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Telephone: [redacted]
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Date: **28 February 2025**

Via email: [redacted]

Dear [redacted],

REVIEW OF HYBRID WORKING POLICY

Thank you for the update on the comments already made on the NICS Hybrid Working Policy. I welcome the inclusion of a minimum of 40% attendance and the clarification on the relationship between Hybrid Working and Reasonable Adjustments in the NICS Hybrid Working Policy. It is important that we don't allow a 'minimum' requirement to become a maximum requirement so the policy needs to adhere to an expectation of flexibility in attendance should urgent business need require it.

P&OD requested further feedback on the use of Connect 2 Hubs and period of notice to end hybrid arrangements. I am supportive of the proposed wording changes to the Connect 2 Hubs in the Hybrid Working Policy. It would be helpful if the FAQs clarified that hubs are not intended for lone working but could be used for wider team engagement subject to business need and departmental approval.

In reference to the 3-month notice period, I share similar concerns as colleagues about how this impacts our flexibility to service Ministers and deliver our business. The inclusion of 'the period of notice can be reduced in exceptional circumstances e.g. business need, emergencies, including health and safety matters' does not provide sufficient flexibility. As hybrid working is a non-contractual agreement, I suggest that this part of the policy is revisited by P&OD.

Previously I proposed strengthening the phrase 'you are encouraged to attend'. P&OD responded with 'encouraged' is consistent with benchmarking from the Cabinet Office. Justice, DAERA and DfC all voiced concern over the use of the word 'encouraged' and on page 12 of P&OD's Issues for Consideration on Draft Hybrid Working Policy/ Procedures' document, reference was made to a decision being required from FHRAG on this matter. I stay committed to strengthening 'encouraged' and would welcome further review from colleagues.

Based on experience and challenge to date within DfC, I remain concerned that the Hybrid Working Policy does not clearly articulate business need. I note the definition of business need will be expanded in FAQs reminding line managers that business need is not just a local/branch matter but includes Division/Directorate/Department. I ask that this exclusion within the Policy is reconsidered by P&OD.

If you wish to discuss any aspects of DfC's comments further, please contact Eamon O'Kane.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

John Greer
Deputy Secretary
Corporate Services Group