

Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy

Oral evidence: The UK's national security machinery—follow-up

Monday 11 December 2023

4.30 pm

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Members present: Margaret Beckett MP (The Chair); Lord Butler of Brockwell; Baroness Crawley; Baroness Fall; Stephen McPartland MP; Lord Sarfraz; Viscount Stansgate; Bob Stewart MP.

Evidence Session No. 1

Heard in Public

Questions 1 - 29

Witnesses

[I](#): The Rt Hon the Lord Maude of Horsham.

[II](#): The Lord Harris of Haringey; Dr Kathy Oldham, Chief Resilience Officer, Greater Manchester.

Examination of witness

Lord Maude of Horsham.

Q1 **The Chair:** Thank you for agreeing to give evidence to us today. We are interested in your review and the issue of reform within government. Why were you asked to carry out your review, which, as I understand it, was into the Civil Service, governance and accountability, and what were your main findings?

Lord Maude of Horsham: Thank you for inviting me. The commitment to commission such a review was made in the *Declaration on Government Reform*, which I think was published in the summer of 2021 and was issued by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Secretary, so jointly signed by them. I could not say why it was me who was commissioned to do it, but it is a subject that I have been quite involved with in various capacities.

First, it is not a Civil Service reform plan. There are lots of opinions on that, and I have my own opinions, but this does not attempt to go into the substance of what the Civil Service should look like. The question that I tried to answer, the more that I read about the subject, was: why do the same critiques of the Civil Service continually come up? From the Fulton committee report in 1968, 55 years ago, to Kate Bingham's reflections on the Civil Service as a result of her experience leading the Vaccine Taskforce, what really struck me was that many of the same issues were expressed in remarkably similar ways. When you look at what people have written and said about the Civil Service in the intervening period, you see that there are strands that remain. It is not that there have not been very capable people trying to resolve these issues, and it is not that those issues are controversial.

There are critiques that I particularly noticed. First, there is what Fulton called the dominance of generalists—what at one point was called the cult of the gifted amateur.

The second is churn, the rapid movement of officials in what sometimes looks like a slightly random and unplanned way from post to post, which of course slightly perpetuates the generalist thing, because people do not stay long enough and there is not enough continuity to build the deep pools of expert subject-matter knowledge that are crucial.

The third is what tends now to be called a lack of porosity but what most of us would call interchange—a ready, easy, relaxed interchange between the Civil Service and sectors outside.

The fourth is the lack of parity of esteem, what sometimes appears to be a sort of class distinction, between the white-collar Whitehall policy civil servants and the blue-collar people who do implementation, operational delivery, procurement, financial management, IT and digital—the things that tend to attract lower status, indicated by the fact that roughly double the proportion of policy civil servants have senior Civil Service status compared with any of the implementation occupations.

The question that leapt at me was: why, when able and committed people have tried to solve these, does it not happen—or, if it does happen, why is it not sustained? I reached some conclusions. First, there is no one in charge. To begin with, the head of the Civil Service has always, except for one brief period in the late 1970s/early 1980s, been a split, part-time role, generally shared with the Cabinet Secretary. The qualities needed to be a brilliant policy adviser/co-ordinator of the Government's policy agenda are not the same skills as those needed to drive transformational change through a huge and complicated organisation, even if it were remotely possible to do that on a part-time basis.

Secondly, the head of the Civil Service has never actually had power delegated in a formal way to drive this kind of change. Several have said that the levers at their disposal were charm, persuasion and cajolery, which are always important in any leadership role, but at the back of that

it is usually quite important to have formal authority, a formal mandate, and that simply has never been granted. In fact, I discovered that the only formal delegations—apart from in relation to the appointment of civil servants, and those powers are kind of scattered through a dense document called the *Civil Service Management Code*—to manage the Civil Service have been made not to civil servants but to Ministers, although I will guarantee that no Minister knows this.

So there is a lack of someone in charge with authority and the track record and experience to drive complicated change through a complicated organisation. Then, if there were such a person, there is no sustained accountability other than the accountability to Ministers, which of course is the textbook answer that you would expect. Ministers come and, as we know, Ministers go. I was better equipped than most to exert that accountability because I was interested, I was senior, I had political clout and I did it for five years, but that was exceptional, and even then a lot of the changes that happened on my watch were not sustained.

One of the things that should come with having a permanent, professional and politically impartial Civil Service is the benefit of continuity. It is what I have called the stewardship obligation: the obligation to deliver agreed reforms, to constantly improve capability and, arguably, to create sound resilience plans. That obligation exists irrespective of electoral timetables and changes of Government, because there is no politics or ideology in this. These are the benefits of continuity that should come but do not always.

I have said that there should be some external accountability for the delivery of the stewardship obligation. I set myself the constraint of not making recommendations that either required primary legislation or challenged established constitutional norms, because the best thing to do is to use existing institutions. The one that is there and is capable of exercising this enhanced function without any change to the law is the Civil Service Commission. I have made some specific recommendations on how that could work.

That was the first clutch of things. For the second, I looked at the centre of government. I was asked in my terms of reference to look at how things operated here compared with comparable government systems. I looked particularly at those that have a Westminster-type parliamentary democracy and a permanent, politically impartial Civil Service—that is, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland, all of which organise their centre of government in a markedly different way from ours but in a very similar way between them. They have an office of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, which in our terms would bring together the secretariat elements of the Cabinet Office to create a proper strategic centre of government, and then all of them have a separate budget ministry, so the public expenditure functions in our Treasury would be separate.

In my recommendation, those public expenditure functions would be combined with the central leadership of the cross-cutting functions on procurement, IT and digital, major project leadership and management to

create what I have called an office of budget and management. That would bring us much more closely in line with similar organisations, all of which, it is worth noting, have been more successful than the UK has at controlling public expenditure.

Those were the two principal things that may be relevant to the inquiry that you are undertaking.

Q2 The Chair: I would like to explore that a little more. As I see it, you are saying, “These are the problems that people have identified over the years, and they still exist”, and then you have proposals for how they might now be addressed. How do you think that applies particularly to the national security machinery?

Lord Maude of Horsham: Nothing that I recommend will in itself solve these problems, but it would, I believe, at least make it possible for the problems to be solved. My conclusion was that with the best will in the world, and there often has been the best will in the world, the system as it is set up simply makes it impossible to deliver change in a sustained and long-term way.

How does that apply here? One of the things that I was asked to deal with, and lots of people raised this with me, was how to ensure that cross-departmental programmes are delivered more effectively and held to account for the delivery. Sadly, there was a provision in my terms of reference that specifically excluded me from examining the principal problem there, which is the 19th-century theology that dictates that individual ministries and departments must be treated as hermetically sealed silos, with a line of accountability going through the accounting officer to Parliament.

