



## The office of Deputy Prime Minister

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This Note offers a short history of the office of Deputy Prime Minister since 1940, when Clement Attlee served as deputy to the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, without a formal use of the title. The leader of the Liberal Democrat Party, Nick Clegg, currently serves as Deputy Prime Minister within the first peacetime coalition since the 1930s.

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<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1	Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott	3
1.2	Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg	6

## 1 Introduction

As with so much of the British constitution, the office and role of the Deputy Prime Minister has not been formalised, and there has certainly not been a presumption that the office would exist at all. The role first came into existence with Clement Attlee, who served as Churchill's deputy as part of the wartime coalition from 1940-45, but did not hold the title as a formal office of state. *Twentieth Century British Political Facts*<sup>1</sup> lists those who have been recognised by the Prime Minister as Deputy Prime Ministers. It also gives offices held concurrently:

Herbert Morrison 26 July 1945-24 Feb 1951 President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Sir Anthony Eden 26 October 1951-6 April 1955 Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

Rab Butler 13 July 1962-18 October 1963 Minister in charge of Central African Office

Willie Whitelaw 4 May 1979-10 January 1986 Home Secretary 1979-1983, Lord President and Leader of the Lords 1983-1986.

Sir Geoffrey Howe 24 July 1989-1 November 1990 Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons

Michael Heseltine 20 July 1995-2 May 1997 First Secretary and Minister in charge of the Office for Public Service

John Prescott 2 May 1997-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions until July 2001, when a new office of Deputy Prime Minister was created within the Cabinet Office. From June 2003, the ODPM was formed as a department separate from the Cabinet Office.<sup>2</sup>

The appointment of Nick Clegg as Deputy Prime Minister as part of the coalition formed after the May 2010 general election is discussed below.

Clement Attlee was officially recognised as Deputy Prime Minister in relation to the answering of parliamentary questions,<sup>3</sup> but the term does not appear in Hansard again until 1995 and the appointment of Michael Heseltine, questions were accepted to the Deputy Prime Minister. Background on the role until 1995 was given in the *Times*, at the time of the appointment of Mr Heseltine.<sup>4</sup>

The office has sometimes been distinguished by the awarding of the title First Secretary of State. However, this title was given to George Brown from October 1964 until his resignation

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<sup>1</sup> Ed David Butler and Gareth Butler 2000 Chapter 1 Ministries

<sup>2</sup> List compiled from *Twentieth Century British Political Facts* and *British Political Facts since 1979* eds David Butler and Gareth Butler

<sup>3</sup> See for example [HC Deb 9 September 1942](#) c168-9w

<sup>4</sup> "History offers scant hope to bearer of grand title" 6 July 1995 *Times*

in March 1968 and to Barbara Castle in 1968-70, without formal recognition as Deputy Prime Minister.

Michael Heseltine was appointed Deputy Prime Minister in July 1995 and was described as First Secretary of State until the election in May 1997. His base was the Cabinet Office, and there was no separate department. Details of his ministerial responsibilities were given as follows:

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the First Secretary of State if he will list his responsibilities upon which he is prepared to answer written parliamentary questions, and the arrangements for right hon. and hon. Members to ask him oral parliamentary question on a regular basis at other times than when he is deputising for the Prime Minister. [33974]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I propose to answer questions on my responsibilities for all Office of Public Service matters. I will be assisted on all business by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, to whom questions on Duchy matters should be addressed. Further announcements will be made in due course on the rota for answering oral parliamentary questions.

#### **Deputy Prime Minister**

**Mr. Madden:** To ask the First Secretary of State where his office is located; how many staff are directly responsible to him; what is the total number of staff he expects will be responsible to him; if he has a separate departmental budget; and if he will make a statement about the role of his office. [33975]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the replies given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Members for Pembroke (Mr. Ainger) and for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 11 July 1995 Official Report, columns 496-97.<sup>5</sup>

Mr Heseltine gave evidence to the Public Service Select Committee on the role of the Deputy Prime Minister in December 1996.<sup>6</sup> He defended himself against allegations that civil servants had been used for work of a party political nature.

### **1.1 Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott**

After the election of a Labour Government, John Prescott was appointed as Deputy Prime Minister in May 1997. He also held the office of Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. He was elected Deputy Labour Leader in 1994.

