

Ministers reflect

Mark Francois

November 2016



Mark Francois – biographical details

Electoral History

2001 – present: Member of Parliament for Rayleigh/ Rayleigh and Wickford

Parliamentary Career

2015 – 2016: Minister of State for Communities and Local Government

2012 – 2015: Minister of State for Defence

2010 – 2012: Vice Chamberlain (HM Household) (Whip)

2001 – 2010: Shadow Minister for Europe

2005 – 2007: Shadow Paymaster General

2004 – 2005: Shadow Economic Secretary to the Treasury

2002 – 2004: Opposition Whip

Mark Francois was interviewed by Nicola Hughes and Joseph Owen on 1st November 2016 for the Institute for Government's Ministers Reflect Project.

Nicola Hughes (NH): What was your experience of coming into Government like?

Mark Francois (MF): Well, my first ministerial role was in the Whip's Office. So that was directly after the 2010 general election when a new Whip's Office was formed. I was given the position of Vice Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household, a slightly elaborate title. But that meant as well as my duties as a Whip, I also had some ceremonial duties in the Royal Household on days like garden parties. And on the day of the State Opening of Parliament, by tradition an MP is taken hostage at Buckingham Palace, to ensure the safe return of the monarch from Parliament. So on two occasions, I was incarcerated at Buckingham Palace for the morning, during the State Opening. But it is quite a pleasant captivity!

NH: I imagine you'd get a good cup of tea there.

MH: Yes! And then, shall we say, conditions improve as the day wears on.

NH: Was the Whip's Office good training for becoming a departmental minister in Defence?

MH: I think so. I had served in the Whip's Office in opposition, previously. My first front-bench appointment was as the Opposition Junior Whip, back in 2002, I did that for two years. So I had some feel for what it was like to be a whip. Obviously working in the Whip's Office you have got to be pretty hot on your Parliamentary procedure and I think that is good training for any minister. In the Whip's Office you see the show from behind the theatre curtain, as it were, you see the scenery being moved around the stage. So, I think that is very good training, in fact, for a general ministerial career. You get all the sort of camaraderie of the office as well, which is important.

NH: And what about some of your previous experiences? You have been involved in the TA [Territorial Army], been a Councillor: were those useful preparations for becoming a minister?

MH: I think having served in the Armed Forces certainly was helpful. If you go into the Ministry of Defence cold, with no military knowledge at all or no prior experience, it is a pretty steep hill to climb. I am not saying you have to have been in the Armed Forces to be a good MoD minister. Michael Fallon is a very good Secretary of State for Defence and he hadn't served in the Armed Forces. But I think it helps, particularly when you are new, if you have got some idea of the military ethos and also the peculiar sense of humour. I mean even though I had been a very junior, you know, lowly platoon commander in a TA Infantry Battalion in the 1980s, it still was definitely of assistance to have had some time in uniform. I did about seven years in total. Having been a young lieutenant there I was later dealing with generals, so it was working on a slightly different level.

NH: Did anything surprise you about the role?

MH: I think just how intense it was. When you are in the Whip's Office, you are living on your watch and it is a pretty fast pace, but you are not dealing with red boxes. So I think just the sheer volume of stuff that I became responsible for and the sheer throughput of paper was something that took a while to get used to. You had to learn to adjust your day; I tried to do my constituency stuff each morning so as to keep on top of all of that. Once I had done that, I would switch over to doing the ministerial role. When I was at the MoD, which is just up Whitehall from my office, I would try and get most of my constituency work done by about 11, 11:30 and then that would then leave me free to go up to the Ministry of Defence.

NH: You were saying about the boxes and the volume. I mean, you knew a bit about defence, but how did you get your head around how the department and how government worked? The machinery and the actual role of being a minister?

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MH: Well, you have got a private office to assist you and, you know, you rely on them quite a lot. Your private secretary, in a sense, helps to break you in. It is a bit like the relationship between a sergeant and a young officer taking over a platoon: you have got someone that has been there for a while and understands how things work and you might be keen and eager but you haven't got all those years of experience. So, you know, your private office is very important to you, in terms of helping you to settle in and to get used to some kind of routine and to get used to the volume of stuff that is going to come across your desk. Particularly your private secretary, that relationship is key.

NH: And did you inherit one when you went in?

