

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
THE HON. PREMIER
11TH MARCH 2019
PROFESSIONAL SERVICES/CONSULTANTS AND ADVISERS – A REVISED
CONSTRUCT

Mr. Speaker, the use of subject matter experts or political advisers in support of a government's policy aims and objectives is an established and accepted use of professional services in Bermuda and elsewhere. From the days of Raj Nadarajah, some consultants have attracted controversy while others have hardly been known although their contribution to the development of Bermuda can be seen in many facets of our everyday lives.

Mr. Speaker, the increasing demands of modern governance and public administration have taxed the traditional ministry headquarters within Bermuda's Public Service. In Bermuda, Permanent Secretaries combine their principal role of lead policy advisor to Ministers with office management, accounting and budgetary responsibility, speech writing, the drafting of Cabinet memoranda and Briefs, managing Union relationships, PATI oversight, and many day-to-day tasks associated with Ministers' needs.

Mr. Speaker, the SAGE Commission examined the operations of ministry headquarters and the role of Permanent Secretaries. In their 2013 Report they recommended, citing the 2011 Civil Service Review, the creation of a ministerial private office. To quote from the SAGE Report:

A Ministerial Private Office should be created to relieve Permanent Secretaries of the day-to-day tasks associated with Ministers' needs. To again quote the 2011 Civil Service Review: "We believe that a Private Office would relieve the Permanent Secretary of the day-to-day managing of Ministers (tasks such as detailed briefing, speech writing, intelligent prioritization of the Minister's diary, "gate-keeping", managing the Minister's relationship with the Legislature, progress-chasing of submissions from within the Ministry, etc.).

The 2011 Review said: *“We believe that...such a role close to a Minister would be a good one for young civil servants who are judged to have the potential for rapid advancement.”* Mr. Speaker, let me pause on that point and remind Honourable Members of the recent announcement I made on the Cabinet Office internship programmes set to be run during this summer. From the young people we attract for this period I expect that we will identify such ‘high fliers’ who will continue to add to the capacity of the Public Service.

Mr. Speaker, the Review continues: *“We believe that such a system would free the Permanent Secretary to develop a closer grip on improving the performance of the Ministry and its constituent departments, the development of policy options and driving better delivery and accountability through the system”.*

Mr. Speaker, after almost two years in government I think I can speak for all Ministers in saying that Permanent Secretaries are increasingly busy and challenged to meet the demands of the post without the support required. Therefore, I have indicated my full support of the SAGE Commission’s recommendation on private ministerial offices and have encouraged Ministers who field a significant number of requests from the public, to start the process of building this capacity within Ministries by hiring an advisor as permitted by the Ministerial Code of Conduct. Honourable Members should note that Section 9.1 of the Code dictates that such engagements are subject to budgetary approval and the prior, written approval of the Premier.

Further, Mr. Speaker, I can advise this Honourable House that in terms similar to the Premier and Opposition Leaders Personal Staffs Act 1983, I shall shortly invite Cabinet to approve amendments to relevant legislation to formalize ministerial private offices.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will note that the Ministerial Code of Conduct also contemplates the engagement of expert consultants, who through their professional expertise can be taken on in support of the policy remit of a Minister. It is not a poor reflection on the Public Service that successive governments have required professional services to advance their programmes. Highly technical areas, the use of cutting edge technology or the provision of expert advice all demand special skill and expertise.

I wish to further advise Honourable Members that I have invited the Policy & Strategy Section within the Cabinet Office to conduct a jurisdictional review and to advise on a means by which to grade consultant engagements, to ensure pay equity and a compensation package that is more standardized and in keeping with the level of expertise for which the particular consultant has been engaged. This will set a standardised scale for compensation which all parties will be aware and to which they subscribe when working in support of the Government of Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, the pursuit of political goals has made the term 'consultant' a bad word in many cases. Providing a legislative underpinning and a more transparent system of grading and compensation for consultant work both political and expert will go a long way towards changing that perception and more importantly, promoting greater efficiency in the delivery of services and the implementation of policy on behalf of the people of Bermuda.