I was forbidden in my terms of reference from looking at that, because arrangements to do with accountability for public expenditure are to be looked at only by the institution that is responsible for it—that is, the Treasury. You cannot address the issues of how to create effective delivery mechanisms for cross-departmental programmes without addressing that issue. That is deep in Treasury culture and mindset. I was told quite recently, in the last week or so, that when Gordon Brown was Chancellor—he was most of one of the most politically powerful Chancellors—he tried to address this issue, but even he failed to make it happen.

There is something quite fundamental there that will get changed only if we align ourselves more closely with comparable Governments, who have been much better at doing this than we have.

Q3 The Chair: I understand that you indicated that you thought officials’ attendance at the National Security Council was a model of best practice.

Lord Maude of Horsham: I did not quite say that. When I was looking at how Cabinet committees work, I was commenting on the stark difference between how we operate in crisis mode compared with business as usual. If you sit in a COBRA meeting, it is very immediate,

there are screens on the wall, action points get put up in real time, named individuals are next to actions and there are timelines for when they are going to report back. It is very real, raw and immediate. Then, as soon as you move out of that back to business as usual, it is much more sedate and much less focused.

The chair of a Cabinet committee does not even get to see the minutes of the committee's meeting, even in draft. When it comes to the processes for drawing up the minutes, they typically do not have action points, named individuals or timelines. They are just markedly different.

There have been Prime Ministers who have favoured much more hybrid meetings; I have read that when Ted Heath was Prime Minister he liked meetings that had both Ministers and officials there together. But there is something about the way some Cabinet committees work that, frankly, is quite sterile. There is not a lot of engagement. Often there are junior Ministers there reading out whatever they have been given. Often it is not their own responsibility; they are just the ones with space in their diary, so they get told to go there and read it out.

That introduces an element of deniability or revisitability. As a group of civil servants once said to me when I asked why a Cabinet committee decision had not been implemented, "We didn't think it was a very strong mandate", to which the answer is, "Well, what do you need, a papal bull?" This was a Cabinet committee chaired by two Cabinet Ministers, and we took a decision, so bringing the normal operation of Cabinet committees much closer to the way normal organisations would operate. I was not a regular member of the National Security Council, but I occasionally attended, and it occurred to me that it operated in a much more hybrid way. My experience, such as it was, was that that was more effective.

The Chair: Thank you. That is very helpful.

Q4 Stephen McPartland: Lord Maude, your evidence suggests that there is great inertia. You referenced the *Declaration on Government Reform*, which states that the Government recognise that they need to modernise and be objective. Do you think the Government initiate and follow through on internal reform, or do they just recognise it?

Lord Maude of Horsham: It depends what you mean by "the Government" in these circumstances. The first point to make is that none of the kind of reforms that I am talking about, and have recommended, will happen unless there is bipartisan support. That is essential. During the coalition Government we made considerable progress—some of which has since regressed—first, because it was a coalition, so there were two parties involved, and, secondly, there was a Labour Party that had recently been in government and hoped to be in government again very soon. All three major parties had current or recent experience of being in government and saw how the system could work better. Throughout that time I was adamant that we needed to keep the Labour Party spokesmen

closely abreast of what we were doing, and we did, and we generated a high degree of consensus.

Permanent Secretaries have often said, and indeed a retired Permanent Secretary said it recently, that the problem is that often Ministers are not very interested. That is plainly true—I was a bit of an exception in that I was probably excessively interested in it. My point is that it should not require Ministers to be interested. The delivery of these agreed reforms should not require a Minister to be constantly pressing for it. This is what you have a permanent Civil Service for, with some accountability, as I said, external to Ministers. I have said that the Civil Service Commission could hold the head of the Civil Service to account for the delivery of these agreed, uncontroversial reforms and report annually to Parliament on their delivery, because I think it important not to challenge established norms.

It is not impossible to imagine a situation where there is a kind of bandwidth crunch and where Ministers say to Permanent Secretaries, “We don’t want you to carry on with this reform, because we haven’t got bandwidth and we’re focusing on the immediate business of the Government of the day”. In that case, the will of Ministers must prevail—that is what our constitutional norms require—but that should be called out by the Civil Service Commission holding to account the head of the Civil Service and reporting that publicly to Parliament.

The Institute for Government made very much the same analysis that I have made of the stewardship obligation and the need for there to be different means for it being delivered. The institute’s solution would be to put the Civil Service on a fully statutory basis, with a statutory Civil Service board. I considered that carefully but rejected it on two bases. First, it would mean primary legislation, so the long grass would beckon immediately, because it is hard to see how for many Governments that would be a priority. Secondly, it would build in a clash between the Civil Service’s legal obligation and its obligation to serve the Government of the day. My solution, which relies on transparency more than legal authority, is both a quicker and a better way.

Q5 Lord Butler of Brockwell: Lord Maude has talked about the long history of these problems. I can testify to that, because he and I worked on them 30 years ago in the Cabinet Office for the first time. I find myself in agreement with a lot of what is in his report, although I hasten to say, for the record, not all of it.

The Government’s response to the report has been quite extraordinary. First, there were reports in the media that its publication was being delayed by some sort of institutional resistance, and I do not know whether Lord Maude knows or can tell us what that was. Then, when it was published, the Government thanked Lord Maude very properly for it and then rejected its main recommendations off the cuff in a Statement by the then Minister for the Civil Service, who resigned the same day. What I want to get at is whether Lord Maude can tell us what has been going on.

Lord Maude of Horsham: I know no more than Lord Butler, and probably less. Publishing my report was literally the last thing that my double successor—he succeeded me as MP for Horsham as well as, after a few intermissions, Minister for the Cabinet Office—did; he just got it out of the door before he left. It took some time to be published and it was not at all clear to me why. The timing was on the same day as a major government reshuffle, which obviously was regarded as more interesting and more likely to get the headlines, which was fair enough. So I do not know.

Taking a charitable view, which I always want to do, the Government did not actually reject the two principal conclusions; they said that they would be a distraction. I have always been clear that the two elements of reconfiguring the centre of government and creating a separate, dedicated head of the Civil Service are very closely interlinked. They are day-one changes; they are changes to happen on day one of either a re-elected or a newly elected Government. It is very hard to do such things mid-term, and they would require preparation. I think the Government were saying, “We don’t want to be distracted by doing anything like this when we’ve got priorities to deliver”.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: So you think it is merely a matter of timing.

Lord Maude of Horsham: I have no idea, I am not privy to the thinking, but I do not discern within the Government any great enthusiasm for these kinds of changes.