MH: I inherited one. It was a very serious Scotsman who certainly helped me to get used to it all. Time management is obviously very important, you have got to get used to things like having two diaries. So you have got your normal MP and constituency diary and then you have got your ministerial diary and you have somehow got to de-conflict the two. So what I used to do was I would take my Westminster team over to the MoD each Monday and we would have one weekly meeting where we would go through everything. My PA was a wonderful lady called Adele and my secretary over in the MoD was a great lady called Beryl and I think if those two had fallen out, my life would have come to a halt! But I tried to involve my Westminster staff, subject to some of the sensitivities, with the MoD, and at least once a week have a full meeting so that we could all go through everything together and then hopefully everybody was on the same page.

NH: What were your big priorities at the MoD and how did you determine them?

MH: Well, I had spoken to people beforehand that had been ministers. I tried to take some advice and what a number of them said was, 'You will never be able to do everything, you will have so many things coming at you, unless you actually pick some priorities that you want to focus on you will find that your whole day is taken up just dealing with whatever crops up.' So, when I first got the Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans post, which doesn't exactly roll off the tongue - the Veterans' Minister in old money - I spent about a month to six weeks learning the job and trying to understand what it entailed. Then I took my private secretary out for a drink one evening, told him to bring his notepad with him and then told him what my priorities were. We laid down a number of things I was determined to try and achieve, he noted them down and that is what we concentrated on.

NH: How did you communicate those to the wider department?

MH: Mainly through my private office.

NH: You mentioned Michael Fallon earlier, how did you establish a good working relationship with the rest of the ministers?

MH: Like most ministerial teams we had departmental 'prayers' once a week and everybody would be given a slot to say what they were working on, what was top of their in-tray. So that was a way for the team to be kept broadly up to speed with what everybody else was doing. I think that is probably fairly standard practice. I had some one-to-ones with the Secretary of State as well.

NH: And those would be to, sort of, update on progress or...?

MH: Yes, but one of the challenges was that quite often, because of the other pressures of work and because of operations, quite often those meetings got cancelled.

NH: Yes - there is, I suppose, a lot of travel involved?

MH: That is right.

NH: We will come back to some things about MoD in due course but I also wanted to talk about your move over to the Department for Communities and Local Government [DCLG] in 2015. Did you know the move was coming?

MH: I didn't know, no. I had been at the MoD, by that stage, for about three years in total. It is always a popular department to serve in, so while I loved being there I knew that I couldn't be there forever. When it came to the 2015 General Election, I had kind of readied myself to be retired to the backbenches, if I am honest. But then I was pleasantly surprised when they asked me to be a minister of state in another department. So, suddenly it was from tanks to local government finance.

NH: Indeed - how did you get your head round the new brief, then?

MH: Did my best. Again, I had a lot of reading to do. I had been a councillor years ago, and that is where the council experience, I think, came in handy, whereas the military experience had come in handy at the MoD. I had some experience of local government and what councillors do, that was useful. Again, I relied quite heavily on my private office, you know, to help break me in.

NH: And again, there, did you try and pick a couple of priorities that would be the big things that you would work on?

MH: Tried to, yes.

NH: Tried to, but couldn't quite...?

MH: I think because I was less familiar with it, it took me a little longer to work out exactly what it was that I was going to focus on.

NH: This might be different in the two departments but how, then, would you describe the main roles and duties of a minister?

MH: Well, you are part of the government and you are bound by collective responsibility. I think that is something you have to remain conscious of all the time. Even when you are at some drinks reception or something, you know, loose words can come back to bite the government. So you are there to be part of that whole entity. You are there to take decisions and to provide guidance on the running of your department. When the Secretary of State for Defence was away, I was the number two in the department. To decide knotty issues after, hopefully, taking the right kind of advice. Also to try and show some leadership, that is partly travelling, getting out around the Department, travelling internationally where necessary. So to decide and to lead, I think.

NH: OK, that is useful and we will come on, later, to how you went about that decision making process.

Joseph Owen (JO): So thinking about the day-to-day reality of being a minister, how did you actually spend your time, on a day-to-day basis? Trying to think about the competing priorities of Parliament, departmental business, media and the like.

