

# Mission-driven government

What does a 'mission-driven' approach to government mean and how can it be delivered?

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# About this work

This document summarises the 'how' of mission-driven government; getting into the detail of delivering missions in practice.

The work is a joint project by Nesta and the Institute for Government (IfG) which builds on the expertise of both organisations: Nesta's practical experience in a mission-driven organisation and the IfG's expertise in delivering effectively in government.

The aim is to set out a recommended approach and to provide examples and illustrative case studies to explain how it could work in practice.

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# The context: intellectual influences of missions

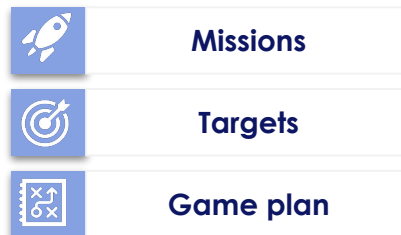
Mission-driven government has specific intellectual origins, in particular the work of Professor Mariana Mazzucato, but it can draw on a range of theory and practice to help govern more effectively:

<b>Deliverology</b>	➤	Government performance based on targets and trajectories, with a small number of identified priorities	<i>Eg. NHS waiting lists</i>
<b>Joined-up government</b>	➤	Organising government around people, places or problems	<i>Eg. Rough sleeping strategy</i>
<b>Industrial policy</b>	➤	Government shaping markets to achieve policy goals with simultaneous action on multiple fronts	<i>Eg.. Electricity market reform</i>
<b>Agile methods</b>	➤	Iterative approach focused on continuous improvement, customer feedback and rapid delivery	<i>Eg. Government Digital Service</i>
<b>Experimentation</b>	➤	Testing solutions against counterfactuals in large-scale trials	<i>Eg. RCTs in education</i>
<b>Behavioural science</b>	➤	Starting from human behaviour – not assuming narrow economic incentives will work	<i>Eg. Pension auto enrolment</i>

# There are three core components to a mission-driven government

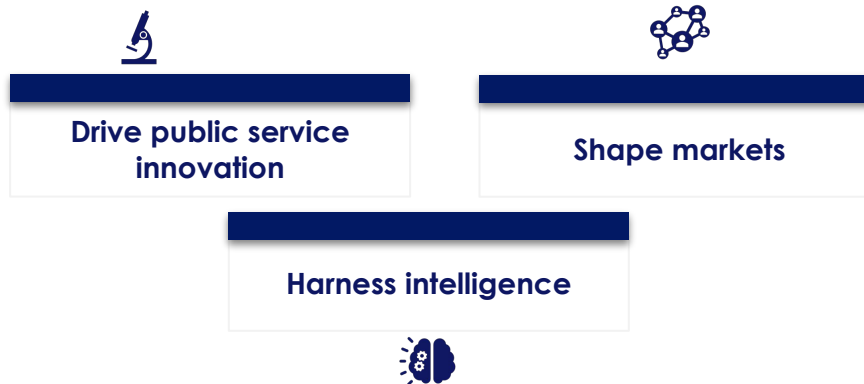
## 1 Direction of travel

Missions set a **bold vision for change**, inspiring people across the system and society.



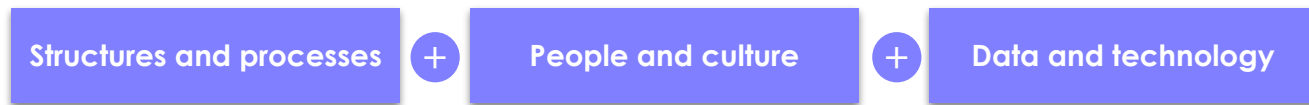
## 2 Role of government

Governments must play **three mutually complementary roles** to drive mission delivery. The roles work together to support learning, testing and scaling.



## 3 Foundations

**Underpinning enablers** that make the work possible.



**DIRECTION OF TRAVEL**

# The mission is a bold vision for change, laying down a challenge to the system and society

## What is it?

A **small number of ambitious, long-term goals** on which government will concentrate resources and political capital.

