board Chairs are discussing the application process and details of how to apply will feature on Saltire soon. If you have ideas about how we best do this, please get in touch with Julie Humphreys , Board Secretary.

Blogging on Saltire

A blogging platform has gone live on Saltire giving colleagues a dedicated space to share ideas and knowledge, connect, collaborate and celebrate success – helping us deliver our SG2020 vision of a more open, capable and responsive organisation.

It provides a virtual space for ‘working out loud’ - generating and sharing ideas across policy areas and specialisms, particularly valuable in supporting our work on outcomes, and the refreshed NPF. How could this platform help you engage others in your current areas of work?

Scotland is Now

Scotland is Now is a new campaign to promote Scotland globally as a great place to live, work, study, invest and visit. It brings together the international marketing activities of SG, Visit Scotland, SDI and Universities Scotland under a single brand for the first time – a powerful example of collaborative working. This brand is now the default position for how we present Scotland to the outside world – and a useful brand and resource for your own work with stakeholders in Scotland. Find out how you can use it at Scotland.org and you can follow on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

This is just one example of the creative, collaborative, innovative (and intensive) work underway in the organisation. I am always proud of the work you produce - but in recent weeks I have been especially impressed by the commitment and energy being shown by teams across the SG and in our agencies. There is tremendous work taking place on FOI, YoYP, the child poverty action plan, our induction pack for new starts, total operating costs, economic interventions, legislation, end of year reviews and the Nancy Glen Salvage Operation - to name but a few. Thank you.
#proudpermsec

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Published 23/04/2018

New Corporate Board

Last week we held the first meeting of the new Corporate Board. The Corporate Board supports, challenges and advises me as Principal Accounting Officer of the SG in giving direction and taking assurance on strategic issues of organisational development and performance. Essentially it tests the health and effectiveness of our organisation – ensuring the SG is the open, capable and responsive organisation it needs, and wants, to be.

Corporate Board members understand that this new remit requires us to stay in a strategic space – relying on other Boards to fulfil their remits to help us do so. And for officials on the Board to share what is going well and where we're struggling. I have specifically asked our Non-Executive Directors to take a constructive but robust role in challenging what they see and hear at the Board.

At this meeting we discussed:

- Finance - year end processes and increasing the accuracy of our forecasting
- Digital Government – and its vital role in both the transformation of our organisational culture, and how citizens access information and public services
- EU Exit – an introduction to a detailed examination of our organisational readiness in June

I also want greater transparency - sharing Corporate Board decisions (and discussions that lie behind them) across the organisation and in our agencies, including what these mean for you and your work. We are looking at the best vehicles and methods (written and oral) to achieve this – more soon.

End of year reviews

We're in the midst of end-of-year reviews and taking time to reflect on our objectives, our achievements and lessons learned over the past 12 months. I have been gathering feedback on, and carrying out EYRs, for those I line manage. The headers I use to guide those discussions are - what are you hearing and learning from your feedback? What have been your key triumphs and struggles this year? How can I help you succeed? And how is your work/life balance and wellbeing?

If you can't see it, call it!

As some of you know, my husband works in the live music industry and he quotes an episode where, when challenged by backstage security, a very famous singer pointed to his (well kent) visage, saying 'my face is my pass'. However, mine clearly isn't, and indeed shouldn't be, because this week I was challenged – rightly so – by Barbara Allison for not having my pass on display. We each have a responsibility to keep our workplaces safe and secure and visible passes are an important part of this. So if you see someone inside the building without their pass or wearing it outside - call it out. And remember, Barbara's watching...

Find out more

Security is a priority for everyone – so don't delay in reporting anything that worries you. Find out more about reporting security and data incidents and reporting cyber security incidents.

