

News story: Statement on Sir Jeremy Heywood

Sir Jeremy Heywood today announced in a personal statement that he is standing down as Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service to concentrate on his recovery from ill health. He has served as Cabinet Secretary since 2012 and Head of the Civil Service since 2014.

The Prime Minister has appointed Sir Mark Sedwill, the acting Cabinet Secretary, permanently to the role with immediate effect. He will continue to serve as the Prime Minister's National Security Adviser.

Paying tribute to Sir Jeremy, the Prime Minister said:

Jeremy has given exemplary service to the public in his civil service career. He has worked constantly to improve our country's future and to deliver for the public, serving Prime Ministers and Ministers of all parties with distinction in the finest traditions of the Civil Service. I am personally grateful to him for the support he has given me as Prime Minister. He has made an enormous contribution to public life in our country and will be sorely missed.

Sir Mark Sedwill added:

The whole public service will want to thank Jeremy for his tireless and outstanding service to our nation, and for the values he exemplifies. He has had a profound, positive and lasting impact and will be greatly missed.

Sir Jeremy joined the Civil Service in 1983 and has worked across government as well as in the private sector. In recognition of his distinguished service to public life, the Prime Minister has nominated Sir Jeremy Heywood for a life peerage.

35 years ago I joined the Civil Service as an enthusiastic young economist in the Health and Safety Executive, full of ideas and keen to make change happen. Today, I still have all that desire to serve my country and to make a positive difference. It is with great sadness therefore that, on medical advice, I must now retire.

Since joining the Civil Service, I have had the privilege of supporting, at close quarters, four Prime Ministers, two Conservative and two Labour, and the first Coalition government for decades, with its first full-time Deputy Prime Minister.

Throughout my career, I have seen it as my responsibility to look for fresh angles, to challenge lazy thinking and to work with colleagues to find solutions rather than simply identifying problems and obstacles that everyone can admire. Some of the toughest issues we have faced as a country in recent decades have required genuinely new or lateral thinking – the product of Ministers and civil servants working closely together to deliver shared goals – including putting in place the UK’s new monetary framework after the 1992 ERM crisis; responding to the financial crisis of 2008/2009, not least through the highly successful London G20 Summit, while trying to prevent Britain’s falling into another Great Depression; and subsequently tackling the twin challenges of low productivity and weak public finances.

After becoming Cabinet Secretary in 2012, and Head of the Civil Service in 2014, I continued to serve the Prime Minister of the day on a wide range of policy issues, including Brexit, where I am particularly proud of the work Whitehall has done in seeking to bring clarity, shape and practical options to the table for Ministers to discuss.

During my time in charge, I have encouraged the Civil Service to be more open, more diverse, more inclusive in its culture and more professional in all that it does. And, despite a number of recent “noises off” from anonymous commentators, I believe that the service is in robust health, well-equipped to provide the support the country needs over the coming months and years.

I would like to pay tribute to Mark Sedwill for holding the fort so admirably over the summer months as Acting Cabinet Secretary, and to congratulate him today on his well-deserved promotion. I would also like to thank all my brilliant permanent secretaries who have shown what a great team they are. I know they will give Mark the support he needs to do this job.

On a personal level I have very much appreciated the support of the Prime Minister over the last few months and all the messages of goodwill received from so many current and former colleagues, friends and acquaintances.

Above all, I would like to thank all the hard-working civil servants across the UK who keep this country moving forward. Thank you for allowing me to be your leader for the last six and a half years. It has been the greatest privilege of my career.