# CHAPTER EIGHT

# THE CORE EXECUTIVE

**1. Introduction**

This topic covers the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, the Civil Service, and the role of Special Advisers (SPADS). The core executive is a network of bodies that plays a central (or core) role in shaping government policy. It includes:

* The Prime Minister and senior postholders in the ***Prime Minister’s Office***
* The Cabinet and senior postholders within the ***Cabinet Office***
* Senior officials in government departments, such as the Treasury
* Organisations which provide policy advice (these are sometimes called ‘***think tanks’***)
* Government Whips and chairs of select committees.

KEY TERMS:

**Cabinet:** the committee of ministers that is the policy making body in government

**Executive:** the branch of government responsible for making and implementing policy; also known as the civil service or, in the USA, the bureaucracy.

**Prime Minister:** the head of the government who chairs the Cabinet meetings

2. THE PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister is the most senior figure in British Politics. He or she is leader of the largest party in parliament and therefore, by default, becomes the head of the government. The Prime Minister chairs the weekly meetings of the Cabinet. The powers of the Prime Minister include such Royal Prerogative powers as appointing and dismissing ministers, signing treaties and granting honours.

The office of the Prime Minister first appeared in the eighteenth century. It came about when the constitutionally limited monarch, George I, required a ‘first’ or ‘prime’ minister. The original office holder was also the First Lord of the Treasury, and even today the Prime Minister is officially known as ‘the Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury’. He or she is given an official London residence, 10 Downing Street, and a country residence to entertain foreign dignitaries, Chequers.

Initially the role was considered to be one of ‘first among equals’ (***primus inter pares***) within the Cabinet. From the 18th century the British system of government was based on the principles of ***Cabinet government.*** No individual minister was dominant and all Cabinet members shared ***collective responsibility*** for the running of government. Increasingly in the twentieth century a system of ***Prime Ministerial government*** emerged (this is the ***Mackintosh thesis***). This arose after the Second World War because of the growing complexity of government. Governments became responsible for managing nationalised industries, a welfare state and the NHS. The size of the Cabinet increased and it with it the power of the Prime Minister, as he became only participant who could reasonably have an overview of the work of government. Some observers suggest that in an era of 24/7 news media the Prime Minister has become more ***‘presidential’*** in style (the ***Foley thesis***). Harold Wilson was the first Prime Minister to court the media and seek opportunities for ‘sound bites’. Subsequently, Thatcher underwent an image transformation for the media; and Tony Blair became particularly adept at the manipulation of the media (or ***‘spin’*** as it is known). The presidential nature of recent Prime Minister’s is also linked to their importance of the world stage. Again, Blair, after 9/11, played a significant role in international affairs.

In order to become a Prime Minister a politician must be:

1. an MP: by convention Prime Ministers must be drawn from the House of Commons
2. leader of a political party
3. that party should be the largest party in Parliament. This does not necessarily mean a majority party: Harold Wilson became Prime Minister in 1974, despite not winning a majority of seats, and in 2010 a hung parliament saw David Cameron appointed Prime Minister.

**The role of the Prime Minister**

The role of the Prime Minister is not clearly set out: there is no job description. However, there are a number of important tasks to fulfil:

1. Providing political direction and leadership to the country. This is particularly true in times of national crisis, such as war.
2. Oversight and policy direction to the government.
3. Forming a government. The Prime Minister can appoint and dismiss government ministers. Occasionally he or she might wish to move people to different departments or bring new people into the Cabinet and remove Cabinet ministers who are not performing well. This is known as a ***Cabinet reshuffle.*** Reshuffles can bring ‘new blood’ into a Cabinet and revitalise it.Famously Harold Macmillan sacked seven of his ministers in 1962 in what became known as ‘the Night of the Long Knives’. But reshuffles should be used with caution. In sacking Geoffrey Howe in 1989, her Chancellor, she opened the way for him to bring about her downfall.
4. Chairing the Cabinet meeting. The Prime Minister sets the agenda for Cabinet meetings. There is no formal vote in Cabinet, so the Prime Minister ‘sums up’ the mood of the meeting.
5. Organising the structure of government. Prime Ministers can add, remove or change government departments. For example, in 2007 Gordon Brown decided that the Home Office was too big. It had responsibility for homeland security, the police, border controls and immigration, the courts, the probation service and the prisons. He split the ministry onto two: the Home Office (homeland security, the police, border controls and immigration) and the Ministry of Justice (the courts, the probation service and the prisons). As a result a new Cabinet post was created: the Secretary of State for Justice.
6. Managing relations within Parliament. The Prime Minister shapes the government’s legislative programme and helps shape the parliamentary timetable.
7. Representing the UK abroad. The Prime Minister represents the UK government on the European Council (see Chapter 9) and other international organisations and regularly meets with other national leaders.
8. The Prime Minister is also an MP with a constituency to represent. David Cameron’s constituency is Whitney in Oxfordshire.