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Published 14/05/2018

Polmont

There are few things more sobering and powerful than hearing directly from young people in custody on the circumstances, experiences and choices that led them there. I have visited HM Young Offenders Institution Polmont many times, and on Thursday I joined a group of young men to hear about issues that matter to them. We discussed how flexible approaches to learning – embodied in Curriculum for Excellence - are enabling these young men to plan a path for the future. Several were taking qualifications and planning events and I look forward to hearing and seeing the results. I spent time with 4 young men to hear about their extensive experience of the care system and the differences which they think might have helped them then, and now. One described his 14 different placements all over Scotland during a 12 month period – he was still only 18. It was interesting to hear that the one person who featured positively in all their lives was Granny - we then discussed how Grannies might be celebrated in the Institute's YOYP programme. What I heard resonated with the important work of the Care Review on a system with love for the child at its heart.

All credit to Polmont on how it has embraced the Year of Young People, including embedding co-production in its programme and culture, and ensuring these young voices are included and heard.

Learning at Work Week

We are each responsible for our own learning, and allowing our teams the time and space to learn. It's an essential part of our becoming the more open, responsive and capable organisation we want, and need, to be. Some of my most powerful and creative learning experiences have been through shadowing (see below), mentoring, hearing an inspiring speaker and from visits - seeing the world through other's eyes. Very little of the learning I have absorbed was to be found in a classroom. So please take the initiative in this Learning at Work Week / #LaWW18 to broaden your learning perspective and practices, and talk to your line manager about it in your monthly conversation. Look out for upcoming Saltire articles and join discussions on the 'All Company' Yammer page.

Could a young person shadow you?

I was joined last week by [REDACTED] a third-year Politics student, and got as much out of it as she did. How can you support a young person to learn about our workplace, either as an individual or perhaps welcoming them as part of your team for the day?

Sexual Harassment survey

I have spoken previously about our new guidance on tackling harassment and made clear that bullying or harassment of any kind is unacceptable within the SG. A UK Civil Service survey on harassment and misconduct runs until the end of May. Please submit your views so that we can better understand these issues and continue to improve and inform policies, practices and support.

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Published 21/05/2018

Travelling Cabinets kick off

It's fitting that the first travelling Cabinet of the year is taking place today in the Clyde Gateway - marking a decade of regeneration and investment in the area.

I particularly look forward to the public discussion at these events – hearing the (unvarnished) views, perspectives and experiences of local people, businesses and community groups is gold dust to public service providers and policy makers alike. Taking Cabinet on tour is no mean feat and requires significant planning and coordination - but connecting people throughout Scotland with their Government and providing the opportunity to shape and influence its direction is priceless. Thank you to everyone who organises, attends and contributes briefing to these important events.

EU (Withdrawal) Bill

Last week saw unprecedented events in the history of devolution when the Scottish Parliament refused to give legislative consent to the UK Government's EU (Withdrawal) Bill. The Bill received its Third Reading in the Lords on 16 May. It now returns to the Commons for consideration of the extensive amendments made by peers.

It is not yet clear what action the UK Government will take in response to the vote of the Scottish Parliament. Both UK and Scottish Ministers have indicated they are ready to continue discussions, with representatives of the other parties at Holyrood, to find a mutually acceptable solution to the current impasse.

Well-being

I read the recent annual ONS publication on national well-being with interest. The comment that measuring success "is at least as much about people's well-being as it is about the country's economic health" really stood out.

Well-being is even more important given the level of uncertainty we experience each day, both at home and at work. What do we need to do differently in order to be an organisation in which everyone thrives? What would feel different? How would we measure our progress? These are the questions being explored by People

Directorate with colleagues from across the organisation over the next couple of months. If you'd like to contribute please get in touch.

I was interested to read about the Welsh Government's new offer of a dedicated 'well-being hour' each week and we're connecting with WAG colleagues to find out how this is working. And I have also asked the Chief Medical Officer to consider how we can support better health and well-being within our organisation – watch this space for her advice and action.

GDPR

GDPR is the biggest change to data protection rules in the UK for 20 years. The new legislation and our compliance with it is an important part of how the public views and trusts SG. So it's vital that everyone completes the mandatory training this week - I've done mine. Have you done yours?