

CABINET DOCUMENTS OFFICERS' HANDBOOK

*Cabinet Office
December 2007**

* The only amendment to the previous version (November 2006) was to update references to Public Record Office (PRO) to The National Archives (TNA).

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Introduction

This handbook covers the rules and procedures to be followed when handling Cabinet documents, whether they are received in hard copy or accessed electronically via Cab.Com. Cab.Com is the Cabinet Office electronic system for managing and distributing Cabinet Committee documents classified as restricted or below. The rules set out here apply equally to hard copy or Cab.Com documents. Where the practical application of these rules is different for hard copy and Cab.Com documents, these practical differences are set out in table form.

Departmental Cabinet Documents Officers (CDOs) should familiarise themselves with the content of this handbook. Where possible, when a new CDO is appointed, the outgoing CDO should brief his or her successor fully about the practical elements of their responsibilities. Any queries should be directed to the Cabinet Secretary's Private Office (telephone 020 7276 0101) or to the Secretariat Business Manager at Economic and Domestic Affairs Secretariat in the Cabinet Office (telephone 020 7276 0055).

This handbook should be read in conjunction with the web pages on Cabinet Office's public website - "A Guide to Cabinet Committee Business". The link is to this is http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/secretariats/cabinet_committee_business/index.asp and is updated regularly. It explains the background to the Secretariats' work, how to obtain collective agreement to proposals, the various forms of assessment and appraisal which must be completed before collective agreement can be given, and how departments should prepare for Cabinet and Cabinet Committee meetings. It also gives details of the current Cabinet Committee structure and contact points in the Secretariats. Any enquiries should be directed to the Secretariat Business Manager at 020 7276 0055.

The handbook may be shown to, or copied for, any departmental official for the purposes of making sure that correct procedure in relation to Cabinet documents is followed within departments.

Part I: Rules concerning the control of documents of the Cabinet, its Ministerial Committees and Cabinet Official Committees

Section 1: General rules

Cabinet Documents Officers

1.1 Within each department the arrangements for handling of Cabinet and Ministerial Committee memoranda and minutes, known collectively as Cabinet documents[†], are the responsibility of a Cabinet Documents Officer (CDO). That person is usually a member of the Private Office of the Minister in charge of the department. But whoever is appointed to discharge these functions, overall responsibility for ensuring the application of the rules rests with the Principal Private Secretary of the Minister.

1.2 The Private Secretary to the Cabinet Secretary maintains a list of CDOs, and should be informed when a new CDO is appointed. The CDO should ensure that at least two other members of the Private Office are able to cover the CDO's work in his/her absence, including being able to operate the Cab.Com system. The names of any CDO deputies or private office staff who can cover the CDO's job should also be passed to the Private Secretary to the Cabinet Secretary.

1.3 The CDO will be the normal point of contact with the Cabinet Office on all matters of procedure. In relation to Cab.Com and matters of electronic document security, the CDO should direct any questions to the Economic and Domestic Secretariat (telephone 020 7276 0055).

1.4 The CDO should maintain close liaison with their Departmental Security Officer (DSO) on matters of physical and document security and ensure that any breaches of security affecting Cabinet documents, or cases of apparent loss, are reported to the Cabinet Office and to the DSO without delay. This includes any apparent breach in relation to documents circulated by Cab.Com. All breaches should also be reported to the Cabinet Office.

1.5 Cabinet Official Committee documents are circulated directly to the individuals concerned, not via the CDO.

Access

1.6 The "need to know" principle is paramount. No one, other than a member of the Cabinet or the Ministerial Committee concerned, has an automatic right of access to a Cabinet document.

[†] The expression "Cabinet documents" is used to denote Cabinet and Cabinet Committee memoranda and minutes. Meeting notices and agenda are not subject to the special control procedures but should be handled in accordance with normal document security procedures.

1.7 Cabinet documents must not be shown to anyone within a department except on the specific instructions of the Minister (who may delegate this responsibility to his or her Principal Private Secretary) to whom those documents were issued.

1.8 Special rules apply to documents bearing a Circulation Members Only (CMO) marking or circulated as a Limited Circulation Annex (see Sections 2 and 3 below).