MH: Don't forget the constituency side, I would normally try and get the constituency stuff done first in the morning and then go across to the Department. I would normally start my time in the Department with a meeting with my private office, we would just go through the diary for the rest of the day, talk about any forthcoming meetings or events, anything that had happened overnight, anything I needed to be aware of. And then into the meetings for the day. I used to try and avoid having meetings back-to-back. I normally used to try and allow a gap of at least about half an hour, where possible. Some days you know, things happened and it just wasn't possible. But I normally tried to have an air gap between meetings, it's a chance to mentally re-set yourself for the next subject. Because some of the things you were dealing with were quite complex and bouncing through those, literally one after another, during the day is not the best way to conduct business.

JO: Yes. From what you have said so far, it sounds like you rely quite heavily on your private office. Is there anything in particular about how they operated that made them effective, from your perspective?

MF: Well, again, with the MoD it is slightly different, because when you are Min AF [Minister for the Armed Forces], you've got a military assistant, an officer in uniform who is part of your team. Part of

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their job is to help you liaise with the Armed Forces, make sure you get your military etiquette right, all those sorts of things. So it is a slight variation on the normal theme for the Civil Service. I had four people in my private office, one of whom was, first off, a Royal Marine, then a Royal Marine Colonel and then an Army Colonel.

JO: Switching to think about a particular occasion where an unexpected crisis hit your department, how did you deal with it?

MF: At the MoD, things just kept cropping up. So when I was Min AF I was responsible for overseeing the day-to-day draw down from Afghanistan, that was an ongoing process. But then you had other things that would crop up, for example in Iraq, Syria, later on the Ukraine, the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone. One of the features of working in that department was, as we used to say in my private office, 'The world won't let us slow down.' So things kept happening. For instance, when we decided to deploy troops to Sierra Leone, I was put in charge of overseeing that. The plan to do it came up through my office and I went to see the troops in training, at York, before they went. These were the medics at 22 Field Hospital. I spent quite a bit of time with them and then promised that I would go out and visit them once they were in Sierra Leone, which I did do. I thought that was my duty to go and see them in action. That whole deployment lasted a number of months and the troops performed brilliantly, made a major contribution to defeating the disease in Sierra Leone and did it without losing anybody of ours at all.

JO: In terms of your role, how did you balance your responsibilities as a, sort of, decision maker in the department versus managing the media and external facing duties?

MF: I did interviews from time to time, but quite often we put military people up front. We had some of the medics and the brigadier who we were going to deploy doing a number of the interviews. Because, I think the public wanted to see their Armed Forces making a contribution to this. One of the things that you found was even those people who are perhaps normally rather sceptical of overseas aid and everything that goes with it, on this occasion that was different. This was helping a country fight a disease and ultimately, by so doing, protecting our own people back at home. So there was very little public opposition to that; if anything, there was a lot of pride. I certainly was incredibly proud to be associated with it and even more proud of our troops and how they performed.

JO: I imagine it is slightly different in the MoD, as in many cases, but how had the Civil Service around you responded to that? Or was it largely a military focus?

MF: It was mainly military-led, and it was troops we were sending, but there was obviously Civil Service input. In the run up, I was having lots of planning meetings about how we would actually organise our contribution, how we would deploy; I spent a lot of time looking at the risk analysis for it. Learned a lot about disease. We had to try and ensure that whilst there was inherently always going to be some risk, given the nature of the task, that we did it as safely as practically possible.

JO: In general, when you were at the MoD, how much did you focus on the military versus the civil servants in head office? So the front-line command versus head office – did you have the better relationship or greater focus on one or the other?

MF: Well, you have got to divide up your time carefully. We would have an operational briefing once a week, Op Min, as it was known. That is where, as ministers, we would get an operational update on all the things that the MoD was involved in around the world. That was quite an important meeting and I always tried to make sure I was available for that. But interestingly, within the MoD, you are dealing with several different cultures all at the same time. You have got a civil service culture and the MoD civil servants are very proud of being MoD civil servants, so they have got quite a strong culture. You have then got the military culture and you can then sub-divide that into the different services, because all of the different services have got a slightly different culture of their own. So you are dealing with a number of different cultures, whilst wearing one hat, if you see what I mean.

JO: In terms of some of the crises that you have managed in your time there, how important do you think it is that lessons are fully learned and passed on?

MF: Well, that is almost a motherhood and apple pie question, if you don't mind me saying so. Of course it is important...

JO: OK so what is the best way to go about it, do you think? I mean, how did you try and pass on lessons that you learned in office?