**Clear and ambitious** enough to materially and sustainably change society for the better, and encourage those outside government to invest time and resources in.

A **bold vision for change**, laying down a challenge to the system and society.

## Why set one?

To avoid being **spread too thin**, and break a cycle of political and policy short-termism.

To **galvanise people and align disparate actors**, across and beyond government, behind a common challenge – with a focus on delivering change that the public can feel.

To **catalyse innovation**, forcing new ways to think and learn about a complex problem.

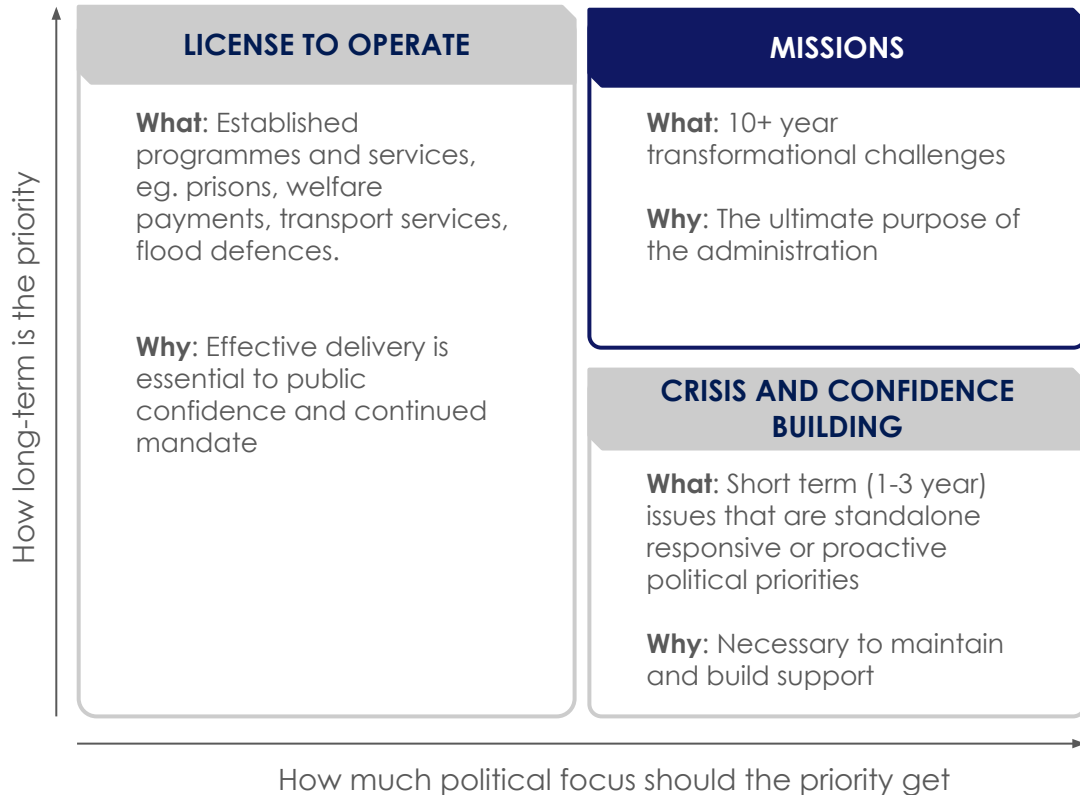
# A mission is not another word for a priority

The term 'mission' is sometimes used interchangeably with the word 'priority', but really missions are a type of priority:

**Licence to operate** issues are those areas of core service delivery that cannot be allowed to go wrong – where success is the absence of failure. Government must minimise this risk as cost-effectively as possible.