1.9 The procedures set out in this guide cover documents relating to the business of the United Kingdom Government and any Committees of which the devolved administrations are formal members. The devolved administrations are not part of the Westminster decision-making process, and so Cabinet documents should not generally be copied to them. But at the discretion of the Chairman of the Civil Contingencies Committee, the devolved administrations may be fully involved in the proceedings and in these circumstances will need to handle Cabinet Committee papers according to the security requirements of the UK Government.

Table 1: Arrangements for the receipt and recording of documents

Hard copy documents	Cab.Com documents
All documents from secretariats other than the Economic and Domestic Secretariat will be sent in hard copy. In addition, all documents classified at confidential and above will be sent to the CDO in hard copy.	All Economic and Domestic Secretariat Cabinet Committee documents classified as restricted or below will be accessed electronically through Cab.Com.
For Cabinet documents received in hard copy, a record, to be known as the Cabinet Document Register (CDR), is to be maintained by the CDO indicating the initial receipt and subsequent location of every Cabinet document together with the names of those who have had access to it. This record should include the names of all officials (including secretarial staff) who handle documents in the course of their duties. If the CDR is held electronically, a hard-copy version should be kept for record purposes.	The Cabinet Document Register is not necessary for documents circulated via Cab.Com. The onward distribution of Cabinet documents is traceable through Cab.Com and GSI email systems.

Table 2: Movement and filing of Cabinet documents

Hard copy documents	Cab.Com documents
<p>Cabinet documents received in hard copy and extracts from them are to be circulated in distinctive folders to those authorised to see them. All officials who receive these folders in the course of their duties must record their names on them when they receive them. Printed instructions on the special handling procedures should appear on the folders. These instructions are set out at Annex A.</p>	<p>Cabinet Committee documents accessed via Cab.Com should be distributed to those officials authorised to see them by GSI email. Cab.Com includes email distribution lists for those officials who regularly receive Cabinet Committee documents.</p> <p>Cabinet Committee documents can only be emailed via the GSI and should never be emailed outside the GSI system. Officials within the CDO's department who do not have a GSI email address may not receive Cabinet Committee documents electronically, but instead must be supplied with a paper copy from the Economic and Domestic Secretariat.</p> <p>Where Cabinet Committee documents are accessed through Cab.Com and are emailed to officials, the CDO must make it clear to the recipient that they must not forward the email on to anybody else and they must delete the email and its attachments no later than four weeks after receipt. The handling instructions that must accompany such emails are set out at Annex A.</p>
<p>Neither Cabinet documents nor extracts from them may be placed on departmental files. A note, however, may be placed on a file giving the reference to the memorandum or to the minutes of the meeting at which it was discussed. The CDO should always know the location of Cabinet documents within their department; this may be best achieved by keeping a central store of those which are not in active use by officials.</p>	<p>The CDO has access to all Cabinet documents received via Cab.Com through the Cab.Com archive for one year only. If the CDO needs to refer to papers more than a year old then a request must be made to the Economic and Domestic Secretariat. As the CDO will have access to all Cab.Com documents through the Cab.Com archive, he/she should not store any paper copies of these documents within their department.</p>

	Once Cab.Com documents have been forwarded to officials, the CDO must remember to delete the forwarding email from the Sent Items of their email application.
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1.10 Departments exceptionally needing to circulate Cabinet documents by fax in order to meet deadlines should apply to the Private Secretary to the Secretary of the Cabinet. Permission to do so will only be given where secure fax facilities exist and there are clear arrangements in place to destroy the facsimile document as soon as possible after use.