Q6 **Baroness Crawley:** Good afternoon, Lord Maude. Looking in particular at national security leadership in the centre of government, I am interested in where your review and our findings as a committee overlap. During our inquiries into the UK’s national security machinery and biosecurity in 2020-21, our committee found a lack of prime ministerial oversight of the National Security Council. Did your review identify a similar challenge?

Lord Maude of Horsham: No, but only because I did not particularly look at that.

Baroness Crawley: Sorry, you did not look at the National Security Council, or you did not look at the overview by the Prime Minister?

Lord Maude of Horsham: I did not look at the overview by the Prime Minister. Part of the problem is that the Cabinet Office has become a huge, very confused and confusing institution, with numerous different functions and a lack of clear accountability. That is why other jurisdictions have all taken the central national security functions into an office or, in many cases, a department of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, which can operate as a proper strategic centre.

People have talked about how the Cabinet Office—partly as the result of some of the reforms that we initiated during the coalition Government—has developed some of the features of a corporate headquarters, but that, combined with the co-ordination of policy and secretariat functions,

is a very awkward mix. That is why, for me, it should be configured so that the Cabinet secretariat, including the national security secretariat, is combined with the Prime Minister's Office to create a proper, much more stable structure with greater continuity as an office of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet.

Q7 Baroness Crawley: Perhaps I can follow up with an example of our involvement as a committee. After the UK's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, our committee concluded that the National Security Council and the cross-government machinery supporting its work were "inadequate to the task". I am quoting from our report.

Lord Maude of Horsham: Yes, I saw that.

Baroness Crawley: To what extent do you think things have changed since 2021?

Lord Maude of Horsham: I do not think I am qualified to judge that. I did not look specifically into how the national security secretariat is operating. However, there is still a lack of clear lines of accountability, so pulling all this into one place is desirable.

Something that has changed is that Prime Ministers today have much more of their time taken up with national security matters than would have been the case previously. I remember David Cameron telling me that national security matters—Baroness Fall will know this better than me—were taking something like 25% or 30% of his time, dealing with things that the public never saw. One of the oddities about the way our system works is that a lot of this activity comes together only at Prime Minister level, which is probably not brilliant.

One of my suggestions is that, if my suggested model of an office of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet came into existence, there should be a second Cabinet Minister in the Prime Minister's office who would effectively be the chief of staff. They would be a Minister—ideally, someone in the Lords, so not distracted by constituencies and not capable of being seen as a competitor, which is always an issue. They would be able to be in a place where they could direct officials in a way that a special adviser cannot. That would be a stronger arrangement.

Baroness Crawley: And, indeed, important in the sense that national security will take up more of a Prime Minister's time into the future.

Lord Maude of Horsham: Yes.

Q8 Viscount Stansgate: I am tempted to ask whether some of the proposals about which you have just been talking might amount to a more presidential than prime ministerial form of government. However, my official question is different. In what way would your review would be most useful, and what would be its main application, in the event of another crisis, whether another major national security incident or another longer-term national security problem, whether animal disease or another pandemic outbreak, and so on? Which are the most pertinent of

your recommendations in that situation?

Lord Maude of Horsham: There are two things. The Institute for Government, in its version of the stewardship obligation, includes resilience and emergency planning as part of that obligation. I was agnostic on that, but I now strongly believe that that is correct, because there is no politics or ideology in this; this is planning that has to be medium and long-term and has to be pursued irrespective of the electoral cycle and changes of Government. You have to find a way of removing the alibi that “Ministers are not interested in this”, because these are things that need to happen whether Ministers are interested or not. It is just basic national-interest stuff that needs to happen. So that is the first thing: the creation and the recognition of an explicit stewardship obligation, which I now agree with the IfG should include resilience and emergency planning, would be helpful.

The second area is finding ways to break down the silo culture that makes it harder than it need be to drive cross-departmental programmes. That should make it easier to create common budgets that are related to a broad programme, rather than everything having to be allocated to an individual silo.

Viscount Stansgate: To that extent, would you say that, in your judgment, we are not actually best placed, even at the moment, for another major pandemic because of the structural issues that you have identified?

Lord Maude of Horsham: I am not aware that we have done anything to improve the structural arrangements. There may be improvements, but I am not aware of them. Certainly both those constraints still exist.

Q9 Stephen McPartland: You talked earlier about how Gordon Brown, the very powerful political Chancellor, was unable to get the Treasury as the organisation to look into cross-departmental accountability. You also mentioned that David Cameron spent 25% to 35% of his time on national security issues. Why do you think national security issues and cross-departmental accountability were excluded from your review? We know that national security issues are a cross-departmental issue.

Lord Maude of Horsham: National security was not excluded, although it was not specifically included. I was looking more broadly, not at particular sectoral issues. What was excluded was me looking at the arrangements for—I cannot remember the precise wording—the accountability for public expenditure, which is based on a very strong silo culture.

During the coalition Government, we created the beginnings in a slightly makeshift way of what is now called the functional model, where cross-cutting functions such as procurement, IT and digital, major projects, legal and so on were strongly led from the centre of government. Interestingly, the Treasury was, at best, indifferent to the very big savings that we delivered through that—£52 billion cumulatively, year on year, in five years—and, at worst, actively hostile.

We only got it done—this insight has occurred to me only recently—because it was a coalition Government and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who was a leading Lib Dem and a powerful figure, obviously in the Lib Dem party but also accordingly in the Government, had much more independent stature and authority than if the Chief Secretary had been, as is usually the case, a political subordinate of the Chancellor. He was able to overrule Treasury officials to a much greater extent than would normally be the case, so he was able to operate much more as an independent budget Minister. Without that, I think we would have struggled to make progress.

Stephen McPartland: I remember the quad. When it comes to national security policy, do you have any suggestions for how we could improve cross-departmental accountability?

Lord Maude of Horsham: In my review, I recommended—this is evidence of my slightly having lost the will to live at that point—that there should be a subsequent very specific review carried out without the constraint that I was under. Some interesting things have been done on this, particularly in New Zealand, where admittedly it is easier because the country is smaller and more compact. The IfG has done some work on this, as did the Commission for Smart Government, looking at ways to create much broader cross-cutting arrangements, both for delivering and for holding those charged with delivery to account.

Q10 **Stephen McPartland:** In your evidence, you suggest that there is almost institutional inertia or reticence. This committee has a scrutiny function, and we are sometimes called to private briefings that reject it. I just wondered if you had any insight into why that might be.

Lord Maude of Horsham: No, not really. Why do reforms not get implemented? There can be political pushback, but not here; these are politically uncontroversial. There can be vested-interest resistance, but, again, not here, really, except that heads of departments quite like to be in charge of a silo without interference. The interference of the functional model creates some kind of real-time accountability, which is not always welcome to those being held to account. The third element is sheer inertia. The fourth is often the lack of technical capability, which is often overlooked as a factor, although it should not be a factor here, because implementing these kinds of reforms should be meat and drink to a well-functioning bureaucracy.