**Crisis and confidence building** activity is short-term and reactive. It uses political attention to fix problems.

**Missions** are the ultimate purpose of the administration. And the story to tell at the end of a Parliament.



# Missions are supported by goals and targets, with different goals or targets appropriate for different challenges and timeframes

## What type of goal/target



### Moonshot or 'aspirational' goals

Moonshot goals are those that are 'almost impossible', eg. halving obesity. When taken literally, they force teams to think more radically, challenge conventional wisdom and institutional inertia.

A headline mission goal may be broken down into intermediate outcome goals, for example carbon reduction by sector, healthy life expectancy into obesity or educational achievement by key stages. Breakdowns by socioeconomic group or place, such as 'floor targets', may help drive the system to raise the average while also narrowing inequality.



### 'Committed' targets

'Committed' targets are calibrated to be stretching but achievable. They may be shorter-term, set to avoid the loss of credibility from failing to hit an aspirational goal, or set when goals are interdependent and require sensible planning assumptions (eg. grid build-out related to renewable power). Missions may also set both committed targets and aspirational goals as a way to be clear about the difference between expectations and ambitions.

## How to use them



### Firm on 'what' flexible on 'how'

Missions are firm on outcomes, but flexible about the means of achieving them. Measuring inputs and outputs is still essential but should be used as an aid to understanding what's working and updating theories of change, not as a proxy for success.

# The game plan is not a static blueprint or Gantt chart, but a plan that is continually tested and updated

## 1. Understand the system

Continuous process of understanding what is happening and why

## 2. Theory of change

Set out a theory to change it. Be clear about where evidence is strong and levers are effective. Plan to fill in the blanks

## 5. Evaluate

Test how the means reach the ends. Measure the combined effect, being clear about confidence range.

## 3. Challenge assumptions

Test theory & means with those on the frontline and across sectors

## 4. Hedge for uncertainty

Back multiple horses, over-programme and weed out weakest ideas



### Game plan, not Gantt chart

The evidence and the policy in the game plan should be continuously tested and adapted.

# When defining a mission and developing a game plan, we begin by understanding the system and developing a theory of change

Missions (by nature) go beyond the control of those working in central government. It is hard to deliver on bold missions without significant system coordination across multiple actors, whether that is public bodies, local government, businesses, charities, families or individuals.

## Understand the existing system

- Who are the critical players?
- What are they doing now ?
- What's driving their behaviour?
- What outcomes is the system delivering?
- What's working well?
- Who or what are key blockers?
- What other reforms and changes are planned in the system?



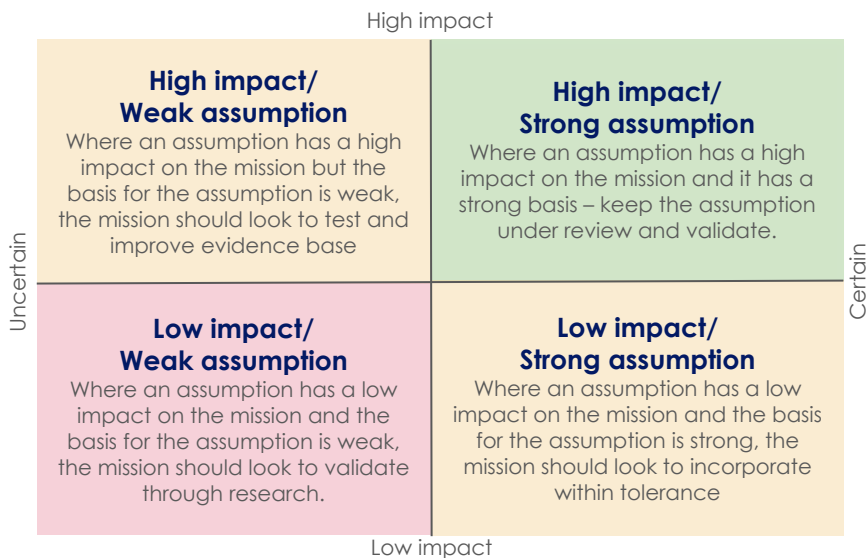
## Develop a theory to change it

- Develop a hypothesis about the causal relationships that lead to the mission outcomes
- Assess the degree of evidence that supports these relationships, and the strength of these relationships
- Understand the relative importance of different pathways, and any constraints, or points of leverage
- Identify whether you have the data to measure each step in the theory of change.

