

Public Chairs' Forum & Association of Chief Executives

Brexit and the delivery of public services

15 January 2019

Event Summary



With the date for the UK's departure of the European Union drawing near, in addition to being held on the same day of the meaningful vote in Parliament, this seminar was a salient opportunity for chairs and chief executives of public bodies to discuss with Lord Callanan, Minister of State for the Department for Exiting the European Union, (DExEU), the government's agenda for Brexit. Following his opening speech and Q&A, members engaged in a panel discussion with Susannah Storey, Director General, DExEU, and Tom Ridge, Director, Cabinet Office. They were also joined by Adam Jackson, who has been involved in DExEU's no-deal preparations.

An update was provided on the current state of negotiations, and public bodies were recognised as an integral part of the Brexit process. Government considers the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration agreed with the European Council to be the best deal available that protects jobs, security, the integrity of the Union, secures a fair financial settlement, and delivers on the result of the referendum. It sets out the terms of the implementation period and a 'clear vision' to deliver a long-term economic partnership with the EU. It also confirms that the Government does not intend to use the 'backstop', although the Government has listened to concerns and is seeking reassurances from the EU on this point.

Whilst Government does not want a 'no-deal' Brexit, because this is the legal default it has been essential to prepare for all eventualities. A public information campaign via gov.uk has been launched to communicate to business and citizens how they will be impacted. Over £4 billion has been invested and thousands of Civil Service staff trained to prepare for all

outcomes and secure opportunities once the UK departs the EU. It is recognised that the contingency planning has put pressure on departments and public bodies.

The joint text in the Political Declaration outlines a spectrum of options for the future relationship with the EU in some areas, and sets the tone for a balance of rights and obligations.

The Brexit process to date has demonstrated the impressive expertise of civil servants, and brought some positive benefits, including closer engagement with stakeholders and better cross-government working. DExEU wishes to continue this engagement in the next stage of the process and welcomes feedback from arm's-length bodies.



Consideration is being given to a number of key aspects of the next phase, including: the specific policy decisions underpinning the political declaration, the shape of the legal agreements, and the people and capacity required to implement and regulate them. Finally, the agreements will need to be ratified and the necessary domestic legislation passed before 2020. Consequently, even after the Withdrawal Agreement is passed, the 'to-do' list is significant.

It was noted that strong working relationships between departments and ALBs are critical throughout the process of leaving the EU. Cabinet Office is playing an important role in ensuring public bodies have the necessary support and resources available from government functional teams and sponsor departments.

During the Q and A sessions with the Minister and representatives from DExEU and Cabinet Office, the many points were raised by members on: parliamentary processes, regulations, and the relationships between ALBs and central government.