I would not be crazy enough to try and cover all the aspects of Mr Jenkin's wide-ranging talk in the shorter time I have available, so I have decided to restrict myself to four key issues.

I would however first like to say that I completely agree with him about the need for a central drive behind the Civil Service from the centre, bringing departments together. In large well – run local authorities this function has been provided by the corporate policy function and is critical to the effective working of the Council. I was also very glad that Mr Jenkin pointed out the diversity of the Civil Service. It is not all policy makers and devisers of legislation – there are scientists, ICT specialists, frontline customer service people and call centre operators – the task of leadership has to take place in a number of diverse settings. I would also say that I believe some very good work has been done in the Civil Service on the importance of leadership skills in managing people.

I will be focusing on four key issues:

- Dual leadership
- Accountability
- Implementation
- Neutrality

and a quick ‘skyte’ round into Devolution to finish off.

But before I comment on these issues I want to touch on the vision of what the Civil Service should be. I have recently been sorting out the effects of my sadly deceased Father, a retired senior civil servant. And in doing so I found this small orange document “A Handbook for the New Civil Servant”, given to him in 1947 when he joined the Civil Service in Scotland as a clerical officer.
Interestingly the pamphlet was produced by HM Treasury.
As you might imagine there are various fascinating passages but the two, very close together which I felt were of great relevance for today, were these:

*Your Minister ….has the job of explaining to Parliament what you are doing, and justifying it if Parliament chooses to ask questions about it. The responsibility for the actions of his Department is his and he must shoulder it. So you must serve him loyalty, to the best of your ability, and carry out his decisions, and the decisions of senior officers acting on his behalf. Your loyalty is to the Minister of the day. When a new party comes into power, your new Minister may require radical changes in the policy of your Department. Your duty is to carry out the new policy with the same loyalty that you gave the old.”*

And then another passage, potentially still meaningful today to civil servants who are more operational than policy – making:

*“This is perhaps the most fundamental thing of all that you have to remember - that as a civil servant you are the servant of the public: of the public as a whole and not of any sectional interest. You must be scrupulously fair, you must be quick, accurate and efficient, you must be courteous to the members of the public with whom you have to deal, and within the limits of your Department’s powers (as laid down by Parliament) you must be as sympathetic and helpful as possible. That is your job.”*

Not bad for 1947 and not bad for today I think, but possibly a reminder that there are some things which remain constant.

So, first to say a few more words about the **Dual Leadership** which Mr Jenkin mentioned - this in my view is the single factor which could most have the biggest influence over many of the things he mentioned. In our research
on dual leadership in the document “Dancing on Ice”¹, Professor Hartley and I used the metaphor of the ice dance and ice dance partners to describe the delicate relationship between a senior politician and a senior public service manager working with him, at times one leading, at times the other, bending in response to circumstances, to achieve objectives and avoid the pressures of media, stakeholders and political party, to name but a few. That partnership makes the complexities of exercising leadership in the Civil Service very particular and unless politicians recognize this issue of dual leadership and much more work is done on how best to make that work in the modern world, then it will be an obstacle to the development of many of the points made by Mr Jenkin. Civil servants respond to the context they operate in and that means the politicians whom they serve. One of the objectives of our research is to get a better understanding of how relationships work between politicians and senior public servants and what makes them successful. I agree with Mr Jenkin that there needs to be much more explicit discussion of this issue, preferably between politicians and civil servants as well as separately.

My second issue - **Accountability**, is in some ways the most critical to this discussion and it should be a major focus of the review Mr Jenkin has trailed, into the Future of the Civil Service. I would argue that it is not the role and function of the Civil Service which needs to change – as the 1947 description indicates - in many ways that is the same today - but it is about the way that role and function is enacted.

One of the things which has changed since 1947 is the prominence of the role of Select Committees, in many ways a very good thing and now part of the landscape of the state. But there needs to be much more explicit discussion of how senior civil servants appearing before Select Committees can fulfil both their remit to deliver evidence to Parliament and at the same time be loyal to their Minister, in some cases defending them to the bitter end.

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¹ Dancing on Ice: leadership with political astuteness by senior public servants in the UK Stella Manzie and Jean Hartley 2013 The Open University
It is not a great surprise if there is some of the blame culture described by Mr Jenkin when more junior staff in the Civil Service have witnessed their bosses being publicly pressured often very acrimoniously and personally at Committee. Although the recent revision of the Osmotherly rules gives Senior Responsible Owners for major projects in the Civil Service a direct line to Parliament to seek to clarify their accountability to Parliament, this does not resolve the issues. Often senior civil servants may look either evasive or slippery because they are valiantly trying to defend their Minister without (putting it crudely) “dumping them in it”. Don’t get me wrong, I am not suggesting senior civil servants should not be accountable, but culturally I am not sure this kind of process in this kind of way is likely to help the process of trust.

I feel that if there is any key issue the Committee’s review should focus on, it is this, ie how central issues of accountability can be squared in the environment in which senior civil servants operate. This will require more explicit discussion of the points of tension between senior politicians and senior civil servants and the challenges of public accountability in a political context.

Another area where Mr Jenkin’s points strike a chord is on what I call “Implementation”. Historically the Civil Service has been enormously strong in developing policy and new legislation and I have personally seen great moments of innovation and creativity in those subjects. The area of implementation is where there has been less focus and where there could be considerable improvement and more respect for operational skills. This is something which has been highlighted for some time. My Father used to talk slightly disparagingly of people who thought that when they had written a Minute they had done something. It is even more important now that implementation often takes place at the touching points between different parts of the public sector, for example Civil Service, Local Government and the NHS and collaboration between different parts of the sector and other stakeholders is increasingly important.
I also wanted to talk about the **Neutrality** of the Civil Service. We should not undervalue what we have. I can understand Ministers wanting to be more engaged with the appointment of senior civil servants, a subject that has been discussed recently. If you have ever been a local authority chief executive then you are used to having been appointed by a panel of politicians – with advice – but nevertheless politicians. However the critical point about this that those panels include the Opposition to the majority Group, and how they do it, is laid out in statute. If Ministers do want to be more involved in the appointment of senior civil servants, then the only way they should be able to do so is if representatives of the Opposition are involved, because any appointment is not just for the duration of their administration, but for a longer period, and this is vital to the stability and neutrality of the Civil Service.

In order to avoid overrunning I will end in a moment, but I just need to mention the impact of **Devolution** on the future leadership of the Civil Service – having worked in the Scottish Government I believe there are some lessons that can be drawn from the way the smaller countries have operated the Civil Service, even within the structure of the UK Civil Service, and we certainly need to consider how Devolution influences the future development and requirements of the Civil Service across the four nations.

Thank you for listening

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