

Star Chamber

I was pleased to see the PM and Chancellor have decided to set up a committee to seek better value for money from departments. That used to be the main task of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Star Chamber was a committee to adjudicate the following year's annual budget where the Treasury and spending department disagreed about the totals. It would be chaired by a nominated senior Cabinet Minister, with a right of appeal to the PM. It was not usually a good idea to exercise that right for a spending Minister and was very rare. The new Committee would be wise to empower the Chief Secretary to push back more on wasteful or ineffectual spending.

They should start with the massive NHS budget. They need to pin down how much of the one off spending of the last 20 months on Test and Trace, vaccinations and responses to the pandemic can be ended, and to see how much of the spending in the NHS budget to undertake non covid work was in practice vired to pandemic related spending. They should want to see a proper costed programme for reducing waiting lists, backed by a proper manpower and recruitment budget. They should require clarity over how much extra social care is going to get, now that it is to share part of a nominated tax for part of its budget. The decision to hypothecate some National Insurance was a bad one, and will give misleading views of how much these two expensive services actually cost. they should ask why NHS management has kept the NHS so short of beds but long of management and management consultancy

They should review the progress with the administrative reorganisation. They should ensure no senior manager gaining a job in the new structure receives a redundancy or other payment for their past service in the old structure. They should seek to retain and reappoint all the good people from the old structure without recruitment fees. They should economise on new logos, use up old administrative supplies and only allow property changes where that will result in savings. These are all points I have made about the impending reorganisation.