**What power does the Prime Minister have within the core executive?**

This is a crucial question and one that informs many exam questions. The relative power of the different institutions of the core executive is central to this topic. There is no codified job description for the PM. Asquith once said that ‘the office of the prime minister is what its office holder closes to make of it.’ Harold Macmillan once famously said that the job of running the country was steered largely by ‘Events, dear by. Events’ (the so-called *proximate climate*). So what power does he/she have and what do Prime Minister’s do?

***Appointing and dismissing:***

As we have seen, the Prime Minister enjoys some Royal Prerogative powers. He or she can appoint or dismiss ministers. This is the power of ***patronage*** (the power to appoint someone). Amongst the appointments senior the Prime Minister can make are and senior members of the Church of England. He or she used to be able to appoint senor judges, but the Judicial Appointments Commission now largely fills that role. Similarly the conferring of honours in now largely undertaken by the independent Honours Committee (made up of civil servants and ‘independent’ members). The Prime Minister can still make political appointments to the House of Lords (***life peers***), but follows recommendations from the independent Appointments Commission on non-party appointments.

***Managing the Cabinet***

The Prime minister chairs Cabinet meetings, arranges the agenda, and sums up the discussions. He or she can determine the length and timing of the meetings. Tony Blair reduced the two hourly meetings on Tuesdays and Thursdays to just one meeting of an hour; David Cameron moved the meeting from Tuesday to Wednesday. Some Prime Ministers like to run their governments through the Cabinet, others, like Blair, prefer to create opportunities for decision making outside the Cabinet. These meetings with ministers outside the Cabinet are known as ***bilateral*** meetings (if one minister is involved with the PM) or ***trilateral*** meetings (if two ministers are involved). Blair’s informal style of arranging bilaterals and trilaterals was nicknamed a ***sofa Cabinet***, by the rebel Labour MP Clare Short.

In running the **coalition** government, David Cameron chose to have meetings early on Monday mornings with Nick Clegg (Leader of the Liberal Democrats and Deputy Prime Minister); George Osborne (the Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer) and Danny Alexander (the Liberal Democrat Chief Secretary to the Treasury). This group became known as ***‘the Quad’*** and many important decisions were made at these meetings and presented to Cabinet for ratification.

**Coalition governments** require a more collective, collegiate approach. The parties involved need to share responsibility for government. For example, in the coalition government 2010 – 2015 five Cabinet posts were reserved for the Liberal Democrats. These included the Deputy Prime Minister (Nick Clegg), the Business Secretary (Vince Cable) and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Danny Alexander).

**Party Leadership**

Being the leader of the largest party in Parliament gives the Prime Minister some authority within Parliament. It allows the Prime Minster to control Parliament through a disciplined majority party in the House of Commons. The fortunes of the party are also linked to the success of the Prime Minister, so the party is likely to be behind him/her.

**Constraints on Prime Ministerial power**

1. The Prime Minister cannot always appoint and dismiss ministers as easily as he or she might like to. He or she must take account of different groups (or ***factions***) within the party if he/she is to avoid a potential leadership challenge from within. For example, Tony Blair might have wanted to remove Gordon Brown from the Cabinet because he was a threat to Blair’s power within the party. The Labour Party was divided into two camps, the Brownites and the Blairites, and both had significant support. In addition, dismissing someone from the Cabinet can leave them free to criticise or rebel from the backbenches, so it might be better to leave a potential critic in the Cabinet, where, under the convention of *collective responsibility*, they cannot criticise.