That is a bit different from some of the long-standing failings that I identified in Fulton, and indeed way beyond Fulton; if you read Lord Hennessy's brilliant magnum opus *Whitehall*, you will see that a lot of these critiques go back decades. In fact, I found a book published shortly after the First World War, in 1921, by someone who was an irregular brought in during the Lloyd George years. Lloyd George said he needed men of "push and go", in his phrase, to drive and make things happen. As Lord Hennessy reports, that was done in a fairly chaotic way, but afterwards this guy—his name now eludes me—wrote this thing called *Reform of the Civil Service*, where he clearly identifies the lack of anyone

in charge as being a fundamental problem when it comes to constantly driving up efficiency, which is what all organisations should be doing.

- Q11 **Baroness Fall:** You have talked quite a lot about your plans for national security. You talked about a Prime Minister's office and the machinery of government. I am curious about the long-term momentum behind it, as we are coming into an election next year. My question is: how do we keep the momentum going? Looking back over a decade now where you have been involved both in government and looking out, there have been reforms with national security at the centre, such as the National Security Council first being put together. I am curious as to what you think the difference is between a prime ministerial office and bringing the departments together with the same view of getting away from the silos in Whitehall—and the FCDO; you have not mentioned the FCDO, but that would be a machinery-of-government change. Is there anything from the pandemic on that side?

Lord Maude of Horsham: There is quite a lot there. How would creating an office of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet help? You have seen, better than most, how different Prime Ministers want to configure things differently. Some have wanted to treat the Cabinet Office, or part of it, as part of No. 10, effectively. There has been constant debate about this. It is not obvious that our system works so perfectly that we should be complacent about it, particularly when you look at how the comparable jurisdictions operate. They all have something that is an office of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and the secretariats in the same place to create a proper strategic centre of government.

In answer to Viscount Stansgate's unspoken question, "Is this becoming more presidential?" I would say not necessarily. Australia and Canada are not necessarily more presidential. All these Governments are becoming more presidential not because of structural changes or because of machinery of government. It is largely to do with television that the success of a Government and a party is focused much more on the persona of the leader than was the case 30 or 50 years ago. All this arrangement does is recognise that the Prime Minister these days, in any of these countries, is more than just a first among equals. It creates a much more co-ordinated centre.

I did not particularly comment on the FCDO other than to comment slightly obliquely, deep in an annexe, on the slight strangeness of our arrangements, which are a bit eccentric. Look at devolution. Northern Ireland has a completely separate Civil Service structure, organisation and legal basis, whereas Scotland and Wales do not; they are part of the mainstream Civil Service. The Diplomatic Service has its own different standing and the power to manage it is vested by the same statute in the Foreign Secretary, not the Prime Minister, yet for many purposes it is treated as being the same. Particularly now that again we have a Foreign Office that includes development, most of the officials serving in the FCDO will not be members of the Diplomatic Service, yet there is a huge range of officials whose work is primarily international in the rest of Whitehall who are also not part of the Diplomatic Service. It is a slightly

eccentric arrangement that I concluded was not worth bothering to change as long as you basically ignore it and treat them as the same.

This committee is much better qualified than I am to comment on how well the national security arrangements work in practice, because you have been looking at them systematically over the years and examining them much more closely, but the impression I have had is that the national security arrangements—putting in place the National Security Council and a mostly full-time National Security Adviser—have been a positive step, in that there is one person other than the Prime Minister where all these complicated things come together. Still, as I say, you are better qualified than I am to judge that.

- Q12 **Baroness Fall:** You mentioned Lord Hennessy's book, *Whitehall*, and I am sure you know the quote where he describes "the curse of the missed opportunity" after World War II. Why is it so difficult to reform? I know that question might take a long time to answer. You mentioned at the beginning that you did not believe that it was particularly ideological. That struck me. Is that really true? Do you not think it is ideological?

Lord Maude of Horsham: No, I do not. What leaps off the page is hearing people from different parties saying very much the same things. I do not think there is ideology here. Different parties in government will have a different view of the size and activism of the state, and all that. The basic mechanisms and the capability needed are constantly changing and evolving, and should be constantly improving, but that has nothing to do with political direction.

Lord Hennessy has a whole chapter in his book on the missed opportunity after the Second World War. In a very successful move, huge numbers of people were brought in from academia and business to work in the Civil Service. Then there was a conscious decision, not by Ministers but by the head of the Civil Service and Permanent Secretaries, who met on a Saturday. The few pages where he describes that meeting are vivid. If anyone has not read it, it is cracking read. The meeting was very carefully minuted, and he describes how the idea that this much more hybrid, much more open model—with outsiders coming in, going out, and moving back and forth—should be perpetuated was elegantly and definitively seen off.

The odd thing is that that was at a time when you had a Government who were embarking on an approach to government where the state was becoming much more activist, taking the means of production and nationalising it, there was the National Health Service, and all that, yet the view was taken—as I say, not particularly by Ministers—that you should return to a much more insulated Civil Service model.

- Q13 **The Chair:** May I ask you for a much more general observation? You said that transparency is a key mechanism for change. To what extent do you think that excessive secrecy obstructs proper oversight and organisation of national security policy?

Lord Maude of Horsham: Again, you are better qualified than I am to comment. What I would say is that one of the things we did in the coalition Government was drive an extremely aggressive open-data programme where we released many, many datasets. Government sits on vast amounts of data, which tends to be held within different departments and agencies, and they guard it fiercely. As we were driving this open-data programme, we tapped into a very rich vein of creativity for reasons why particular datasets could not be released. The first would be national security; the second commercial confidentiality; the third privacy, because that is always a good one to worry politicians, rightly. Then there are legal reasons.

The last resort was always, “The quality of the data isn’t very good, Minister, so we need time to improve it”—to which the answer was, “Publish it, and you’ll find that the quality gets better quite quickly”. National security is always a good reason for keeping things close. Obviously, a lot of things have to be kept very close for national security reasons, but it should always be tested vigorously.

The Chair: Thank you very much, and thank you for coming to give evidence to us this afternoon.

Lord Maude of Horsham: My pleasure.

Examination of witnesses

Lord Harris of Haringey and Dr Kathy Oldham.

Q14 **The Chair:** Good afternoon. Thank you both very much for coming to give evidence to us. I will begin by asking you about the resilience framework, which the Government launched in December 2022, eventually—so about a year ago. I do not know about the rest of you, but it does not seem to me to be very long ago. However, it is a full year since it was published, so does it seem to you that the systems and capabilities that support collective resilience have been strengthened by the publication of that framework?