MF: Well, I did a handover with my successor, Penny Mordaunt. I tried to make sure that I gave her a head's up on what I thought some of the key points were. I don't think our system is set up for that, we don't formalise it. It really tends to depend on the ministers concerned and how they get on. I think maybe we should have a slightly more formal system of handing over, in order to try and make sure things aren't lost.

The other thing to add is that I also spent a lot of time trying to get out: visiting troops and visiting the front-line commands. So I didn't just sit in the office – I worked a lot in the car and out and about. I went out to Afghanistan twice, Sierra Leone once and Gibraltar, Germany. I tried to get out and see the Armed Forces where they were operating, rather than just sit in my office and read reports. That was obviously quite time intensive.

JO: I can imagine, even in the UK, MoD and front line commands aren't all stationed right next to each other, so it is a fair amount of travelling. You touched on being very proud of Sierra Leone, but is there any other achievement, while you were in office, be it MoD, Whip's Office or DCLG that you are most proud of?

MF: As you ask me, getting what are called the Genium prosthetic legs for our wounded. When I was the Veterans' Minister I looked into this and the quality of prosthetic that we give to troops who lost limbs in Iraq or Afghanistan was not world-class. It had been adequate in its day, but the stuff the Americans were giving their people, a thing called the Genium, was way ahead of what our guys were getting and I was determined to change that. There was a certain amount of medical bureaucracy to go through and the small matter of getting £6.5million out of the Treasury. But I set that as one of my objectives, when I was Veterans' Minister, and I am pleased to say that with help from others I managed to do it. So a lot of our wounded, now, who have lost limbs are now walking around on those world-class limbs that perhaps they might not have got otherwise. If I never do anything else in politics, I am pleased I did that.

JO: And you talked about the support from other people, but what other factors do you think contributed most to that success?

MF: Talking to experts who understood the problem. Talking to people at the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham. Talking to our experts down at Headley Court. Talking to charities like Help for Heroes, Bryn Parry, who ran the charity at that time, knew a lot about this and was very helpful. So, you know, gathering information to make a persuasive case.

JO: Thinking about making policy decisions, can you talk us through an example of how you made policy decisions while you were in office?

MF: Well, let's look at Sierra Leone if we can. There were a number of policy decisions to be taken there about the conduct of the operation and the risk management aspect of it. I went out to see the troops in training, to try and get a feel for it for myself and I talked to quite a few of them. I talked to the medical experts in the MoD and also the operational experts. One of the challenges I had was that in order to come up with a risk assessment and take a balanced view of the risk, there had been a number of competing risk assessments which had been prepared. I was looking at four different risk assessments, all of which said different things. So, I said 'There is no way I can sign off on this, on this basis.' So I demanded some consolidated advice, that came through the Permanent Joint Headquarters, PJHQ. They came up with one summary risk assessment, which assessed what our people have to face. I remember having a conference call and going through that with the medical brigadier, just to make sure that he was fully supportive of it. In fact, at one point, I said 'Do you support this really key paragraph in the letter?' He said 'Well, actually, I drafted that paragraph, Minister.' 'Fair enough, Brigadier, I will take your point!' So I had to take a pretty key policy decision and that is how I went about it.

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JO: It sounds like you consulted quite widely within the MOD. Did you do any consulting of external experts to get advice?

MF: I didn't on that one, although our own MoD medial people were speaking to the civilian medical people quite a bit, the experts we have at the Royal Free Hospital in London, they were in constant contact with them and some of their staff came out on the mission to help us achieve the task.

JO: Thinking about when other people were lobbying you for change, what worked and what didn't work?

MF: Well, I think unsurprisingly, having a strong case. You know, when you are a minister you are bumping into people all the time that have got a particular interest in something or a pet project. I think you just have to use your natural instincts to try and work out when something is genuinely important and then, if it is, you follow up on it. There was quite an active campaign to get a medal for the Arctic Convoy veterans and I looked into that and ended up being quite supportive of it. I was delighted when the Government decided to do that, I was there at Downing Street when the Prime Minister handed out Arctic Stars to the first 14 Arctic Convoy Vets. That was quite a proud day.

JO: And thinking about Number 10 and even Treasury and other departments, how much do you interact with them and how did you go about it?

MF: Well, clearly, the main interaction with Number 10 was by the Secretary of State. But I had some interaction with Number 10 over the Geniuses and also over Sierra Leone. So that was sometimes through the Prime Minister's Chief of Staff, Ed Llewellyn. The Prime Minister also had a military adviser of his own, who was a colonel and he would liaise directly with the Secretary of State's office and with other ministerial offices as required.