Yet another constraint is the public face of the Cabinet. In 2010 Cameron was criticised for having too few women in Cabinet posts, so in 2015 he has deliberately chosen more women for Cabinet roles. A further constraint is that Cabinet members are drawn from MPs or peers. Special advisers might attend Cabinet meetings, as Tony Blair’s Director of Communications (or ‘***spin doctor’***), Alistair Campbell did, but not in a voting capacity.

1. Cabinet support for the Prime Minister is conditional on the Prime Minister being popular in the polls. When Thatcher’s poll rating plummeted Cabinet members mounted a coup to replace her and John Major became the new Conservative Prime Minister. Cabinet resignations (and there were several high profile resignations under Thatcher) can also be very damaging to a government.
2. Party loyalty can evaporate if the Prime Minister becomes a liability (as happened with Thatcher).
3. The Prime Minister is extremely busy. He/she lacks the time to devote to policy formulation alone.
4. Globalisation has reduced the ability of a Prime Minister to act unilaterally (on their own without the support of other countries). In trying to tackle the global financial crisis in 2008 Gordon Brown attempted to involve other world leaders.

**Support for the Prime Minister: The Prime Minister’s Office**

The Prime Minister’s Office lies within the larger organisational unit of the Cabinet Office and is based at Number 10 Downing Street. Its staff of 190 people include civil servants and ***special advisers*** (***Spads***). Special advisers are political appointees from outside government. Tony Blair appointed an ex-journalist, Alistair Campbell, as his special adviser. Campbell was responsible for communicating a positive message about the successes of Blair’s government. Those involved in promoting such ‘propaganda’ are known as ***spin doctors.*** David Cameron appointed his friend Steve Hilton as a policy adviser. Hilton was unconventional and often rowed with civil servants, eventually leaving because of the acrimony (unpleasantness) between him and the civil servants.

There are two key functions of the Prime Minister’s Office:

1. ***Policy advice:***

The Prime Minister can receive advice on policy independent of the Cabinet through the Prime Minister’s Office. Cabinet members may have their own agenda in advising the Prime Minister: they might, for example, want more kudos (glory) for their department. This can make the advice of Cabinet members unreliable, but the Prime Ministers feel they can generally trust advice from the Prime Minister’s Office. It also helps to co-ordinate and implement policy across government.

1. **Communications:**

The Prime Minister’s office liaises with the media in the presentation of information on government policy.

**Prime Ministerial Styles**

Inevitably, different Prime Ministers have adopted different leadership styles in managing governments.

***Innovator***

Thatcher and Blair were both innovators. They both took their parties in new ideological directions. Thatcher changed the Conservative Party from a ‘One Nation Conservative’ ideology to neoliberalism (see Chapter 5); and Blair remodelled Labour to abandon its commitment to common ownership (nationalisation) and support wealth creation (an ‘enterprise culture’) and private sector involvement in the public sector.

***Balancer***

The Conservative Prime Minister, John Major had to balance the different factions within his party, particularly the Europhile wing (those who sought greater involvement with Europe) and the Eurosceptic wing (those who sought less involvement with Europe). A group of 16 Eurosceptic MPs (nicknamed Major’s Whipless Wonders) threatened to vote against the government over the signing of the Maastricht Treaty (which strengthened the powers of the EU institutions and opened up the free movement of goods, people and services). John Major threatened to call a vote of no confidence in his own government in the House of Commons. Fearful that an election might then be triggered which would lead to a Labour victory, the rebels backed down.

***Reformer***

The Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee was a great reformer, introducing the NHS and the welfare state and nationalising key industries. Gordon Brown would like to have been a reformer. He proposed several constitutional reforms, but the global economic crisis blew him off course. He also wanted to develop a more ***collegiate*** (Cabinet collective) rather than presidential style of leadership, but ended up relying on an inner circle. He became more of a balancer between factions within his party. Cameron has suffered the same fate, hoping to be a reformer, but emerging a balancer and seeking to appease the Eurosceptic wing of the Conservatives.