Dr Kathy Oldham: From my experience, the work of government to implement the framework has led to some reinvigoration of efforts and to greater momentum to improve resilience at the local level. This is due in part to the launch of the Stronger LRFs pilots. However, it is early days, so the frameworks are a work in progress. That sits within the wider context of considerable work to draw out lessons and to identify recommendations following a series of local and national emergencies. I know those are lessons that local resilience practitioners are keen to address, so any uplift in resilience activity is not solely a result of the framework.

Also, the question presupposes that the impact of the framework is measurable and so, perhaps, that we have a suite of indicators or an evidence base to support the evaluation of whether we are delivering a

more resilient country or more resilient local places. The test of this inevitably comes in the face of shocks and emergencies. However, I think the ambition of all of us is to get upstream of this. The framework included a commitment to expand the scope and use of standards and assurance to support better contingency planning and, specifically, to develop a measurement of socioeconomic resilience, and we have yet to be consulted on this or to understand the direction of travel.

So although there has been significant effort, as reflected in the implementation update rollout, new structures and new ways of working and tools, much is still in its early stages. Assurance and evaluation mechanisms are still to be rolled out, and the delivery plans to operationalise the ambition to strengthen local resilience continue to be negotiated.

The Chair: I was going to ask whether it was any clearer how the frameworks will be delivered and measured, but I think you are telling me that it is not yet.

Dr Kathy Oldham: That is true. In my estimation, it is not clear at the moment how it will be evaluated.

Q15 **Stephen McPartland:** Dr Oldham, how clear do you find the Government's expectations of your work as the chief resilience officer for Greater Manchester?

Dr Kathy Oldham: I think we are still awaiting clear expectations of what this will look like at the local level. The Stronger LRFs pilot is setting out some ideas, but it is also looking for there to be different approaches in different localities so that we can look at what might fit best consistently across the country or within a local place.

My role started in 2017 and came about as a result of the 100 Resilient Cities initiative pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation, so whether the way I have shaped my role in Greater Manchester is the model that government wishes to adopt elsewhere is still to be determined.

We have done some work on the Stronger LRFs pilot and have some proposals for how my role as chief resilience officer would sit with our political lead for resilience, and we are thinking of creating a Greater Manchester mayoral resilience group and how my role would sit alongside that of the LRF chair. The Stronger LRFs proposals suggest that the chief resilience officer would chair the local resilience forum. At the moment, we are not going down that route; we are leaving the local resilience forum with the blue-light chair. That will enable my role not only to assist them but to provide leadership on whole-of-society resilience and the prevention or place-based agenda.

Q16 **Stephen McPartland:** You represent a very urban area with a lot of unitary authorities in it. My area of Hertfordshire is a two-tier area, with very small districts and a large county. Do you think resilience will have to be very different for the two different areas, even though the population numbers will no doubt be very similar?

Dr Kathy Oldham: I think there will be some core themes. We certainly look to the long term when thinking about building resilient places and, whether those are urban or rural, both play a part. In fact, we are clear in Greater Manchester that our rural hinterland provides a protective function for the city. It protects us against things like heat and flood risk.

That long-term prevention of emergencies and building resilience of place is a common theme. Working with our communities and businesses to promote whole-of-society resilience is a common theme. I think ensuring that we are prepared to respond to emergencies would be common. However, how we deliver that will look different in different localities.

Q17 **Lord Butler of Brockwell:** Could I ask about the relationship with the devolved Governments? In our 2021 report we raised concerns about the lack of involvement of them, and the Government have still not agreed to include them in the integrated review and NSC meetings. Has there been an improvement?

Lord Harris of Haringey: I think the problem is that this gets confused with other matters, so that it is more about the relations between the UK Government and the devolved Administrations rather than what necessarily makes sense, which has led to difficulties. Having said that, you can point to things that are done which demonstrate that they have managed to have a whole-of-society approach. The Government in Scotland, for example, have produced a website, which I think is still only an aspiration as far as the UK Government are concerned, called Ready Scotland.

So a number of things have happened, but I am worried about the extent to which the devolved Administrations—or, for that matter, the major mayors—are an afterthought when these things are considered, the danger being that the centre tries to reinvent things at every stage.

Indeed, just to follow on from Kathy Oldham's comments earlier, I am concerned that, despite running seven LRF pilots, DLUHC is looking for a preferred model rather than recognising that the different situations in, for example, Hertfordshire as opposed to Greater Manchester or Greater London—and, I suspect again, in Scotland—require different structures and different arrangements, subject to the common themes that Kathy Oldham referred to.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: Does the head of resilience directorate understand this, and is the directorate sufficiently empowered to produce arrangements that reflect the requirements of different regions and areas?

Lord Harris of Haringey: I think it is excellent, but there is a question about whether the head has sufficient clout in the system—we just heard Lord Maude talking about clout in the system, although he was talking at the ministerial level. As I understand it, she has dual reporting lines, which are never very convenient if you are subject to them. One is to the deputy national security adviser and one is to the head of the economic

and domestic affairs secretariat in the Cabinet Office, and I am not sure that that works. It is certainly a lower degree of seniority than people assumed that it would be when the post was created. Add the complexities of dealing with the devolved Administrations or, for that matter, elected mayors and I am not sure that the individual postholder necessarily has the right support and resources.

It might be mitigated by a very powerful Cabinet Office Minister. Again, you have just heard evidence from Lord Maude about the importance of having people in those roles who have real clout within government. That can help. At the moment, we have the Deputy Prime Minister leading on this. He introduced the update to Parliament a week ago, which was an important thing to be seen to have done. However, that might not be the case in the future. In recent years, there have been occasions when the Minister with responsibility for resilience has not been pivotal within the centre of government.

Q18 Lord Butler of Brockwell: Dr Oldham, what would be the ill results if the system did not allow sufficient participation and freedom at the local level?

Dr Kathy Oldham: I would focus on three key issues. First, local government has many of the relationships, makes many of the decisions and holds many of the levers that are required to deliver the ambitions in the UK Government resilience framework. So there needs to be constructive dialogue between government and the local level about how we use those to best effect. As we touched on earlier, that might vary by locality.

Secondly, it is important that government works with local government on the emergency response. Government needs to work with us so that we have the capabilities and resources in place to mount an effective response to an emergency. There can be assumptions that we have capabilities that we do not necessarily have.

Thirdly, my hope is that with the new cadre of chief resilience officers, there will be a real opportunity for local areas and national government to work together on this area of resilience. If there was a lack of engagement between chief resilience officers and government, we would miss leveraging a key element of the Government's resilience framework approach to resilience and therefore, in turn, to enhancing national security.

Lord Harris of Haringey: There is also an argument for saying that long-term planning for resilience is even more challenging for central government—if for no other reason than resource pressures. The immediate squeezes out the long-term.