1.11 Under no circumstances should any Cabinet documents be scanned to be circulated electronically.

Table 3: Copying of Cabinet documents

Hard Copy documents	Cab.Com documents
Cabinet documents received by the CDO must not be copied in departments. If additional copies are required they should be obtained from the Private Secretary to the Cabinet Secretary (or, in the case of Cabinet Committee documents, the relevant Secretariat). Copies are numbered in red to make prohibited photocopies easy to identify.	Cabinet Committee documents accessed via Cab.Com must not be printed off to provide extra copies in departments. Nor must the CDO email Cabinet Committee documents to anybody who is not authorised to view them. If the CDO wishes to forward a Cabinet Committee document to an official who isn't currently authorised, the CDO must seek the permission of the Economic and Domestic Secretariat. However, the CDO may forward a Cabinet Committee document to any official who needs to see the document for the purpose of briefing a Minister, without seeking advice first.
The CDO may authorise extracts of minutes of meetings to be made for distribution on a strictly "need to know" basis. All such extracts must be given unique copy numbers in red and a record of their production, and of access given to them, entered in the CDR.	The CDO may authorise electronic extracts of minutes of meetings for distribution on a strictly "need to know" basis. Such extracts should only be emailed to officials within the CDO's department on the GSI email system.

Quotations from minutes in correspondence

1.12 Minutes should not be quoted in correspondence because such extracts then escape the control applied to the handling of the minutes themselves. If necessary, minutes may be paraphrased, without any reference to the source.

Taking and sending documents overseas

1.13 Apart from certain Committees for which standing authority exists, Cabinet documents should not generally be taken or sent abroad. Exceptions to this arrangement may be made only with the prior consent of the Private Secretary to the Secretary of the Cabinet.

Table 4: Disposal of documents

Hard copy documents	Cab.Com documents
Cabinet documents received in hard copy should not be kept for longer than is necessary and certainly for no longer than a year. Cabinet documents which are no longer required should be destroyed within departments in accordance with normal security procedures. The CDO should make annual checks of outstanding documents. Destruction certificates, where required, should be retained within the department.	CDOs may not store paper copies of any Cabinet Committee documents that can be accessed through the Cab.Com archive. All such documents are available to refer back to for one year through the Cab.Com archive.

Documents bearing a CMO (Circulation to Members Only) marking and Limited Circulation Annexes (LCAs).

1.14 The procedures for documents bearing a CMO marking and LCAs are in Sections 2 and 3 respectively.

Cabinet Official Committee documents

1.15 As the content of Official Committee documents is often as sensitive as that of Cabinet documents, they need to be treated with similar care. The same principles as outlined above for Cabinet documents apply, although because Official Committee documents are not circulated via the CDO, there is inevitably less central control. Instructions for handling Cabinet Official Committee documents are in Section 4, and the CDO is asked to bring these to the attention of those who need to be aware of them. The CDO may detach and circulate copies of Section 4 as necessary.

Section 2: Special instructions for control of documents bearing a CMO (Circulation to Members Only) marking

- 2.1 Some Cabinet documents are marked CMO. Hard copy Cabinet documents or Cabinet Committee documents accessed through Cab.Com can be marked in this way. The CMO marking indicates that a document is of special sensitivity and its dissemination is to be strictly controlled. On rare occasions the CMO procedure is used for correspondence between members of a Committee. The following rules apply to handling of CMO documents irrespective of whether they are received in hard copy or accessed through Cab.Com:
- a. the presumption should be that CMO documents for Cabinet Committees should be issued by the relevant Secretariat, and that Cabinet papers will be issued by the Cabinet Secretary's office. In the exceptional circumstances in which Departments plan to issue a document themselves, they should contact the relevant Secretariat [or Cabinet Secretary's office] for advice in advance, and should ensure that a copy is issued to the Cabinet Secretary and the relevant Committee Secretary;
 - b. members of the Committee or Group concerned will normally receive a single copy of a CMO document. Other Ministers invited to attend a meeting of a Committee or Group for the purposes of discussing a CMO document may also be sent a copy of the document; additional copies of CMO documents may exceptionally be provided to named Ministers in the Departments principally concerned on the express authority of the originator or the Chairman of the Committee or Group;
 - b. a CMO document should not normally be taken outside or emailed to anybody outside of the office of the Minister to whom it has been issued. The Minister is personally responsible for its safe custody at all times, and for giving authority for it to be taken outside the office or shown to anyone else (e.g. for briefing purposes). A record must be maintained of all those who have seen the document, whether they are shown the document in hard copy or are emailed a copy via GSI email. A Minister may delegate these responsibilities to his or her Principal Private Secretary but to nobody else;
 - c. the CMO designation always carries a time limit. When this expires or when recipients are notified by the Cabinet Office that CMO procedures no longer apply, the document should continue to be handled in accordance with the procedures appropriate to its protective marking;
 - d. the rules that apply to ordinary Cabinet documents are obviously even more important in relation to CMO documents. CMO documents (or extracts from them) should not be copied, scanned or faxed, or be placed on departmental files, and no quotation from a CMO document

should be made in correspondence to someone who has not received a copy of it. The Cabinet Office can provide from the distribution lists the names of recipients of documents marked CMO.