**Egoist**

In recent times only Harold Wilson stands out as an egotist, seeking office for the sake of exercising power.

**Presidential or Prime Ministerial government?**

The Foley thesis suggests that Prime Ministers are becoming increasingly presidential. What evidence is there to suggest this?

* The increase in support for the Prime Minister through the Prime Minister’s Office and the Cabinet Office. This provides advice to the Prime Minister independent of the Cabinet. The US president has a similar if bigger support structure, the Executive Office of the president (EXOP).
* The Prime Minister has increasingly become the focus of media attention in making policy pronouncements. Many of these are staged and televised public events.
* The Prime Minister plays a significant role on the world stage and in shaping overseas policy.
* Prime Minsters increasingly display ‘spatial leadership’ (Foley) setting themselves above the fray of day-to-day politics. In his early days, Tony Blair was nicknamed ‘Telfon Tony’ because of his ability to distance himself from political controversy and scandal.

**However:**

* British Prime Ministers can still be brought down by their parties (for example, Margaret Thatcher).
* The Cabinet, and not just the Prime Minister, is responsible to Parliament.
* The Prime Minister can exercise power over their parties through the Whips system (this is not true of the US president).
* Britain has a separate Head of State, the Queen.

**3. The Cabinet**

The Cabinet is the committee of the heads of government departments which determines government policy. The heads of department are known as Secretaries of State. They are senior ministers and in some large departments have a number of junior ministers working for them. The Cabinet usually has about 22 members, 19 of whom have departmental responsibility. For example, Nicky Morgan is the Secretary of State for Education and therefore manages the Department for Education. Because it is a large department, it is sub-divided into smaller departments, each with its own minister. For example, Nick Gibb is the Minister for Schools. Junior ministers do not attend Cabinet meetings. Secretaries of State in the Cabinet are also MPs with a constituency to represent.

The role of the Cabinet is to:

* Discuss and approve government policy
* Co-ordinate policy across the whole of the government so that policy is ‘joined up’
* Resolve disputes between departments. For example, in agreeing an overall budget some departments might face cuts and others might be protected. Secretaries of State often try to defend their departments from budget cuts. William Hague is said to have worked hard to avoid some budget cuts to the Home Office while he was Home Secretary.
* Registering (and usually ratifying) decisions that are either made at lower ministerial meetings or decisions made outside the Cabinet at bilateral or trilateral meetings.
* Take account of the views of the wider party in developing government policy.
* Act as a symbol of collective government. Cabinet members are expected to show ***collective responsibility.*** They are not supposed to disagree with government policy, as they are part of the government. To disagree would allow the government to be weak, indecisive and in disarray. It would be a gift to the Opposition!
* Receiving reports on current developments so that Cabinet ministers can be kept informed.

The frequency and length of Cabinet meetings have declined in recent years. This is because the nature of modern government is so complex that it would be impossible for the Cabinet to hold detailed discussions on all the issues. Consequently, the Cabinet increasingly plays a co-ordinating and information role, ensuring that Cabinet ministers are kept up-to-date on events.

Whereas the British system of government used to be described as *cabinet government* in which there was collective decision making, it is now widely regarded that the Cabinet has lost out to the Prime Minister.

***Cabinet Committees***

A feature of modern British politics has been the growth of Cabinet Committees. Because of the issues mentioned above, a significant proportion of decision making now takes place in Cabinet committees. Committees are appointed by the Prime Minister and include standing (permanent) committees and *ad hoc* committees, which are established for a particular purpose and then disbanded (under Gordon Brown there was a swine flu pandemic committee). There are currently 9 committees (such as the Economic Affairs Committee) and a further 5 sub-committees. The Prime Minister chairs five of these.

**Inner Cabinets**

In times of national crisis a Prime Minister might call meetings of a small group of ministers and advisers, known as an **inner cabinet**. War Cabinets, such as the one assembled by Margaret Thatcher in the Falklands War, are one such example. Inner Cabinets are also sometimes referred to as ***kitchen cabinets***.

