

## **HMG's Response to the Public Body Review of Wilton Park 2023**

In December 2021 the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General wrote to all departments setting out the Cabinet Office's expected approach to reviews of departmental Arms' Length Bodies (ALBs) and asked departments to indicate what bodies would be put forward for Review. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) selected Wilton Park as one of the bodies.

Wilton Park is an Executive Agency of the FCDO. It was last subject to public review in 2018 as part of the Tailored Review Programme. That review noted that Wilton Park was approaching "the next chapter in its rich and fascinating history."

Wilton Park has been recognised as a key strategic asset in the FCDO's portfolio, with its function of facilitating discreet and disinterested diplomatic dialogues serving as a vital challenge function to the strategic direction and policy plans of the FCDO and other government departments concerned with international relations.

This Review comes at an important time for Wilton Park, who have successfully steered through the challenges of the Covid-19 period and is considering options for its future. These include: enhancing the strategic alignment with His Majesty's Government's priorities, the renewal of the lease of Wiston House which has been the home of Wilton Park since 1951, and the need to pursue efficiencies at a time of a challenging economic landscape and the need to ensure that taxpayers' money is spent as efficiently as possible.

We are very grateful to the Lead Reviewer, Lorraine Wilkinson, and her team, for their hard work on behalf of Wilton Park and the Government. The below responds to the recommendations she has made following her review, setting out what actions Wilton Park and FCDO will be undertaking to enact them. For concision, these recommendations have been thematically grouped based on the areas of activity and responsibility they concern.

### **Review Recommendations and HMG's response**

#### **Group 1: Thought Leadership**

**1: (FCDO) As part of ongoing work, provide additional guidance to policy teams on the strengths and capabilities of individual thought leadership institutions, and periodically assess their relative impact and value for the FCDO.**

*We accept this recommendation and will incorporate these tasks into our ongoing work to facilitate access to leading Thought Leadership institutions for FCDO teams while ensuring value for money for the taxpayer.*

#### **Group 2: Outreach**

**2. (FCDO) Support Wilton Park's desire to build and diversify its HMG client base, and to attract core funding from a broader range of HMG stakeholders.**

**6. (FCDO) Ensure outreach is appropriately addressed through communications plans to help senior officials understand Wilton Park's offer and make best use of it.**

**11. (FCDO and Wilton Park) Strengthen working links between Wilton Park's policy team and FCDO Research Analysts to realise synergies across both teams.**

**10. (Wilton Park) Review to what extent the Friends of Wilton Park network forms part of Wilton Park's USP and offer, how it manages this network to maximise benefits and how those benefits are measured.**

**21. (Wilton Park) Agree by December 2023 an outreach programme to raise Wilton Park's profile across other government departments, showcasing successful delivery against departmental international objectives.**

*We accept and welcome these recommendations. The FCDO will work with Wilton Park to ensure it is maximising its outreach both within the department and across government, including ensuring that Wilton Park's offer is understood by senior officials as a vital challenge capability, in addition to the other thought leadership bodies which HMG supports.*

### **Group 3: Strategy and Evaluation**

**3. (Wilton Park) In the current year, simplify its approach by focusing on new sectors and thematic categories to drive event alignment and support evaluation rather than identifying additional future 'areas of work'.**

**4. (Wilton Park) For future years (i) consider whether to retain sector and thematic categories, or adopt FCDO and HMG priorities wholesale; and (ii) if it retains sectors and thematic categories, ensure that they not only align with the latest FCDO and HMG priorities, but that they reflect the USP and relative advantage of Wilton Park vis-à-vis other organisations.**

**5. (FCDO and Wilton Park) Ensure that the FCDO plays a bigger supporting role in informing priorities in annual Strategic Plan updates and ensure that the final plans are explicitly agreed with FCDO Ministers.**

**7. (Wilton Park) Urgently update the Theory of Change (ToC), linking clearly to the Strategic Plan, and with clear key performance indicators against each level, ensuring agreed and implemented prior to 2024-25. The ToC should sit alongside a MEL framework that formalises reporting and learning and sets out clear processes for feeding into decision-making.**

**8. (Wilton Park) Continue to track and take steps to boost diversity of event participants to maximise its effectiveness and impact.**

**9. (FCDO and Wilton Park) Create a systematic feedback loop with relevant policy teams and embassy staff post-event to feed more directly into policy**

**work and monitor impact, as part of the Theory of Change refresh and MEL Framework.**

*We accept these recommendations and agree that strategic alignment between Wilton Park and HMG is essential to making full use of Wilton Park as a strategic asset. Wilton Park have recently hired a new Impact Manager who will lead on updating Wilton Park's Theory of Change and developing a systematic feedback system, which the FCDO will support. Wilton Park will continue to align its priorities with those of the FCDO and HMG while maintaining the independence necessary to ensure confidence in the Wilton Park brand. Wilton Park will continue to track and take steps to boost the diversity of event participants. Wilton Park and FCDO will ensure FCDO Ministers are engaged on the Wilton Park Strategic Plan going forwards.*