# We then test and refine assumptions, strengthening the theory of change in the process

The mission theory will be based on assumptions. A core element of successful missions will be the process of building assumptions, categorising them, testing them and then building better ones.

## Categorising assumptions

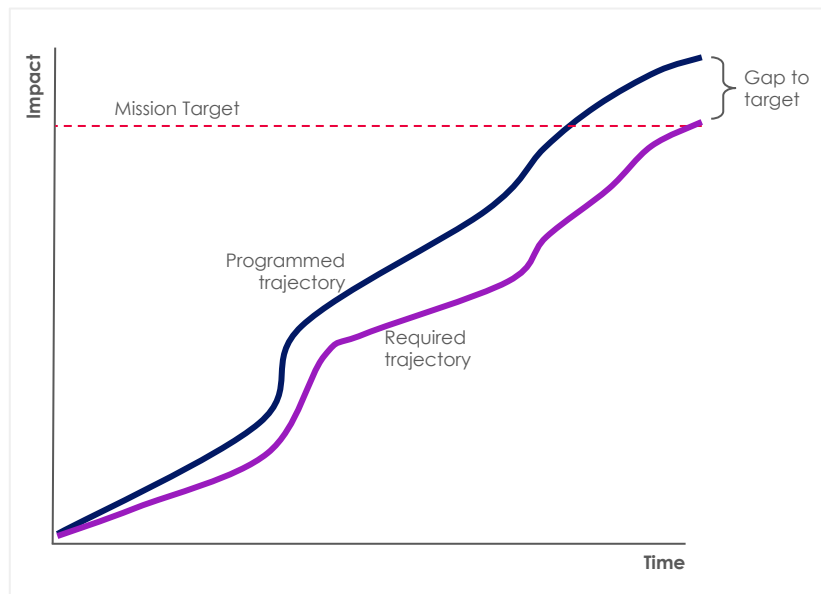


## Testing and building better assumptions

Method	Description
<b>Red teaming</b>	Stress-testing the proposed approach by using experts in an experiential, scenario-based exercise or simulation.
<b>Prototyping</b>	Development and testing of a minimal viable version; assessing how the approach would work in a real-life (small-scale) scenario
<b>Piloting</b>	Trialling activity that will be tested and evaluated prior to wider implementation
<b>User research Frontline staff</b>	Engagement with users and/or frontline staff to get their perspectives, and validate or challenge assumptions
<b>External research</b>	Exploration of the data and evidence that exists on the assumption, including cross-sector and international comparators that could be used to challenge or validate assumptions

# Hedging for uncertainty keeps the mission on track, even if some assumptions turn out to be wrong

To achieve the mission outcome, you need to ensure the individual impact of all of your activities stack up. However, government cannot operate with a sense of certainty that particular inputs and outputs will lead to the outcomes they want. It therefore needs to hedge its bets by backing multiple horses and over-programming and use experiments to build confidence in causal pathways and dose-response relationships.



## Hedging for uncertainty

Working towards an ambitious outcome can require allocating extra resources to handle unexpected changes. This helps keep the mission on track even if some assumptions turn out to be wrong. Having these extra resources also allows for innovating and experimenting, making it easier to stay on course even if some activities don't work out as expected. Accepting this extra planning can be challenging in a tight fiscal environment, but it is critical to achieving a resilient mission.

## Collective impact

All individual activities in a mission should work together to achieve the overall mission goal. These activities should be based on practical assumptions and revisited throughout the mission's duration to ensure it stays on the right path.

# The first 18 months of mission-driven government

## The first two months

### Set the vision and quick wins

Agree both 'moonshot' goals and the small number of early steps you will take.