Clearly, you need better information-sharing between central and local government. I do not think that has always worked in the past. Yes, resilience should be a major element in local devolution deals, but not everywhere is covered. You also have the complexity of boundary issues

and coterminosity, which has not worked well, and the lack of regional government structures. Those are all things that stand in the way of the sort of partnership that we are talking about, particularly given that there is not always an understanding among Ministers and within the Civil Service of the sheer difference between local areas and local structures.

Lord Butler of Brockwell: Taking the case of Manchester, Dr Oldham, do you still get the sense that departmental silos cut across your ability to produce effective plans—or, at least, effective co-operation that contributes to effective planning?

Dr Kathy Oldham: It is fair to say that we have good relationships with the resilience advisers in DLUHC's resilience and emergencies division. They will try to co-ordinate the outcomes of cross-government resilience activity and to provide a single point of contact on these issues as they present them to the local level and we raise questions. This is mirrored by the government liaison officers, who try to support streamlined dialogue in emergencies between strategic co-ordinating groups in an emergency response and many government departments.

So through DLUHC there are these functions that try to co-ordinate the messages locally. However, there are two issues in particular that I would raise. First, drawing on my experience of the implementation of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 through to today. In the years immediately following the introduction of the Act, civil contingencies leadership rested solely with the Cabinet Office, which liaised directly with local resilience forums, rather than today's separation where messages come through DLUHC. Therefore, in the immediate aftermath of the Act's implementation, local areas had a much closer relationship with those crafting policies and protocols. This led to more locally relevant solutions.

Secondly, depending on the type of emergency that we are dealing with, lead government departments appear to have variable understanding of local resilience forum structures and of subsidiarity. An example of this was in the recent exercise to test preparedness for a national power outage. This was characterised by considerable central direction and could perhaps have drawn more strongly on an understanding of the capacities to respond at a local level and the dynamic response to local issues that strategic co-ordinating groups can deliver.

Q19 **Stephen McPartland:** Do you think that national and local governments have the same definition of resilience?

Dr Kathy Oldham: I think we are getting there. Defining resilience is very interesting. We have done quite a lot of work that says that there are likely to be as many different definitions of resilience as there are people in the room. In discussions with colleagues, the term "resilience" tends to be focused on emergency preparedness response and recovery. Perhaps this is UK-wide.

We have had the benefit in Greater Manchester of working with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction for over a decade.

Therefore, we have tended to align our understanding of resilience with the Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction. That has brought us to thinking about how we prevent emergencies from occurring, so we think about whether we are creating new risk, whether we are mitigating existing risk and how we manage residual risk.

We have also been privileged to be part of the 100 Resilient Cities network, which I mentioned earlier. It is now a city-led network. This brought another definition of resilience, resilience to shocks or emergencies but also to stresses—issues such as poverty, lack of access to green space, or ageing infrastructure. The argument is that they not only undermine and weaken the fabric of a city but amplify the impacts of emergencies. They exacerbate unequal and disproportionate impacts for different parts of society.

We have been working quite hard for 10 years on what we think we mean by resilience. We have quite a broad understanding, which is captured in our resilience strategy, which focuses on five priorities: communities, leadership for resilience, discovery and innovation, place-based resilience, and responding to emergencies. We have put that in our proposals for the Stronger LRFs delivery plan, so I will see in the next few weeks whether government agrees with that definition.

Lord Harris of Haringey: There is also a confusion in government as to where it is going and about defining all of that. In the Deputy Prime Minister's statement last week there was an aspiration for "a more coordinated and prioritised approach to investment in resilience ... by 2030". That is two general elections away, so this is quite a long-growing thing. He also said that the Government are "working to embed a focus on resilience throughout government policymaking, ensuring that prevention is built into decisions by design".

Nobody could disagree with that, but it implicitly requires that "Treasury guidelines for evaluating investments in the Green Book properly reflect this new preparedness and preventative emphasis. A traditional approach to cost accounting is inappropriate for the consideration of long-term and uncertain events, the occurrence of which is unpredictable".

So although I think that the concept has been accepted, I am unsure of how it will be built in, particularly on the timescale they are talking about, and whether this has been thought through.

Q20 **Stephen McPartland:** So, from your evidence, you are both suggesting that long-term preparedness and planning for these types of incidents is very challenging. What practical support does local government need from national government to move forward on this and develop greater long-term planning?

Dr Kathy Oldham: As you said, prevention or disaster-risk reduction is very much a long-term activity, because we need to build it into how we design the build environment, how we construct and regulate

infrastructure, how we care for and enhance the protection afforded by the natural environment, and how we promote resilience behaviours.

There are some opportunities with the Stronger LRFs programme to test some of this out, but the programme only runs for two years. I will mention three areas where support might be helpful. The first is long-term risk modelling. The NSRA takes a two to five-year time horizon, depending on the risk under consideration, whereas prevention activity needs to be included in strategies running out to 2030, 2035 or beyond. I know that the Government are working on longer-term risk modelling through their chronic risks programme, and we eagerly anticipate the outcomes of that work to see whether it will help us.

Secondly, there is this matter of resourcing. Again, this is being recognised in the Stronger LRFs pilots, but again it needs to extend into the long term. Similar to the points that Lord Harris has just made, ideally we would like to see resilience as a consideration in every decision we make, so that it is seen as a cross-cutting theme, almost similar to how we would do a test for the implications for diversity and inclusion in the decisions we make, or the environmental implications. It would be helpful to be thinking about the resilience implications of our decisions.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, there needs to be joint work between government and localities to understand where the levers lie to make the changes to safeguard the future of our communities and places. Some of them may well lie with national legislation and policy rather than at the local level, but we need the powers to be able to influence and shape the resilience of our places and therefore the risks of emergencies to which we are exposed.

Understanding risks into the longer term and having the resources and powers to act would help us to support delivery of a more resilient future.

Lord Harris of Haringey: To amplify that, the national risk register is an improvement on its predecessor, but none the less it explicitly excludes what it calls “chronic risks”, slow-burn risks that include climate change, anti-bacterial resistance and AI. They are all seen as being outside that, yet if you were a business you would want to look at all your risks together. They interconnect with each other.

Also omitted are considerations of business-as-usual risks, because it is assumed that departments are dealing with that. The state of the health service is not included explicitly as a risk, although many health practitioners might say that there are all sorts of challenges at the moment. Yet if you look through the risk register at the acute risks that are considered, for about half to two-thirds of them it says, when talking about mitigation: “the health service will do this”.

