

Starmer and Reeves can ignore accounting - but only if ...

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I thought [a Tweet from Robert Peston](#) was especially relevant this morning, so much so that it is almost going to feature as a guest post here this morning.

For context, note that Rachel Reeves has just appointed [a new Covid corruption commissioner](#).

And Keir Starmer has just appointed [a new UK cabinet secretary](#) - who is the UK's most senior civil servant.

Now let Peston take over, with a Tweet posted at 7.45 this morning:



Robert Peston ✓
@Peston

...

Here are two jarring facts. The chancellor has just appointed a special Covid corruption commissioner to examine an eye-watering £7.6bn of dodgy and fraudulent contracts awarded for Covid equipment, and the PM has just appointed as cabinet secretary Chris Wormald, who is the top official in the Department of Health and Social Care, which oversaw the awarding of the dodgy contracts.

The juxtaposition of the appointments is astonishing, quite literally.

I am intrigued by what Keir Starmer asked Wormald about his financial stewardship of DHSC during the job interview. What is Wormald's explanation for how such spectacularly loss-making medical procurement - that has explicitly and repeatedly been described by Rachel Reeves as a scandal - happened on his watch, when he was the accounting officer?

Who does Wormald think was to blame for awarding the disastrous loss-making contracts? Where does the buck stop for the debacle?

It can't be his fault, surely, or presumably Starmer would not have promoted him to run the entire civil service? So who was at fault?

Tricky to blame the tooth fairy for this one.

Is it plausible that the corruption commissioner and the separate Covid Inquiry will give the DHSC a clean bill of health as they go through purchasing procedures and the books? That seems a stretch after the National Audit Office has said the department has written off a staggering £9.9bn on unusable and over-priced personal protective equipment? If they savage the DHSC, does Downing St already have a media plan to protect Wormald and the others.

Everyone tells me that Wormald is sensible and impressive. "He is interested in substance and not just a courtier" says someone who

I agree with Robert Peston. What is going on here? How can a person who oversaw such corruption have any idea how to manage the government as a whole?

And do accounts, managing them, and the internal control system on which they rely - which, as I note [in my video this morning](#), seem to now be in disarray - matter at all? It would seem not.

No wonder this government is already in such a mess. Not only does Rachel Reeves not understand economics, but it is also now clear that she and Keir Starmer clearly do not understand that without good financial controls and having people in charge who really understand the importance of accounting and everything that goes with it, they have no chance of delivering what they want for the people of the UK.

Accounting, accountability, control of financial systems and the good management that flows from those things might be too mundane for Starmer and Reeves to worry their empty heads about, but they ignore them at their peril.