### Baseline each mission

Diagnostic exercise to map and communicate baseline – including performance, trajectory and spending.

### Form core political leadership

Appoint lead secretaries of state, a political sponsor in the centre of government and agree key decision making and oversight structures.

## The first 100 days

### Build coalitions

Mission leadership team must get to grips with the delivery chain and partners that will be critical to delivering change.

### Begin to develop the strategy

A small mission strategy team, working across and beyond government to test, develop and build mission 'gameplans' and joint spending bids for SR.

### Announce some committed targets

In areas where funding has been identified to deliver.

## The first comprehensive SR

### Commit resources

First full, strategic spending review allocates resources to missions. Process begins with a strategic mission SR process to locate resource required to achieve goals across departments and in advance of the departmental SR process.

### Share plans

Publish mission gameplans, including committed and interim targets that enable accountability.

### Open up policy process

Designing solutions should be done in partnership with delivery chain.

## Ongoing

### Test and iterate plans

Evolve the game plan on the basis of learning from tests and evaluation.

### Tell the story

Communicate the story of the mission by publishing progress regularly and building and maintaining the confidence of the public.

# ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

# A mission-driven government needs to play three roles



## Drive public service innovation

**Adopt and diffuse** existing solutions and **pioneer new approaches**



## Shape markets

**Orchestrate the activities of public agencies and private sector organisations** towards a common vision



## Harness intelligence

Rapidly capture the **data and knowledge generated by the interaction of groups of citizens of professionals** to solve problems, improve decision-making and build buy-in

# The fastest way to improve public services is for average and poor performers to borrow and adapt solutions from top performers

## 1 Take proven solutions to scale

There is huge variation in outcomes across public services. The first step is to take proven solutions to scale – for example, there is a major opportunity to take the EEF's education interventions developed in the last decade to nationwide scale.

The following factors can help a solution to achieve scale successfully:

- Making the solution **simple, intuitive and cheap**
- Providing **subsidised technical support**
- Using **influential peer and professional networks**
- **Embedding solutions within existing routines and communications.**

Adoption is a behavioural challenge requiring experimentation.

## 2 Scour for promising practice

Only a small proportion of promising solutions in the country have been subject to rigorous evaluation. We could learn from promising practice, for example, if we scour for outperforming teachers and schools, routinely video their lessons, use AI to identify what techniques may be driving high performance, and then test and scale these.



Therefore, alongside learning from already proven solutions, we should also aim to **uncover additional promising practice in frontline services**. This can be done to setting up public services to routinely capture inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes in order to uncover the drivers of outperformance. This could be applied to the police, prisons, social work, education, job centres and health.

# But it's not enough to copy good practice – we need to push the frontier by creating the conditions for innovation at scale

## 1 Create the conditions for public sector innovation

Put in place the conditions to encourage public sector innovation by holding teams to account for outcomes and incentivising innovation but being more flexible on processes and rules

## 2 Invest in R&D

Earmark a small percentage (< 1%) of resources for directed R&D within the public sector. More devolution will enable this to happen in more radical ways

## 3 Deploy tools to manage innovation systematically

Use specific tools and approaches to incentivise innovation – **experiments; challenge prizes; venture studios; and sandboxes**. This requires policymakers to work much more closely with practitioners, reverse-engineering policy from solutions developed on the ground.

# Some challenges are less affected by delivery of public services, and more by government's ability to shape markets

There are some challenges, such as net zero or economic growth, that require collaboration with the private sector to solve. In these cases, government can deploy a range of market-shaping tools.



Vision setting



Spatial planning



Use of regulation



Risk and reward sharing



Solving coordination issues



R&D investment



Accurate and timely data

# Net zero provides an example of how government can deploy a range of tools to shape markets

## Vision setting

The speed and interdependent nature of the net-zero transition requires government to become **increasingly directive and specific about its vision**, including the specific type and location of technologies.