**The Cabinet Office**

The Cabinet Office was established in the midst of the First World War in 1916. This is the co-ordinating hub of the UK executive and provides the secretariat for the Cabinet. It prepares agendas, circulates papers, calls meetings, and writes minutes. It also helps co-ordinate policy which affects more than one government department. The Cabinet Secretary, who heads this team, is the most senior civil servant and attends Cabinet meetings. The Cabinet Office is divided into twenty secretariats (sub-departments), including the European and Global Issues Secretariat, the Foreign and Defence Policy Secretariat, the Economic and Domestic Secretariat and the Strategy Unit.

It’s growth, along with the Prime Minister’s Office, has been seen as effectively creating a Prime Minister’s Department, further supporting the argument that Prime Ministers are becoming increasingly ‘presidential’.

**4. Government Ministers**

There are around 100 government ministers in total, but it is mainly the Secretaries of State who attend Cabinet meetings. Below them are the ministers of state, who run sub-departments in the giant government departments (eg Nick Gibb, Minister for Schools). Below them are the parliamentary under-secretaries of state who are given particular briefs within a department. Finally, there are parliamentary private secretaries (PPS) who are the unpaid ‘eyes and ears’ of senior ministers, often liaising between government departments and Parliament.

The role of government ministers is to provide:

* Policy direction for their department
* Representing departmental interests: Secretaries of State may be expected to fight to corner for their department in Cabinet meetings. They also represent the government at the Council of Minister meetings in Europe.
* Managing their department.
* Answering to Parliament for their departmental policy
* Liaising with Parliament in steering Bills through the legislative process.

Ministers are bound by the convention of collective responsibility. This has three aspects:

1. Ministers should not publicly disagree with government policy as they are part of the government. If they disagree they should resign. This happened in 1986 when the Secretary of State for Defence, Michael Heseltine, disagreed with the Thatcher government about the purchase of American rather than British military helicopters (the so-called Westland Affair). Heseltine resigned and stormed out of a Cabinet meeting into the startled press corps assembled outside number 10 Downing Street. More recently, Iain Duncan Smith resigned as Works & Pensions Secretary in March 2016 over budget cuts to benefits imposed by the Treasury, arguing that they were a “compromise too far” which he could not support.
2. Ministers should conduct themselves appropriately in office.
3. Ultimately, ministerial responsibility demands that ministers, and not the civil servants who work for them should take the blame for policy failures. Increasingly this code is being broken. In 2011 Theresa May publicly blamed Brodie Clark, head of the Border Agency (which controls immigration) for relaxing passport checks during the summer holidays. He had to resign his post to defend himself in the press, saying that he had kept Ms May fully informed of his actions and implying that she tacitly agreed to his policy. Theresa May is still Home Secretary.

**5. The Civil Service**

The Civil Service is the administrative arm of the government. It is also known as the executive. It includes about 500,000 full time staff. There are offices across the UK, but in London the civil service is based in Whitehall, minutes’ walk from Parliament. In the United States it is referred to as the bureaucracy or the administration.

Senior civil servants are sometimes known as ***mandarins*** (the wise men in ancient China). They are governed by three principles. They should be:

* Permanent
* Anonymous
* Neutral

***Permanent***

In many countries, including the USA, many senior civil servants lose their jobs if a government loses an elections. Civil servants in those countries are political appointments. When Obama first became President in 2008 he had over 2,500 appointments to make to senior levels of the civil service. In the UK civil servants have traditionally enjoyed a job for life. They are not political appointments and they serve whichever government is in power.

***Special advisers*** are civil servants, but they are also political appointments. As such they are not permanent. The growth in the number of special advisers since the Blair years has invited criticism from career civil servants who suddenly find themselves answering to political appointees with little experience of administering government.

***Neutral***

In serving changing governments, civil servants are required to be neutral. Some Prime Ministers have doubted this. The Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, believed that the senior civil service was filled with public school and Oxbridge educated officials who were likely to resist the socialist policies of a Labour government. However, senior civil servants have successfully served both Conservative and Labour Governments. Gus O’Donnell, the former Head of the Civil Service, served under three successive Prime Ministers (Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, and David Cameron).