#### **Group 4: Lease**

**12. (FCDO) Continue to work with the Government Property Agency on other possible like-for-like venues - including leased, ad hoc and to buy options - to ensure they have fully explored and costed alternatives as part of the Spending Review 2024 planning process and certainly long before the commencement of lease renegotiations with Wiston House in 2025-6.**

*We welcome this recommendation and will continue to build up the evidence base for the different options, including evaluating sites, so Ministers can make an informed decision about the benefits of Wilton Park remaining at Wiston House compared to the alternative options.*

#### **Group 5: Funding**

**13. (FCDO) Continue to cap annual core funding at £500k in the medium-term.**

*We accept this recommendation.*

#### **Group 6: Business Model**

**14. (Wilton Park) Strengthen incentives to spread events more evenly through the year, including reviewing the events pricing policy on an annual basis, drawing on benchmarking data. The next review in autumn 2023 should include a reassessment of varying rates through the year.**

**15. (Wilton Park) Undertake a full assessment of the benefits of customer interface and information management system by March 2024.**

**19. (Wilton Park) Set a stretch target of 60% occupancy by 2025.**

**20. (Wilton Park) Develop a clearer model for commercial activity, defining the target customer base and event type, for 2024-25.**

*We welcome these recommendations and agree on the importance of getting the Wilton Park business model right during this period of change. Wilton Park have a new Advisory Council, as well as a new Non-Executive Director, who have been identified with the right skillsets to advise on these areas such as a clearer model for commercial activity. Wilton Park will seek to reach an increased occupancy target of 60%. We agree with the Lead Reviewer that by controlling costs and increasing occupancy, Wilton Park should be able to achieve the 5% efficiency target set by the Cabinet Office for Public Body Reviews through growth.*

### **Group 7: Human Resources**

**16. (Wilton Park) Consider [...] the costs and benefits of adopting the FCDO's HR system.**

**17. (FCDO) Begin listing Wilton Park vacancies under the FCDO on the Civil Service Jobs portal as soon as possible.**

**18. (FCDO and Wilton Park) Clarify and publicise internally by end 2023 the model by which staff can move between the two organisations.**

**32. (Wilton Park) State baseline figures and specific aspirations for workforce diversity clearly in workforce plans and future Annual Reports.**

*We welcome these recommendations and will seek to clarify the relevant HR arrangements as soon as possible, given changes to the HR model across the wider department. Wilton Park will include the diversity figures in Annual Reports, so far as is compatible with rules for protecting anonymity. Wilton Park will consider the cost and benefits of adopting the FCDO's HR system.*

### **Group 8: Wilton Park Board**

**22. (Wilton Park) Agree at Board level by March 2024 a new policy on funding from foreign governments and militaries, including criteria for funding partnerships, an approach to security and reputational risk management, and ensuring alignment to HMG objectives by end 2023-24.**

**23. (Wilton Park) Agree at Board level by March 2024 a new policy on private sector funding, including criteria for funding partnerships, an approach to reputational risk management, and ensuring alignment to HMG priorities.**

**28. (Wilton Park) Put in place a clear action plan for board effectiveness no later than December 2023.**

**29. (Wilton Park) Ensure that Board and Committee papers identify clearly, what is being recommended to Board members; minutes focus on recording**

decisions/conclusions and the rationale for those, rather than on views expressed by individuals; and clear ownership is assigned for implementation.

**30. (Wilton Park) Update its published board register of interests at least quarterly.**

**31. (Wilton Park) Set specific aspirations for Board and Advisory Council diversity – including age, gender, ethnic, cultural, socio-economic and geographical diversity – as part of the Board effectiveness action plan no later than December 2023**

*We agree in full with the majority of these recommendations. Wilton Park will bring the necessary issues to board for a decision, and Wilton Park and the FCDO will work to ensure the Board Effectiveness Review recommendations are implemented, along with the other recommended changes to board practices, following the appointment of a new Non-Executive Director in October. Wilton Park are publishing their register of interests as recommended. We agree with the spirit of the recommendation on Board diversity. Wilton Park will continue to promote equality of opportunity in line with the targets in the Cabinet Office's Public Appointments Diversity Action Plan.*

#### **Group 9: Framework Agreement**

**24. (FCDO and Wilton Park) Work through the Arm's Length Body sponsorship code of good practice to identify areas for further improvement in sponsorship outcomes and behaviours.**

**25. (FCDO and Wilton Park) Review the framework document at least every three years, going forward.**

**26. (FCDO and Wilton Park) Review, and where necessary, amend framework document provisions highlighted by the Review Team, ensuring that the Principal Accounting Officer, Cabinet Office and Treasury are content.**

**27. (FCDO) Review FCDO membership of Wilton Park's Board, with the aim of ensuring clear lines of accountability, ensuring that the Principal Accounting Officer, Cabinet Office and Treasury are content.**

*We welcome these recommendations. The process of updating the Framework Agreement was already underway at the time of the Review, and we thank the Review team for drawing our attention to specific points to address in that process. The FCDO will work through the suggested amendments to the Framework agreement and agree them with the necessary stakeholders, including Wilton Park, and will arrange for the Framework to be reviewed every three years.*