## Spatial planning

A spatial plan laying out the **optimal location for new power stations and grid infrastructure will reduce whole-system costs** and speed up the process. Competition can be maintained but shifted to compete 'for' the site, rather than in the market.

## Use of tax, regulation and subsidy

As well as being used to price in externalities, **instruments such as Contracts for Difference have provided revenue certainty** and thereby reduced the cost of capital for the private sector.

# Net zero example continued

## Risk and reward sharing

De-risking can occur by the state having **'skin in the game' such as equity stakes**. These, or other gain-share mechanisms, can ensure the state captures the upside benefits from value partially created by government decisions.

## Solving coordination failures

Supply-chain investment for offshore wind is conditional on greater certainty on the likely volume and price of demand, infrastructure investment in ports and a skilled workforce.

**Government can play an enabling role to solve these 'chicken and egg' coordination problems.**

## R&D investment

The market opportunities being created will require R&D. However, private R&D may be insufficient due to the inability to capture all the benefits or inherent risk. **Up to 20% of public R&D must be directed by government in line with vision**, rather than hoping this will emerge bottom-up through the research funding system.

## Accurate and timely data

Accurate and timely data is **critical to de-risk decisions by government, the private sector and consumers**, and enable regulators and policymakers to intervene and course correct. For example, millions were spent due to bad estimates of wind speeds offshore which led to mispricing wind subsidies.

# But net zero is not unique: market shaping tools can be deployed by government across a wide range of policy areas

The following examples involve the government using a range of instruments to shape a market to achieve outcomes. These are in contrast to the more limited role economic regulators have traditionally played in ensuring markets deliver enough competition and choice to ensure that consumer preferences are catered for.

Topic	Illustrative examples
<b>Diet and obesity</b>	Making it easier for people to consume healthier food will require regulation or tax instruments to shift the behaviour of retailers and manufacturers. Additional tools might include targeted R&D on behavioural complements to GLP1 drugs, or support for reformulation if 'pull mechanisms' are insufficient. These should be combined with greater data transparency to understand what people are buying across different socioeconomic and geographic groups.
<b>Social media</b>	Growing concern about social media and smartphone use may require a different approach to regulation, whereby regulators require greater transparency over the algorithms used by companies and the effects on consumer behaviour – avoiding both heavy handed, pre-emptive regulation, and intervening too late.
<b>Smoking cessation</b>	Smoking is largely being phased out through a combination of tax instruments and regulation, although further coordination is needed to achieve a full phase-out. For example, GPs may need to shift prescribing practices from behavioural cessation programs to accredited effective e-cigarettes, while older smokers may need different product substitutes, given vapes are currently associated with young people.

# Harnessing data and knowledge from multiple sources can yield rich insights

It is now possible to harness the data generated within public services and our economy to glean much richer insights into how our system is working and how it can be improved. We can also combine this with rapid, large scale collection of the views and preferences of citizens and professionals. This can help with several goals required to deliver missions.

Mission goal	Illustrative examples
<b>Create learning systems that constantly improve and optimise</b>	In health, we could combine data on what consumers are buying and consuming, wearable data from health trackers and other diagnostics, and administrative data on health diseases to <b>identify patterns and divergences that enable system improvements.</b>
<b>Build legitimacy and engagement with frontline staff</b>	When improving public services, we could use AI to do qualitative interviews with thousands of staff, immediately synthesize the findings and share them back with interviewees. This would enable <b>rich feedback and allow leaders to visibly course correct and explain how they are mitigating widely held concerns.</b> Historically, the time-consuming loops required to build consensus have often been avoided for efficiency: it ought to be now possible, at little cost, to build in iterative feedback and maintain organisational alignment.
<b>Improve public acceptability of change</b>	For policies where there are public acceptability questions – for example, on food, energy, housing, or social care – deliberative methods could be used to build consensus. <b>Online or hybrid models of deliberation can be delivered at a fraction of the cost compared to traditional methods,</b> and could become a standard tool for policymakers to improve solutions and test more radical ideas.