Section 3: Special instructions for control of Limited Circulation Annexes (LCAs)

3.1 LCAs record particularly sensitive items separately from the minutes. LCAs must be handled on the strictest “need to know” basis. The CDO must ensure that the following special arrangements are applied to LCAs irrespective of whether they are received in hard copy or accessed via Cab.Com:

- a. LCAs should at all times be kept in the Private Office concerned. When other Ministers or officials need to see an LCA they may do so only in that Private Office; when an LCA is accessed through Cab.Com it must not be emailed outside of the Private Office;
- b. with the passage of time it may cease to be necessary for an LCA to be treated as such. This should never be assumed and a check should always be made with the Cabinet Office;
- c. copies or extracts must never be made of LCAs. No quotation whatever from LCA should be made in correspondence to someone who has not received a copy of it. The Cabinet Office can provide this information from the distribution list.

Section 4: Control of Cabinet Official Committee Documents

Access

4.1 As Cabinet Official Committee documents are not circulated via CDOs, the CDO will have less control over the manner in which they are handled. However, CDOs are asked to bring the following instructions to the attention of officials who receive Cabinet Official Committee documents.

4.2 Access to Cabinet Official Committee minutes and memoranda, referred to collectively as Official Committee documents, is on a “need to know” basis and this principle should be rigorously observed. Breaches of security affecting Official Committee documents should be reported to the relevant Cabinet Secretariat and to the Departmental Security Officer without delay.

4.3 The Committee member to whom a document bearing a CMO (Circulation Members Only) marking is issued is personally responsible for its safe custody at all times, for giving authority for it to be shown to anyone else (e.g. for briefing purposes) and for maintaining a record of all those who have seen it. Where a Committee does not have a named membership, CMO documents will be sent to a named individual in each department represented on the Committee and that individual is responsible for the safe custody of such documents.

4.4 Limited Circulation Annexes (LCAs), which record particularly sensitive items separately from the minutes of Official Committee meetings, must be handled on the strictest “need to know” basis. They should at all times be kept in the office of the individual to whom they have been sent and when other officials need to see an LCA they should do so only in that office.

4.5 These procedures cover documents relating to the business of the United Kingdom Government and any Official Committees of which the devolved administrations are formal members. The devolved administrations are not part of the Westminster decision-making process, and so Official Committee documents should not be copied to them.

Copying documents

4.6 Official Committee documents should not be copied in departments except where the covering pages specify that this can be done. In all other cases where a department requires additional copies, they should be obtained from the relevant Secretariat in the Cabinet Office.

4.7 Copies or extracts must never be made of LCAs. If an additional copy is needed in a department a case should be made to the relevant Secretariat.

Filing

4.8 Official Committee documents may be placed on departmental files except where they contain material of special sensitivity (e.g. CMO documents/LCAs). When their time limit has expired, CMO documents should be treated in accordance with the procedures appropriate to their protective marking.

4.9 Official Committee documents should normally be removed from files before being transferred to The National Archives (TNA) in line with TNA guidance. In exceptional circumstances, however, where TNA do not require their removal, departmental records staff should always check with the Cabinet Office Historical and Records Section about the status of any Official Committee documents on departmental files selected for preservation.

Quotations from minutes in correspondence

4.10 Quotations from minutes of Official Committee meetings should be limited to the conclusions, and care should be taken to avoid unduly widening the circulation of the minutes in this manner. No quotes from a CMO document/LCA should be made in correspondence to someone who has not received a copy of the CMO document/LCA concerned.

