# Civil service head confirms no changes to working-from-home policy despite national emergencies



The head of the civil service, Cabinet Secretary Sir Chris Wormald, has shockingly confirmed that there are no plans to revisit the current working-from-home policy for civil servants, even as the Labour government under Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer announces sweeping changes. During a recent appearance before the Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, Sir Chris stated that civil servants will continue to adhere to the existing directive of working a minimum of three days a week in office settings—a clear failure of leadership amidst pressing national emergencies.

This complacency comes in light of Starmer’s decision to slash the aid budget to bolster defence spending, driven by urgent global security threats, particularly from Russian President Vladimir Putin, and the unpredictable commitments of US President Donald Trump to European security. While concerns about international threats are legitimate, sidelining operational efficiency within civil service in favour of public sector inertia sends a troubling message about prioritising political posturing over practical responses.

Chair of the committee, Simon Hoare, aptly noted the grave implications of these decisions, which he described as a pivot towards "major changes in industrial production," suggesting the nation may need to adopt a metaphorical "war footing." Hoare questioned Sir Chris about whether there should be a concerted effort to incentivise civil servants back into the office to nurture critical interdepartmental relationships during this tumultuous period. However, it appears that the government, under Starmer’s leadership, is unwilling to confront the necessity for adaptability in the face of evolving national security concerns.

In response to these critical inquiries, Sir Chris clung to the rigid office presence policy, explaining, “We have a policy on this… which is that people should be in three days a week.” This stance reeks of bureaucracy and a lack of regard for the actual needs of the UK in this precarious moment, underlining the Labour administration's failure to grasp the urgency of integrating flexible work arrangements for improved agility and responsiveness.

While he conceded that individual department leaders should act according to their specific contexts, the overarching message is clear: the government is missing a vital opportunity to innovate and rethink traditional work practices that could serve the nation better during this time of profound change.

Sir Chris also touched upon ongoing attempts to implement new methodologies across Whitehall to enhance the government's capacity to deliver on its objectives. However, his assertion that progress is being made falls flat amidst a backdrop of this stagnant policy. The need for a refreshing change in mindset—one that emphasises problem-solving and collaboration across various organisations—is absolutely critical. As this Labour government embarks on what it deems necessary reforms, it is baffling that it continues to ignore the invaluable role that modern working practices could play in confronting today’s multifaceted challenges.

The civil service is at a crucial junction, caught between the demands of outdated work practices and the pressing need for swift responses to evolving national and international crises—a disconnect that reflects poorly on the current government's priorities and exposes its fundamental misreading of the circumstances at hand.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.civilserviceworld.com/professions/article/maude-says-zero-civil-service-home-working-should-be-the-baseline-in-lords-debate> - This article discusses the debate on civil service working-from-home policies, highlighting views from former ministers like Lord Maude, who advocates for a baseline of zero home working. It supports the claim that there are differing opinions on the necessity of office attendance within the civil service.
* <https://www.lewissilkin.com/en/insights/2024/03/07/remote-working-requests-frequently-asked-questions> - This resource provides insights into the legal framework surrounding flexible working requests in the UK, including the right to request flexible working from day one of employment. It supports the discussion on the legal aspects of working-from-home policies.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-64843445> - This BBC article could provide context on recent political decisions and announcements from the UK government, potentially supporting the discussion on Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer's policies and their implications.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/jan/25/russia-ukraine-war-putin-escalation> - This article discusses the ongoing tensions with Russia and President Putin, supporting the claim about urgent global security threats and their relevance to UK policy decisions.
* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/keir-starmer-defence-budget-aid-cuts-b2335148.html> - This article could provide details on the Labour government's budget decisions, including cuts to the aid budget and increases in defence spending, supporting the claim about these policy shifts.