**FOUNDATIONS**

# Mission-driven government is enabled by strong foundations, which can determine success or failure

There are well-recognised enablers of good government. But with missions, some of these become especially important, and should be pursued in a particular way:



When these enablers are missing, or when they function in ways that conflict with the mission, the work will be slower and harder than it needs to be.

These enablers are hard to get right. It is therefore important to start this foundational work early.

# Each mission must have structures that cut through arbitrary administrative boundaries

## Setting direction

### Cross-gov ministerial leadership team

Ministers and senior officials with a stake in the solution must have ownership of the mission as a whole. The leadership team for each mission must develop a game plan and submit spending bids together, not narrowly police their own portfolios.

## Owning the strategy

### Mission strategy team

Setting the game plan is not a task-and-finish job. A small strategy team for each mission must constantly refresh and revise, working to the leadership team (with regular advice and briefings, both collectively and individually) and central team.

## Developing the response

### Dept. policy teams / local government

A mission will require existing teams to refocus and new teams to work on new ideas. But a fundamental redrawing of structures all over government will waste time and energy.

## Shaping the change

### Private sector, civil society, the public

Structures must be outward facing, not focused solely on Whitehall wrangling. They need to offer leadership to the whole delivery chain, convening and driving shifts in practice – and allow the delivery chain to shape the game plan.

## Making the trade-offs

### The centre

Mission strategy and spending will require trade-offs, within and between missions, and against other government priorities. This should be supported by a small central team, reporting to the Prime Minister via the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (CDL) and a senior official responsible for missions.

# Mission structures: Safer Streets example

## Cross-gov leadership group

## Safer Streets mission strategy team

## Central Mission Oversight

### What

- Political ownership for safer streets mission and strategy, accountable to PM, CX, CDL
- Proposes joint spending bids
- Oversees delivery against goals eg. on VAWG and knife crime

- Multi-disciplinary team of 30-60 officials, reporting to cross-gov leadership
- Responsible for developing and overseeing strategy
- Coordinates activity across departments

- Small team reporting to CDL and SRO for all missions
- Supports by brokering agreement within and between missions
- Identifies cross-cutting barriers to mission(s), eg. procurement

### Who

- **Ministers:** Home Sec (chair), Justice Sec, CO minister, CST, relevant HO & MOJ & MHCLG
- **Officials:** Mission SRO, HMPPS, HMCTS and CPS
- **Other:** Experts, local gov

- Officials from HO, MOJ, MHCLG
- Led by Mission SRO
- Includes frontline experience (HMPPS, HMCTS), analysts and policy – with secondments from outside government

- Small number of officials (around 5), with experience in CJS

### How

- Supported by strategy team to develop performance baseline and strategy
- Agrees overarching strategy and joint spending bids
- Reports to PM, CDL, CX

- Briefs and advises the cross-gov leadership group collectively and individually - not just HS
- Dual reporting line into Home Secretary and CDL

- Provides regular updates to CDL and Number 10
- Works closely with mission strategy team to support them unblocking issues

# People and culture: missions forge a sense of shared purpose and excitement – ‘whatever it takes’

## A good mission gets the best from people – it inspires, aligns people and focuses minds

This makes culture a critical enabler of missions. Mission-driven organisations must build a culture through leadership, processes and incentives.

A great mission-driven culture is:

- 1 Purpose-driven:** People working on the mission ‘get’ the problem, but aren’t fixated on a single solution. They are in touch with frontline workers & service users. Leaders are powerful, personal advocates.
- 2 Obsessed with outcomes:** The mission outcome is always front of mind. Teams prioritise ruthlessly, stopping things that aren’t working. Appraisals focus on outcomes, not outputs.
- 3 Iterative:** Multi-disciplinary teams combining policymakers, practitioners, researchers and subject matter experts are brought together in small, agile teams. They have bounded autonomy – they can test, learn and pivot in pursuit of the goal – and they can escalate issues quickly.