If you have not addressed the risks facing the health service by not having the capacity to cope, you are not really providing mitigation. The extent to which climate change and acute climate crises arising from it are all interconnected with everything else seems to be a weakness in the

approach. Instead, you need an approach that says, "Let's deal with the basic requirements that you need in any emergency and make sure that there's capacity to deal with them".

- Q21 **Stephen McPartland:** To deal with this and to get to where you want to be, what practical steps would you like to see? Are you asking for more legislation, funding, transparency of data sets?

Lord Harris of Haringey: Transparency of data sets is always helpful. Again, you heard about that from Lord Maude.

Kathy Oldham talked about this needing to be something that happens automatically and whether you should always consider it in the same way that many reports consider EDR issues. Maybe there are other things that you can do to institutionalise that. In the same way that net zero has been a legal obligation since the Climate Change Act, would something like a national resilience Act institutionalise that? It might make it easier to deal with some of the arguments with the Treasury about what investments would be appropriate. Something that would skew things in the direction of making all of that happen, which placed a duty on the Government themselves but also on public bodies to make sure that their resilience and their contribution to national resilience are part of the scheme, would be very helpful.

- Q22 **Baroness Crawley:** My first question is to Lord Harris. It is good to see you. Given what you said a few moments ago about the Government not having a settled view of what model of local resilience forums they wish to see yet, would you say that new and developing pilots represent a sign of increased political willingness to support communities to prepare and respond to emergencies?

Lord Harris of Haringey: I would like to think so. It could, of course, be a way of kicking the can down the road: "Yes, we'll have some pilots and then see what happens". My slight worry about the pilots is that the approach is to say, "We don't really know how these local resilience forum things work, so we'll have some pilots, find which one works best, and then require everyone to do it in the same way". That is not what we are looking for here. We need to recognise that, because local areas and local communities will be different, they may need different solutions, but you have to focus on what you want to ensure the required outcomes.

That may be where they will go, but I do not think that having seven pilots will automatically the route for it unless you are prepared to accept that there may be seven different ways of doing things and that all of them seem to work effectively on it or whatever else it might be.

- Q23 **Baroness Crawley:** Thank you. Dr Oldham, you have heard Lord Harris's concerns about pilots, what works and what does not, and what, at the end of the day, the Government are intending to pick up. You are obviously very much involved in the Greater Manchester pilot. What do pilots aim to achieve, and what is your experience so far, from your very local knowledge?

Dr Kathy Oldham: The Stronger LRFs pilot is, in my view, looking to test how we could deliver locally a number of areas of the government resilience framework. There is the potential for this programme to be one of the most transformative moments, at least in local-level resilience, since the Civil Contingencies Act, because it offers the potential for a step change in our resilience knowledge and practice. If we can realise our ambitions through the pilot, I will seek to strengthen the resilience of Greater Manchester.

However, our experience to date has been that the initial delivery plan had to be created at pace against tight deadlines, and I am grateful that the timescales have now shifted to enable a more co-produced and more considered approach to be taken to local delivery plans. I am also conscious that, in designing our delivery plan, Greater Manchester already had the benefit of our international experience of writing a resilience strategy and of trialling the chief resilience officer role. That put us in a good place when we were developing our resilience plan, but it may have been a unique place. The scale of ambition and pace at which we have had to craft that has been a challenge, but we have in our delivery plan been able to set quite an ambitious vision and to propose a substantial programme of work.

For us, there are challenges to do with what happens at the end of the Stronger LRFs programme. It complements our Trailblazer devolution deal, which mentioned local resilience. The Trailblazer devolution deal looks to longer-term implementation, but currently there are few signals from government about what might happen at the end of the Stronger LRFs programme.

I also trust that government will recognise, build on and take forward the innovation and good practice identified in the pilots. There have been issues previously in upscaling and rolling out innovation at the local level and in taking that international thinking across the country, so I trust that this will be an opportunity for us to co-produce and co-deliver something with government.

Q24 **Baroness Fall:** To what extent do you see local and national resilience having improved after the experience of the pandemic, and to what extent have they reinforced each other or at times been in conflict? That is a question to both witnesses.

Lord Harris of Haringey: Kathy Oldham can talk about the local government experience. My impression is that there was a lot of learning being done very rapidly during the Covid period. In some instances we will learn more when Lady Hallett's inquiry reports, but in other instances I think wheels were re-invented. There was, for example, no recognition in central government, or among those charged with making some of the decisions, of the capacities of local structures. It was, "Let's create a national framework. Let's do it nationally".

There was, for example, a call for volunteers to help support vulnerable people living on their own. That was done nationally. It would have been

much more effective had it been done locally using local structures and local networks, probably getting local voluntary and community organisations to do it, but it was being driven nationally. I think that learning was gradually acquired during the course of the pandemic. My concern is that some of that learning will have disappeared.

Also, some of the structures that were created during the pandemic have since been dismantled. Covid is seen by some as no longer being the same sort of threat, so we no longer need the same systems for monitoring infections and keeping up to speed with them. That is very dangerous, and what I hope will come from Lady Hallett's inquiry are very clear guidelines as to what is needed to manage emergency responses and recognise what works and what does not work.

Dr Kathy Oldham: At the local level, the pandemic brought to the fore how we might think about emergencies that affect the nation as a whole. To a certain extent there had been a focus beforehand on local responses and on concepts of subsidiarity, and many of the emergencies that we dealt with up to that point fitted into that model. Covid brought this idea of a wide-area emergency to the fore. During the pandemic we created structures and ways of working that we are trying to build into our forward planning.

There remain challenges for us to work through with government. There is a whole series of risks that could produce a similar impact on the country as a whole, and we need to understand how we can take the learning from Covid to manage those sorts of risks and emergencies into the future, and how we balance the level of central direction in, the national approach to, supporting the country through the emergency, while at the same time recognising what sits best at the local level and what can be delivered, sometimes at a hyperlocal level, because of the knowledge of our communities.

Lord Harris of Haringey: There are examples of that in the way in which some communities, some local authorities, responded to Covid. Yes, you had the national press conferences led by the Prime Minister or whoever it was that day, but you also had, at a very local level, people communicating with local communities. You had to make sure that the messages were broadly compatible, but often it worked better if it was, for example, the local councillor or the local council leader talking locally about what was being done, where help was available, what could happen. Allowing your local authorities to get on and communicate and support the local networks in their areas requires a degree of trust. Only they will really know about those local networks.

Baroness Fall: You can see how it works very well when there is the trust and compatibility, but, going through the pandemic, we also saw Governments taking a great deal of power to themselves in dealing with something they had never dealt with before. So there are potential tensions. Is there anything that we should be looking at or reviewing at this time to prevent those tensions emerging at another national crisis?