In July 2001 a new office of the Deputy Prime Minister was created within the Cabinet Office:

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I head a new office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the Cabinet Office. I am supported by a Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), by a Parliamentary Secretary, my hon Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) and by Lord Macdonald of Tradeston CBE and Baroness Morgan of Huyton for business in the House of Lords. As First Secretary of State I will continue to deputise for the Prime Minister as required, drawing on the resources of other parts of the Cabinet Office as necessary. I will oversee the work of the Social Exclusion Unit, which reports to the Prime Minister through me. I am also responsible for the Regional Co-ordination Unit and the nine Government offices of the Regions.

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<sup>5</sup> HC Deb 12 July 1995 c604w

<sup>6</sup> HC 153 1996-7

On international matters I will support the Prime Minister by seeing visiting dignitaries; undertaking overseas visits; and overseeing the work of the International Public Service Unit. I also carry ministerial responsibility for the British-Irish Council and will deputise as necessary for the Prime Minister at meetings of the Council. I will continue to play a role in international climate change discussions and negotiations on behalf of the Prime Minister. In addition, I will chair new Cabinet Committees on Domestic Affairs and on Nations and the Regions; and new sub-Committees on Social Exclusion and Regeneration and on Energy Policy. I will continue to chair the Committee on the Environment<sup>7</sup>

Following the reshuffle of June 2003, the department of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was formed from the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions. John Prescott remained Deputy Prime Minister. At this point the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Planning, Local Government and the Regions Select Committee was established.<sup>8</sup>

In May 2006 Mr Blair undertook an extensive Cabinet reshuffle, in which Mr Prescott retained the office of Deputy Prime Minister, but lost his departmental responsibilities. The functions of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister passed to a new Department of Communities and Local Government under Ruth Kelly. Mr Blair sent him a letter outlining his responsibilities, and setting out his role, but did not refer to salary details, which remained the same as before the reshuffle. <sup>9</sup>There was comment in press and in Parliament as to the real extent of Mr Prescott's new responsibilities. The Shadow Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling, was quoted as stating that Labour should pay for Mr Prescott's salary, his government car, grace-and-favour flat in Admiralty House and his country residence, Dorneywood.<sup>10</sup> The ODPM Select Committee was remodelled as the DCLG Select Committee.

In answer to a parliamentary question, the Prime Minister gave further details on the costs and responsibilities of the office:

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Prime Minister under which departmental budget the cost of the Deputy Prime Minister's office will fall; and what estimate he has made of the cost in 2006-07. [71071

**The Prime Minister:** The business of Government is by nature cross-departmental and the main way of agreeing policy and driving reform across departmental responsibilities is through Cabinet Committees and sub-Committees.

Like previous holders of the office, the Deputy Prime Minister will act with my full authority in overseeing the delivery of Government business, including delivering key pledges in the 2005 manifesto. He will have a wide ranging brief across the full range of domestic policy areas, and will continue to deputise for me domestically, including at Prime Ministers Questions, and in his current international role.

Following the reshuffle, the full list of chairs of Cabinet Committees and sub-Committees has today been announced in a written ministerial statement. The Deputy Prime Minister will chair nine Committees, a net addition of four to his previous responsibilities. This includes chairing the Domestic Affairs Committee, which takes decisions across the range of domestic Government business.

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<sup>7</sup> HC Deb 11 July 2001 c573-575w; see also Evidence to the Public Administration Select Committee 2001 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmpublicadm/262/1101803.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Sessional Returns 2001-02 The Committee was nominated on 22 July 2002

<sup>9</sup> Letter from PM to John Prescott 16 May 2006 *No 10 Press Office*

<sup>10</sup> "Prescott's perks an 'astonishing waste of money" 11 May 2006 *Independent*

The full list of Committees chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister is:

Domestic Affairs (DA)

Public Health (DA/(PH))

Housing and Planning (HP)

Inspection (RB(I))

Post Office Network (MISC33), a new Committee

Ageing Policy (DA(AP))

Local and Regional Government (LRG)

Local Government Strategy and Performance (LRG(P))

Animal Right Activists (MISC13)

In addition, the Deputy Prime Minister will play an active role as my deputy on the following seven Committees:

Anti Social Behaviour (ASB)

Asylum and Migration (AM)

Energy and the Environment (EE)

National Health Service Reform (HSR)

Public Service Reform (PSR)

Schools Policy (SP)

Serious Organised Crime and Drugs (SOC)

The Deputy Prime Minister is also entitled to attend all other Cabinet Committees, as he judges necessary.