***Anonymous***

As the responsibility for the successes or failure of government departments lies with the cabinet minister; civil servants are traditionally expected to be working anonymously in the background. Anonymity has been broken recently over the case of Brodie Clark (see permanence, above) and Dr David Kelly. Dr Kelly was a weapons expert who produced a dossier on the weapons of mass destruction held in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. Allegedly under pressure from the Labour government, he ‘sexed up’ the document, suggesting the intelligence was more reliable than it was. Under the eye of the media he answered questions from a Parliamentary select committee investigating events leading up to the war. The pressure of questioning and the attendant media attention (removing his anonymity) eventually led him to commit suicide.

**The role of the civil service**

The civil service administers, or *executes*, government policy. It is therefore the executive arm of government. Senior civil servants have responsibility for:

* Preparing legislation. About 40 civil servants in the Cabinet Office have responsibility for drafting Bills. Civil servants also help prepare ministers to answer questions on government policy in Parliament.
* Policy implementation. Civil servants manage the introduction of government policy in their departments. They must anticipate problems and ensure policy initiatives are introduced in a timely and efficient way.
* Administration. Civil servants administer government policy.

**Reform of the Civil Service**

Since the 19th century the civil service has undergone a number of reforms to improve its efficiency. In the 20th century it has been criticised for its social composition (at a senior level: middle class and university educated) and rigid structure. Sometimes it has been viewed as resistant to change. Both Harold Wilson (Labour Prime Minister) and Margaret Thatcher (Conservative Prime Minister) have felt that their government policies have been delayed or thwarted (defeated) by the civil service. It has also been criticised for lacking the necessary scientific, technical or managerial skills to run a modern state.

In 1968 the ***Fulton Report*** made recommendations to tackle some of these deficiencies. It improved recruitment and training to the civil service and established a more streamlined structure. However, Thatcher believed that the civil service had grown too large and was prone to being self-serving (promoting expansion of government departments so that managers could gain kudos and higher pay). She wanted to reduce the size of the civil service, saying that she wanted to ‘roll back the frontiers of the state’. She sought to involve private sector expertise (such as Sir Derek Rayner, the chief executive of Marks & Spencer) in managing functions previously the sole concern of career civil servants. She appointed Sir Derek Ibbs to run the Efficiency Unit. His report, the ***Ibbs Report,*** argued that many civil service functions could be delivered by ‘Next Steps’ agencies. Effectively this involved establishing ‘arms-length’ agencies which could provide civil service functions, but not be directly managed by Whitehall. Such agencies included the DVLA and the Prison Service.

Increasingly, after Ibbs, civil service functions were outsourced to other agencies (for example, prisons being run by Group 4). This led to what observers call a ***‘hollowing out’ of the state***. Fewer functions were managed directly by the civil service.

Under Tony Blair two key initiatives transformed the civil service. One was the Public Private Partnership (***PPP***), carrying on the Thatcher policy of involving private sector expertise in managing the civil service. Blair also introduced private funding for the public sector, particularly in relation to schools and hospitals. The ***PFI*** scheme saw private sector funding build new schools and hospitals. The new Queen Elizabeth hospital in Birmingham is a result of private sector funding through the PFI (Private Finance Initiative).

In 2015 Frances Maude, the Cabinet Office Minister, proposed that senior civil servants should be fired after a year if they do not perform well in their jobs. He further proposed that ministers should be given the powers to choose who should run their departments. He said he wanted to see the civil service operate more like a business, with a tougher appraisal system, increased accountability and a more entrepreneurial culture. If implemented, these proposals would represent a further erosion of the permanence of senior civil servants.

***Special advisers (Spads)***

Blair also introduced more ***special advisers*** into government, among them Alistair Campbell. In the Major years there had been 38 special advisers working in government; by the end of the Blair years there were over 80. He wanted to change the culture of the civil service and make it more receptive to radical reform, arguing than only outside advisers not immersed in the culture could do this. Some observers argue that this amounted to a ***politicisation*** of the civil service. Arguably, special advisers have further marginalised the Cabinet by providing yet more independent advice to the Prime Minister. Cameron has made use of special advisers, notably Steve Hilton, the architect of the confusing and failed Conservative policy of ‘the Big Society’.