JO: Once you had taken a policy decision, what did you do to ensure it was implemented effectively?

MF: Well, I used to have regular meetings with the heads of the three services, that was an opportunity to discuss anything. I also sat on the MoD Board and – which I am told is regarded as one of the better departmental boards in Whitehall. The Board had mechanisms for chasing progress and for following up on actions which had been agreed. The Board was a very good conduit for making sure that important things got done, because everyone in the MoD knew that they could end up having to come in and report back to the Board themselves. It met pretty regularly, too, I think it met every five or six weeks. So within the Ministry of Defence, the MoD Board was taken very seriously and was a genuine tool for exercising ministerial authority.

JO: Did that shift come through the Levine Review?

MF: Yes, Levine recommended the creation of the MoD Board. It was one of his key recommendations.

JO: More generally over your entire time as a minister, what did you find most frustrating?

MF: Sometimes the time it would take to get things done, what you might call powering through treacle. You know, wanting to get something changed, finding a lot of institutional resistance and then having to keep plugging away at something, sometimes multiple times in order to try and achieve the effect that you wanted. Also being able to concentrate on that whilst you had stuff coming at you all the time. I likened it to trying to make headway in a blizzard, there is stuff coming at you, literally all the time and sometimes at very short notice, sometimes requiring you to make a call quite quickly and all the time you are also trying to achieve other things. So you are trying to push forward in the blizzard, as it comes at you.

JO: That makes sense - so thinking about the blizzard, how do you think Government could be made more effective?

MF: Well, it wasn't a blizzard every day. I shouldn't over-egg the example. But there were certainly some days when it was snowing quite hard! How could Government be made more effective? It is a good question. I think by making sure that ministers have the right kind of support. I think also by trying to make sure that ministers had time to think. The danger is there is so much paper to deal with, that you become a bit of an automaton, a cog in the wheel. You become a machine that processes pieces of paper, rather than a minister that is actually exercising authority. So I think it is important that ministers get the right level of support and it is important that they don't get drowned with trivia.

NH: When you say support, do you mean private office or are you thinking more of the policy advice?

MF: Well, I think mainly private office and, you know, most Secretaries of State now have got two special advisers [spads] and I know that the spads were heavily relied on in the Department. I think it is important to allow ministers time to think and if you are constantly having a piece of paper put under your nose and told 'We need the decision on this today, sir', you can't do that. I tended to push back against that: was it really urgent? Did it absolutely have to be done this minute? And why hadn't someone found this out earlier?

NH: One of the things that was going on at the time, that you have not mentioned, is the aftermath of the SDSR [Strategic Defence and Security Review] and big changes in the department and in the forces. I mean, what did you see as the ministerial role in all of that?

MF: Helping to implement the change. But also trying to provide reassurance to the Armed Forces while it was happening. It was a big programme of change, because of some of the problems that were happening in the Department prior to 2010. Some of the changes had to be quite drastic and I think it was important that ministers were involved in that process. Also that ministers were visible going out and doing visits, meeting the troops, talking to families, receiving feedback, showing that they were genuinely interested by what was happening at ground level. So that is why I did try to quite a lot of visits to air bases, to barracks, to ports, in order to try and meet as many members of the Armed Forces as I practically could, and to engage with them and to try and explain what it was that we were seeking to achieve. Also the families, too, because the families are very important.

NH: You experienced both coalition government and then single party Government, so did it feel like there was a big change in 2015 when you were also going into a new department as well?

MF: There was some change, but in the MoD we had all been of the same party. So in that sense, the coalition didn't crop up day-to-day, if you see what I mean. Difficult decisions had been taken in 2010 and we had a job to implement those decisions, whilst maintaining operations, whilst continuing with the draw down from Afghanistan. We had quite clear parameters on which to work and we weren't a department that was subject to constant negotiations within the quad. We had quite a lot to do and within reason, the free reign to get on with it, we weren't having to get constant quad approval for stuff, which I think was a challenge that a number of other government departments had.

NH: But then I mean in 2015, you obviously, won the election as a majority. Did you feel a sense of refreshing the agenda? How did the culture and the mood of government change at that time?

