



Wallace resigns: Sunak carries out mini-reshuffle

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak reshuffles his deck as Wallace leaves space at the top

Briefing by PoliMonitor

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Summary

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Ben Wallace, the Secretary of State Defence, resigned on the morning of 31 August 2023, after serving as Defence Secretary for more than 4 years under three Prime Ministers. He had announced his intention to resign from his role in July, as well as an MP at the next General Election, and cited in his resignation letter to the Prime Minister that “after so many years it is time for me to invest in the parts of life that I have neglected, and to explore new opportunities”.

Wallace, who had survived the resignation of two Prime Ministers, was seen as a highly capable Defence Secretary who most recently had helped to spearhead the UK’s response to the invasion of Ukraine. At the time of his departure, Wallace was the most popular member of the Cabinet amongst Conservative members, with a net approval rating of 76.8%. He had been touted as a potential successor to both Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, but ruled himself out both times. It had also been reported that he was interested in becoming the General Secretary of NATO, although this was ruled out after it was announced that the current General Secretary, Jens Stoltenberg, would stay in post for a further year.

The following briefing outlines the small changes made to Rishi Sunak’s Cabinet and Ministerial team in the wake of today’s resignation.

Changes

Secretary of State for Energy
Security and Net Zero



Grant Shapps

Secretary of State for
Defence



Ben Wallace

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
for Children, Families and Wellbeing



Claire Coutinho

BEFORE

AFTER

Secretary of State for Energy
Security and Net Zero



Claire Coutinho

Secretary of State for
Defence



Grant Shapps

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State
for Children, Families and Wellbeing



David Johnston

Secretary of State for Defence - Grant Shapps

Upon Wallace's resignation this morning, Grant Shapps, the-then Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, was announced as the new Defence Secretary. Shapps had served as the Secretary of State of the newly formed Department for Energy Security and Net Zero since February 2023, having previously served as the Secretary of State in its predecessor Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Shapps has also previously served as Home Secretary, Transport secretary and Chairman of the Conservative Party. Following his appointment Shapps stated that he was "looking forward to working with the brave men and women of our Armed Forces who defend our nation's security. And continuing the UK's support for Ukraine in their fight against Putin's barbaric invasion." Shapps, who has been the Member of Parliament for Welwyn Hatfield since the 2005 General Election, had a career in publishing and business before being elected to Parliament. This is his first role in the Ministry of Defence.



Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero - Claire Coutinho

Replacing Grant Shapps as Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero is Claire Coutinho. The culmination of her meteoric rise since being elected as the Member of Parliament for East Surrey in 2019, this is Coutinho's first Cabinet position, and the first for an MP elected in 2019. She previously served as Minister for Disabled People in the Department for Work and Pensions during the tenure of Liz Truss's premiership, and then as Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing in the Department for Education. Before becoming an MP Coutinho worked for investment bank Merrill Lynch, the Centre for Social Justice, the Housing and Finance Institute and KPMG. She then became a Special Adviser at the Treasury, initially working for Chief Whip Julian Smith, before serving as a Special Adviser to the-then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Rishi Sunak. Coutinho is seen as a close ally of the Prime Minister.

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children, Families and Wellbeing - David Johnston

Replacing Claire Coutinho as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children, Families and Wellbeing is the Member of Parliament for Wantage David Johnston, who makes his Ministerial debut. Also a member of the 2019 intake of Conservative MPs, Johnston served as a PPS to the Department for Education in 2021 before he joined colleagues in a wave of resignations during the Chris Pincher scandal in 2022. Prior to being elected to Parliament, Johnston was Chief Executive of the Social Mobility Foundation.



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