Capability is also critical and it is **as much about mentality as skills**. Mission leaders are humble, able to cope with complexity and versed in contemporary leadership practices. They understand not just policy but delivery too.

# Missions require a specific type of leadership

## Sustained



Missions are long-term goals that require cross-cutting collaboration. They therefore require sustained political leadership from the top of government to demonstrate sustainable commitment and, through doing so, building political consensus around the policy agenda.

## Coalition-building



By definition, missions require collaboration from multiple parts of government, the private sector, civil society and across the country. They therefore require an approach to planning and communication that identifies and builds coalitions within and outside government.

## Empowering



Leaders need to be empowered to make decisions and they need to empower their teams to act. 'Talking shops' and decision-making bottlenecks should be avoided.

## Both internally...

<b>Senior</b>	Missions will be a major shift for government and will require the public and private support of the most senior members of government: the PM and Chancellor
<b>Clear</b>	Each mission requires a single point of political and senior official leadership, in the form of a lead Secretary of State and senior civil servant.
<b>Distributed</b>	Just as missions themselves will be distributed across levels of government, leadership will need to be too. Both by devolving leadership for relevant aspects of missions out of UKG and within.

## And externally

<b>Broad beyond UKG</b>	To reflect the collaborative principles of mission-driven government, their leadership should bring in leadership from the rest of the public sector, the private sector, civil society, academia and other experts.
<b>Builds confidence</b>	The leadership of missions should be accessible from outside government, with strategy and performance updates published by default to allow productive scrutiny.
<b>Public and story-telling</b>	Leaders have a responsibility to communicate the purpose, urgency, plan and progress for each mission, crafting and communicating a public story.

# Data and technology cut across silos, making the work more responsive

## Data and technology work is done collaboratively, at the level of the mission

Traditional data and technology work sits in a department. With missions, D&T work is lifted up to serve the mission as a whole. This generates new connections and helps decision-makers across the system be more responsive and aligned.

**Example:** In a mission to build 1.5 million homes, a D&T strategy builds a data service on house-building activity. The data is live and granular, using unconventional data to provide quicker insights. It is open to all key decision-makers, from central to local government to infrastructure bodies. It sits alongside a platform to speed up planning decisions.

## Data and technology work starts on day one of a mission and builds progressively over multiple years.

The work gets more valuable as it progresses. As key principles, the work is:

- **Collaborative** – Multiple institutions work together (regulators, funders, universities, keystone charities)
- **Interconnected** – Data is linked, including from unconventional sources (eg. satellite or commercial data)
- **Behavioural** – The work is savvy about behaviour. eg. data is visualised to incentivise positive behaviours
- **Open** – Where possible, data and platforms are made available to actors across the relevant system

**Crucially, data and technology work sits at the level of the mission, not within one organisation.**

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# ANNEX: Working with local government and the private sector

## PRIVATE & THIRD SECTOR

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT



### Drive innovation

- Tools and approaches to incentivise innovation – **experiments; challenge prizes; venture studios; and sandboxes**
- Use a small amount of £ for **directed R&D**

- Scour for promising practice and share or **scale proven solutions**
- **Central and local government partnerships** to create conditions for innovation (eg. Investment Zones)



### Shape markets

- **Tax and regulatory measures** to influence behaviour of organisations or consumers
- **Transparent data** on citizen behaviour or government plans to inform external actors

- Combined authorities to set out **local spatial plans** or **solve coordination issues** in local economy or services.
- **Local vision and direction** for local markets and economies, eg. around city regions



### Harness intelligence

- **Greater involvement in policy and strategy** development, through cross-govt leadership boards
- **Combining datasets to identify patterns** and points of divergence to inform systems

- **Using devolution as a policy laboratory**, but gathering evidence about successes to share
- **Establish rapid feedback mechanisms** in local areas that are more responsive than national