MF: Well, I think the Civil Service reacted to a clean result. Remember in the run up to the election there were all these endless scenarios about red lines and who would negotiate what with whom - tremendous amount of media speculation on that and then we went and won the thing. So I think the Civil Service was given a bit of a jolt by that and realised that they were now dealing with a one-party government. I think they made the adjustment fairly quickly. Again, the in the department I had served in previously, we weren't involved in many quad negotiations, but talking to others that had been I think they found it much healthier to be able to negotiate internally on the basis of one party and with one set of internal mechanisms as opposed to two.

NH: Did you do much legislative stuff and negotiation?

MF: I didn't deal with much government legislation, as such. So my labour of Sisyphus was in opposition when I was the Shadow Europe Minister. Day-to-day, I was the guy dealing with the Lisbon Treaty for us, all 300 pages of it! So we spent 14 nights debating the Treaty in Parliament, even though we couldn't change a single punctuation mark in it. So that really was the biggest legislative activity that I was involved in, as a Shadow.

NH: And what about spending time in the House in general as a minister – networking, engaging with backbenchers and just being in Parliament – did you find that dropped off?

MF: Yes, it is a challenge. The constituents want you in the constituency. The civil servants want you in the department. Your political colleagues want you in Parliament. Trying to keep everybody happy can be quite a challenge. So yes, I found I wasn't getting over to the tea room as often as I used to, I wasn't as up on the gossip as I had been, but you have got a parliamentary private secretary [PPS] to help you with all of that, they are very important in terms of keeping you in touch, letting you know what was the murmur on the backbenches that week. So I relied on my PPS quite a bit, for that.

MF: You mentioned Europe, obviously the other big thing that was going on in your last few months at DCLG, was the Referendum and I think you were a Leaver, so in a different position to the Government...

MF: Yes. And it was partly the Lisbon Treaty that had done it for me.

NH: So how did the campaign effect your work as a minister?

MF: Well, I think as we got towards the end of the campaign and running up to the referendum itself, everything in government sort of slowed down. A bit like waiting for the result of a general election. So ministers were in their departments less and had more time to be out on the campaign trail. In that sense it was quite similar to the 2015 general election, when you are out door knocking and leafleting and doing all the campaign things that we do. But I think there were quite a few people that were surprised by the result, not least Her Majesty's Civil Service.

NH: Did you have any kind of conflict or difficult or compromising positions because of having to, sort of, tow the Government line as a minister, but also campaign for Leave?

MF: Well, I mean the Prime Minister had made plain that ministers could campaign in accordance with their consciences, which I think was a very good decision. Within DCLG, I was for leaving, so was James Wharton. The other Commons ministers were for staying. Greg Clark [the Secretary of State] was an absolute gent about the whole thing. So no pressure was put on me because of the decision that I had taken. I mean, I made my maiden speech against the Treaty of Nice.

NH: So it was pretty clear which way you were going to go!

MF: Well I think, from memory, the letter said '...those ministers who have had longstanding views on this issue' – so I said to the system, 'Well, I made my maiden speech on it, does that count?'

NH: When you were at MoD maybe, did you have any dealings with the EU?

MF: Not much. Not a great deal. There was some over the issue of what is called lawfare and law of armed conflict and that sort of stuff. But compared to many other ministers, no. I didn't have to keep going to ministerial summits and European meetings. In practical terms, very little actually.

NH: You mentioned earlier that you got advice from some other ministers when you started. Our final question is, what would be the key pieces of advice that you would give to a new minister?

MF: One, enjoy it. It is a wonderful opportunity to do good. Two, size up the task when you get there and then when you have been there a couple of months or so, pick a few things that you really want to achieve, and then focus on those and try and make sure that whatever else crops up, you get those things

done or changed. Because if you don't pick some priorities and focus on them, the workload will still keep you very busy. The risk is that you just become very reactive and that you are spending all your time reacting to whatever crops up, rather than driving change.

NH: Brilliant. Is there anything that we have not asked about that you would like to add?

MF: I still think it is a great privilege to be allowed to serve, actually. Secretly, when I was a kid, I always wanted to be an MP, from when I was a teenager and if I was ever going to be a minister, then I really wanted to be a minister in the MoD. So I was very, very lucky in that I got my dream, if you see what I mean. Despite all the hard work, it is worth it.

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We are well placed for senior members of all parties and the Civil Service to discuss the challenges of making government work; and to seek and exchange practical insights from the leading thinkers, practitioners, public servants, academics and opinion-formers.

Copies of all the interviews undertaken as part of this project are available at:

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