Cabinet ministers now also have their own teams of special advisers.

**6. So….Who dominates the core executive?**

There are several models that describe the relationship between civil servants and ministers.

1. ***The traditional, public administration model***. This is based on the principle that ‘civil servants advise, ministers decide’. It is the job of the civil service to advise ministers. Ministers can choose either to ignore or act on that advice. Civil servants then implement policies put forward by ministers. This model assumes that the civil service is *neutral.* It is supported by the doctrine of ministerial responsibility which states that ministers should take the blame for the failure of government policy and the praise for its success.
2. ***The adversarial model***. This proposes that civil servants regularly try to block government policy which they do not favour. It sees them as powerful players within government, able to challenge politicians. It proposes that their social values lead them to attempt to maintain the status quo (the way things are) rather than embrace radical reform.
3. ***The Whitehall community model.*** This argues that civil servants favour ministers who defend their departments in Cabinet. Ministers and civil servants share a common interest in the success of their departments. Each has a set of skills to offer in their symbiotic relationship. Ministers have the political acumen to protect their departments, while civil servants have the expertise and contacts. Whitehall is like a village where there is competition for limited resources and there is much to be gained by ministers and civil servants working together to protect their common interests.
4. ***The public choice model.*** This model closely reflects Thatcher’s view of the civil service. It says that bureaucracies have a tendency towards needless growth (for status as prestige) and inefficiency. They are immune from market pressures and have a vested interest in the expansion of public services.

In practise the British system of government operates an ‘inexpert’ model. Cabinet ministers come and go. They are transient. For example, in his time in government since 2010 Michael Gove has been Education Secretary, government Chief Whip, and Justice Secretary. This can give senior civil servants who have enjoyed long careers the upper hand in the relationship. The experience and expertise of senior civil servants are important to the smooth running of government. However, strong ministers will insist on their policy.

*PAST QUESTIONS: GOOD EXAMPLES*

Explain the term *Shadow Cabinet* used in the extract. (5 marks).

The Shadow Cabinet is made up of MPs from the Official Opposition (second largest party in the House of Commons). Members of the Shadow Cabinet are known as shadow ministers, Ed Balls, for instance, is the shadow chancellor of the exchequer. The job of the Shadow Cabinet is to scrutinise the government and promote an alternative set of policies that they hope to be able to implement after the next general election. They are often seen as a government in waiting and they sit on the front bench of the House of Commons opposite the current government.

Explain the word *Cabinet reshuffles* used in the extract. (5 marks).

A Cabinet reshuffle occurs when the prime minister changes the holders of ministerial positions; this is sometimes described as hiring and firing. While reshuffles can be used to show the prime minister's strength they can also go horribly wrong, for instance when MacMillan sacked 7 ministers on the 'night of the long knives' it made him appear weak. Prime ministers are often limited in the extent to which they can reshuffle the cabinet. Blair was unable to fire Brown and at the moment Cameron was obliged under the coalition agreement to have a fixed number of Lib Dems in his cabinet.

*Using your own knowledge as well as the extract, explain why a prime minister's power to hire and fire government members is 'a mixture of freedom and constraint'. (10 marks)*

The prime minister has many powers including the power to hire and fire, however the PM is also limited as they need to surround themselves with loyal supporters whilst at the same time appeasing any potential rivals.

Prime ministers wish to create a supportive cabinet and use their hiring and firing powers to this end. When Thatcher became prime minister her cabinet was a mix of wets and drys but she gradually reshuffled until the drys were in the overall majority. This did not however resolve all internal problems and it can be argued that regular reshuffles led to her downfall.

Reshuffles should be used with caution; the phrase 'keep your friends close and your enemies closer' is appropriate. 'Big beasts' within parties are often rivals for key posts and prime ministers have to avoid creating damaging splits which can lead to back bench rebellion. The notorious rivalry between Blair and Brown shows that prime ministers do not have total freedom as Brown remained Chancellor during all of Blair's terms of office.