Taking and sending documents overseas

4.11 Apart from certain Committees for which standing authority exists, Official Committee documents should not be sent or taken out of the United Kingdom. Where it is considered essential to do so prior consent must be obtained from the Private Secretary to the Secretary of the Cabinet.

Disposal of documents

4.12 Official Committee documents should be destroyed within departments in accordance with normal security procedures. Destruction certificates, where required, should be retained within the department.

Part 2: Layout and Reproduction of Cabinet and Official Committee Documents

Timing of Circulation

5.1 Memoranda should be circulated in sufficient time to enable Committee members to read and digest them, and to be properly briefed on them. Memoranda for Cabinet and Cabinet Committees should be with the Secretariat in time to allow circulation at least two clear working days and a weekend before the meeting at which they are to be discussed. The Secretariat may refuse to circulate a paper received outside this deadline. Wherever possible, and especially in the case of CMO documents and lengthy or complex papers, a longer interval should be allowed. Memoranda for Official Committees should be circulated at least two working days before the meeting at which they are to be discussed.

Form of Memoranda

5.2 Memoranda should be as clear and brief as possible. Memoranda for Cabinet and Cabinet Committees should be no longer than three pages of A4 paper (excluding annexes). For practical purposes this means a target during preparation of no more than 900 words. Memoranda should begin with a summary which states the problem at issue, outlines the main relevant considerations, and gives a precise statement of the decisions sought from the Committee.

5.3 Unless otherwise agreed with the Secretariat, the first draft of memoranda should be produced in the originating department and checked by the Secretariat before copies are distributed from the Cabinet Office. First drafts should be submitted to the Secretariat electronically if possible, for ease of amending. Drafts should not be faxed. The Secretariat will give the originating department a serial number for each memorandum. The Secretariat will require the originator's telephone number, the protective marking of the memorandum and its expected time of arrival in the Cabinet Office. It must be remembered that only memoranda classified as restricted or below may be circulated via Cab.Com.

5.4 Draft memoranda for Cabinet itself should be sent to the Private Secretary to the Secretary of the Cabinet at least one working day before the memorandum is to be circulated.

5.5 When a memorandum is being prepared the following points should be noted:

- a. **Security.** The Cabinet Secretariat will add the protective marking at the top and bottom of each page of the memorandum and annexes where appropriate. The cover page will show the highest protective marking of the contents of the memorandum; exceptionally where a document is not protectively marked the covering page should be protectively marked Restricted and each subsequent page marked "Not protectively marked";

- b. Format (see also Annex B). The front page of the memorandum should bear the following details:
- i. the superscription “THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY’S GOVERNMENT”;
 - ii. space for the copy number to be stamped in red;
 - iii. the identification of the paper, i.e. the identifying symbol (in capital letters) of the Committee, the year - in brackets - and the serial number;
 - vi. the date - day, month and year. The date under the symbol should be the date of reproduction;
 - v. the heading “CABINET”;
 - vi. the name of the Committee in capital letters;
 - vii. the title of the paper in capital letters;
 - viii. the name of the originating Minister or Department.

The pages of memoranda for Cabinet Committees should:

- ix. normally have a binding margin of at least 2 cm at the appropriate edge;
 - x. be page numbered at the foot (this numbering continuing throughout the whole document, blank sides excluded);
 - xi. each paragraph should be numbered;
 - xii. the document should be typed using Times New Roman 12 point font;
 - xiii. 1½ spacing should be used with (three spaces between paragraphs);
 - xiv. sub headings should be bold and underlined; and
 - xv. sub points should be roman numeral numbered.
- c. Abbreviations. If it is necessary to refer repeatedly to a body with a long title an abbreviation may be used if, on the first occasion, the full title is given and the abbreviation added in brackets (e.g. “The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)”).

Attribution of authorship

5.6 At the end of the memorandum (excluding annexes) the name of the originating Minister and Department should be shown below the text at the left of the page. Below this should be the date of origin.