The Deputy Prime Minister has also agreed to work with Cabinet colleagues on improving the effectiveness of policy development across Government, and in particular with respect to the major issues which require an effective cross-Government response. He is also looking at our practice in developing policy, and how this can be improved.

Additionally, the Deputy Prime Minister will continue to assist me with my international duties, along with his other international work particularly in respect of the China task force, and, in recognition of his work in delivering the Kyoto treaty, to work with the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for the Environment, and other departments across Government on promoting the Government's post-Kyoto agenda.

The Deputy Prime Minister will continue to have the use of Dorneywood. Under the terms of the Dorneywood Trust, there is no cost to public funds. The Deputy Prime Minister will be supported by a private office and secretariat, allocated from within existing civil service resources. This expenditure will be accounted for and audited in the normal way. In his Cabinet Committee work he will be supported by the Cabinet

Office's secretariats, and will draw on the support of officials in other Departments as necessary to fulfil his other responsibilities.<sup>11</sup>

Mr Prescott answered his first questions in his new role on 17 May 2006:

**Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire) (Con):** But is not the blunt truth that the Deputy Prime Minister's principal role is, as his party chairman said, as a political broker—a sort of marriage guidance counsellor between No. 10 and No. 11? Will he assure us that the civil servants in his office will not be dragged into those squabbles, and should not the Labour party being paying the bill?

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I recommend that the hon. Gentleman reads the Select Committee reports from when Lord Heseltine was giving evidence on the definition of the Deputy Prime Minister's role. It was made absolutely clear that civil servants were used as cheerleaders under his office. That had to be changed. It is not the intention to use civil servants in that way. Let me be clear that the office that Lord Heseltine defined is exactly the one I accepted. He also said in his evidence that he chaired a number of Cabinet Committees. That is true, but I will be chairing two or three times as many as he did. He also said:

"I have the responsibility for the presentation of Government policy".

Within two years, we had a majority of 169—it does not sound as though his presentation worked too well.<sup>12</sup>

In response to a series of parliamentary questions about the financing and role of his office, Mr Prescott gave the following parliamentary answer:

To support me I have an office which will be called the Deputy Prime Minister's Office. It will be established as a separate Government Department and funded by a Parliamentary Vote for which my Office will apply shortly. My Principal Private Secretary will be the Accounting Officer for the vote. At present, my Office employs 18 staff, including two special advisers. I also receive support and briefing from other Government Departments as necessary according to the issue I am dealing with at the time. Most of the staff employed by my Office are seconded from the Department for Communities and Local Government and their salary costs are met by my Office. My office continues to be based in 26 Whitehall."<sup>13</sup>

Mr Prescott resigned as Deputy Prime Minister on 27 June 2007, at the same time as Tony Blair resigned as Prime Minister. The new Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, did not appoint a Deputy Prime Minister. In a reshuffle in June 2009 Lord (Peter) Mandelson was appointed First Secretary of State.

## 1.2 Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg

After the general election on 6 May 2010, a coalition government was formed, consisting of Prime Minister David Cameron, leader of the Conservative Party and Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, leader of the Liberal Democrats. An initial coalition agreement was reached on 11 May 2010.<sup>14</sup> A fuller agreement, *The Coalition: Our programme for Government*, was

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<sup>11</sup> HC Deb 17 May 2006 : c986W

<sup>12</sup> HC Deb 17 May 2006 c981

<sup>13</sup> HC Deb 9 October 2006 c73w

<sup>14</sup> [Conservative Liberal Democrat coalition negotiations – Agreements reached](#), 11 May 2010

published on 20 May 2010.<sup>15</sup> A written ministerial statement from the Prime Minister set out the responsibilities of the Deputy Prime Minister on 2 June 2010:

**The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron):** I am today outlining machinery of government changes affecting a number of existing Departments of State.

These changes are a result of the formation of the coalition Government and will help implement the programme for Government. Further adjustments may be made and announced in due course.

*The Cabinet Office*

As previously announced the Deputy Prime Minister has been given special responsibility for political and constitutional reform. To bring this into effect responsibility for the following will transfer from the Secretary of State for Justice to the Deputy Prime Minister:

Introducing fixed-term Parliaments

Legislating to hold a referendum on the alternative vote system for the House of Commons and to create fewer and more equal sized constituencies

Supporting people with disabilities to become MPs

Introducing a power for people to recall their MP

Developing proposals for a wholly or mainly elected second Chamber

Speeding up implementation of individual voter registration

Considering the "West Lothian question"

Introducing a statutory register of lobbyists

Reforming party funding

Supporting all postal primaries

The Deputy Prime Minister will also have policy responsibility for the Electoral Commission, Boundary Commission and Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority.<sup>16</sup>

The Deputy Prime Minister also works across the whole range of government policy and has a separate website.<sup>17</sup> Mr Clegg is based in the Cabinet Office, as the answer to this parliamentary question makes clear:

**Margaret Curran:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many members of staff are employed in the Deputy Prime Minister's office.

**Mr Maude:** The Deputy Prime Minister's Office is an integral part of the Cabinet Office.

As part of the transparency agenda, the Department publishes an organogram and structure charts including information on staff and their salaries at:

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<sup>15</sup> HM Government, *The Coalition: Our Programme for Government*, 20 May 2010, p27

<sup>16</sup> HC Deb 2 June 2010 c22WS

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/deputy-prime-ministers-office>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cabinet-office-staff-and-salary-data-30-september-2012--2> and on [data.gov.uk](http://data.gov.uk).<sup>18</sup>

In a letter to the Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee in July 2010, Mr Clegg set out his roles and responsibilities:

### **Underlying principles**

The Committee asked about the role of the Deputy Prime Minister in the constitution, as well as his role in this government. There is no set or binding role for the Deputy Prime Minister within the British constitution. The role of the current Deputy Prime Minister will be different from that of previous recent holders of the post, in particular because this is a Coalition Government.

The current Government is the first coalition government we have had in 60 years. The role of the Deputy Prime Minister reflects his position as the leader of a party within the coalition. He supports the Prime Minister in the oversight of the full range of government policy and initiatives. As Chair of the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Home Affairs he has particular responsibility for coordinating domestic policy and within government the Deputy Prime Minister is responsible for the programme of political and constitutional reform.<sup>19</sup>

The Deputy Prime Minister has a separate slot in the rota for parliamentary questions in the [order of parliamentary questions](#). He also answers questions on behalf of the Privy Council.

The House of Commons agreed on 7 June 2010 that the [Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee](#) should be established, to consider political and constitutional reform, scrutinising the work of the Deputy Prime Minister in this area. The Deputy Leader of the House, David Heath, stated in his introduction to the debate:

The Government have committed to establishing the Committee as quickly as possible and with cross-party support, to ensure that the House is able to scrutinise the work of the Deputy Prime Minister. I stress that that scrutiny will be in addition to the Deputy Prime Minister's regular questions sessions in this house. It is our intention, if the House so agrees, that the election of the Chair of the Committee will take place on Wednesday, alongside the election of all other Chairs of Select Committees, to ensure that the Committee can start work as soon as possible.<sup>20</sup>

There have been a number of occasions where collective responsibility has been waived under the coalition. These are detailed in Standard Note 6404 [Coalitions at Westminster](#).

The backbench Conservative MP, Peter Bone, presented a bill on 24 June 2013 entitled *Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Abolition) Bill 2013-14*.<sup>21</sup> The Bill is due for debate on second reading on 13 September 2013, but it is unlikely to make progress, as it is a presentation bill and does not receive any priority in the ordering of parliamentary business.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> HC Deb 27 February 2013 c516w

<sup>19</sup> [Memorandum from the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Political and Constitutional Reform](#) July 2010

<sup>20</sup> [HC Deb 7 June 2010 c137](#)

<sup>21</sup> At the time of writing, the Bill had not been published

<sup>22</sup> For background see UK parliamentary website *Private Members' Bills* <http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/laws/bills/private-members/>