Addenda and corrigenda

5.7 If additional relevant material becomes available after a memorandum has been distributed, an addendum should be sent. Similarly, if it becomes clear after a Cabinet document has been sent that it includes an error, a corrigendum may be necessary. Appeals from departments to amend the minutes of a meeting should be considered in line with the Guide to Minute Taking. In the case of corrigenda, it may be simpler to send an entirely new document, or a whole new page, with a request for recipients to destroy the previous version, than to ask them to make numerous or complicated changes. Addenda and corrigenda should be sent as quickly as possible once the need is identified; only in the most exceptional circumstances should appeals from departments be allowed more than 24 hours after the minutes were circulated. The department responsible for the original Cabinet or Official Committee document should provide the Cabinet Secretariat with a draft: details of how addenda and corrigenda should be set out are at Annexes C and D respectively.

ANNEX A

Table 4: Handling instructions for Cabinet Documents

Hard copy documents	Cab.Com documents
<p>The following handling instructions should appear on the front of folders in which hard copy Cabinet documents are circulated. The folders should also provide space for the name and copy number of the document, the names of the officials to whom it is circulated and the date for the return of the folder to the CDO.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This folder contains a Cabinet document to which special handling procedures apply. The document should not be removed from the folder. 2. No-one may have access to this document without the authority of the Principal Private Secretary or one of the officials named in [Section D] above. 3. This document must not be copied. If you need a further copy of this document, or an extract from it, please contact the Cabinet Documents Officer. 4. This document must not be placed on official files. 5. Recipients should sign and date [Section D] above as soon as they receive this document. They should also record the date when they pass the document on. Anyone who has access to this document whose name does not already appear in [Section D] above must enter his or her name in [Section E]. This includes 	<p>The following handling instructions should appear in the body of emails circulating Cabinet Committee documents from Cab.Com to departmental officials:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attached to this email is a Cabinet Committee document to which special handling procedures apply. This email or its attachments should not be forwarded to anybody else. 2. The attached document may be printed out for working purposes only and must be destroyed after use. The document must not be placed on official files. 3. The attached document must not be saved to any location on your PC or any other computer drive or server. It must only be accessed from your email. 4. This email and its attached document should be deleted from your email inbox no later than four weeks after the email is received.

<p>secretarial staff.</p> <p>6. Please return this document to the Cabinet Documents Officer by the date shown [in Section C] above. Please inform the Cabinet Documents Officer as soon as it appears that there might be any delay.</p>	
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Annex B

Layout for Cabinet and Cabinet Committee Memoranda

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC
MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

[Serial Number] ([Year code]) [Paper number]
[Date]

COPY NO [# in red]

CABINET

[NAME OF COMMITTEE]

[TITLE]

Memorandum by [Responsible Minister or Department]

Summary

1. A short summary which states the problem at issue, outlines the main relevant considerations, and gives a precise statement of the decisions sought from the Committee.

Background

2. Text.
3. The paper should be no more than 3 sides of A4; additional detail should be included in annexes.

Conclusions and Recommendation

4. Key conclusions and recommendations, plus proposed next steps.

[Originating Department]

[Date]

(Please note, copy numbers will not appear on documents accessed via Cab.Com.)

Annex C

Layout for Cabinet and Cabinet Committee Addenda

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC
MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

COPY NO [# in red]

[Date]

CABINET

[NAME OF THE COMMITTEE]

ADDENDUM TO [Serial Number] ([Year code]) [Paper number]

Tables 1, 2 and 3 referred to in paragraphs 12 to 15 are attached.

[Originating Department]

[Date]

(Please note, copy numbers will not appear on documents accessed via Cab.Com.)

Annex D

Layout for Cabinet and Cabinet Committee Corrigenda

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC
MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

COPY NO [# in red]

[Date]

CABINET

[NAME OF THE COMMITTEE]

CORRIGENDUM TO [Serial Number] ([Year code]) [Paper number]

Page 2, paragraph 3, line 4

Delete: "200"
Substitute: "2,000"

Page 3, column 1

Delete: "(figures for these imports are not yet available)"
Substitute: "(January to October 3,140 tonnes: estimate November and December, 500 tonnes)"

OR

Please destroy the earlier version of paper [Serial Number] ([Year code]) [Paper number], circulated on [date] and substitute the attached new version.

[Originating Department]
[Date]

(Please note, copy numbers will not appear on documents accessed via Cab.Com.)