Lord Harris of Haringey: I think there is a general way to resolve some of these issues, or at least lessen the chances of them arising, which is by regularly testing and exercising—at every level, not just in a government department or the emergency services, but really modelling these things and it being seen as a national priority to do this. In some countries—Norway, for example, has its total defence initiative—it is seen almost as a national duty that you take part in the national exercise to look at things, and that will be true of senior people in corporates, in local administrations, in national government.

If you work through how these things might arise, it is much less likely that they will happen for real when you are facing the consequences. I remember speaking on a platform with General McChrystal. His line was, “If the first time you meet these guys”—he did say “guys”—“is when you walk into the situation room, it’s too late”. The purpose of a good round of exercising and so on is to familiarise the people not only with each other but with an understanding of the capacities of all the people represented around the table.

Q25 **The Chair:** I want to ask you both about your impressions of DLUHC. Is DLUHC facilitating and leading local government, or is it getting in the way of local government?

Lord Harris of Haringey: Local government is expecting a lead and to be allowed to get on with it. Kathy Oldham may have a view, but I am not sure that you will always feel as though it is being facilitated by these processes. I am sure DLUHC would say, “Of course we’re trying to facilitate the support”, but I am not sure that is always how it feels, particularly where local authorities are feeling incredibly pressured by their financial situation and how they deliver the most basic of services.

This almost seems like a refinement: “This is not today’s problem”—until it is; “We’ve got to sort out this issue”—refuse collection or whatever else it might be—“before we even start to think about it”. It is about how you can create the space in which that would happen.

Dr Kathy Oldham: In my view, there is an opportunity at the moment, perhaps through the Stronger LRFs or perhaps elsewhere, to work with DLUHC to understand how we can improve local resilience.

To take one example that speaks to some of the problems at the moment, we have a national security risk assessment that we know is crafted by government departments, scientists and intelligence agencies, is subject to challenge and, according to the implementation update, is underpinned by 25,000 pieces of data. Within a framework that is supported or mandated by DLUHC, we take that excellent and carefully put-together piece of work and subject it to a local re-run of the risk assessment process. We do not have access to a similar cadre of experts. I do not think we have proven methodologies, and I am not sure about the value that comes out of that local re-run of the NSRA process. It is designed to produce a community risk register.

That takes considerable local resource. There is a working group on risk at the moment that is trying to consider how we work harder using the same process. All the effort that goes into that could be used elsewhere, in talking to communities and businesses about risk. Sometimes DLUHC works really hard to work with us locally. The Stronger LRFs programme is perhaps offering a new way of doing that, a new co-design process. Equally, however, there is sometimes a holding on to how we have done things for 20 years and perhaps not taking the opportunity to examine that and see whether there is a better way to do this locally.

Q26 The Chair: You referred earlier to the blue-light services and being chair of some forum. In your experience, how do they work together and relate to other services?

Dr Kathy Oldham: I do not know whether Greater Manchester is different from other areas of the country, but we have very strong relationships between our blue-light services and as part of the wider system leadership of Greater Manchester. I have great support from my blue-light colleagues when it comes to resilience in its broadest sense. I can have robust and challenging conversations with them, and they are supportive of this agenda. But I can only speak for Greater Manchester and I do not know whether that echoes the experience of other LRFs in the country.

Lord Harris of Haringey: It would be the case in London for similar reasons, because you have coterminous services—the fire service and the police service are coterminous with the ambulance service and the Greater London Authority. But that is not the case in every other part of the country. Also, in London and I think now in Greater Manchester, a lot of effort has been made between the three emergency services to work very closely—again, to practise, exercise and work out the protocols as to who does what and how they do it.

I am not sure how far that has developed elsewhere or whether the same quality of relationships has been built with the different local government structures. You need to go beyond that to build relationships with the local voluntary and community sector and with the local business sector. They are not necessarily organised along the same regional and sub-regional boundaries as blue-light services or local government.

So there are some real issues there. If you are serious about a whole-of-society approach, you need to be engaging with business and with the local voluntary and community sector.

Q27 The Chair: A specific and slightly technical aspect of the system is that there is an emergency alert system. Do you perceive the testing of that system as sufficient?

Lord Harris of Haringey: It has only taken, I suppose, a decade for the Cabinet Office to move from having done three pilots of an emergency alerts system direct to mobile phones to getting the national alert trialled in April 2023. So I suppose we have to regard that as good practice, although a huge number of countries around the world managed to adopt

such a system long ago and have found it to be very worth while. So yes, it is welcome.

We are not necessarily using the most appropriate area-specific emergency alert system. Technically it is a cell broadcast system, so everything goes out from the aerial and reaches everyone within range. It may bounce and be received some further distance away. There are other systems. There is an SMS-based system that would target specific areas. Had that been available to the watch commander on the night of the Grenfell fire, it would have been possible to send a message to all mobile phones only in Grenfell Tower and at every level, saying, "We have changed our evacuation protocol. Please leave". No emergency alert system was available and the system was not quite as sophisticated as that.

The other problem is that, as I understand it, we are not geared up to using them for area-specific emergencies, although in principle the capability is there. If you, as the local emergency services, say, "We need to get a message out to the local community that this is happening and what they need to do", you first need to get permission from the lead government department that this is an appropriate case for an emergency alert to be issued. They will then contact the national situation centre in the Cabinet Office so that the duty Cabinet Office director can be found to authorise the alert.

I suspect that you need some rather quicker and sharper protocols to make that happen. What you have is a system that could be immensely valuable for all sorts of different emergencies, yet we are not necessarily utilising the most appropriate way of doing it, nor necessarily have we worked out the protocols so that it is used correctly and appropriately in any emergency.

The Chair: That is illuminating. Thank you.

Q28 **Viscount Stansgate:** I have the pleasure of asking a question about the longer term, to wrap things up. What would you say is the biggest challenge facing improved resilience for the UK Government? This is as long as a piece of string, I know, but what is your reaction to such a question about the longer term?

Lord Harris of Haringey: The first thing to say is that, as a nation, we have not been taking preparedness and resilience seriously enough for a long time. There needs to be a greater investment in this. It is difficult because you may not need it, it may happen outside the term of office of politicians who make that decision, and if something happens you may not be able to prove that what you did prevented it. So it is inherently difficult, but we have to start parking the philosophy that we have had about investment and the way we have run services for the last 50-odd years—a just-in-time philosophy, which, in the interests of efficiency, has squeezed out redundancy and alternatives—to a just-in-case philosophy so that you have back-up systems available.

For example, we are now all universally dependent on positioning and navigation signals. This is not just about teenagers getting lost without a map; this is about all of us. The financial system requires the timing signals from satellites. Logistics systems require timing and navigation systems, and there is shipping and so on. Apart from the fact that satellites can be spoofed and are potentially subject to cyberattacks, and that solar activity can disrupt them, we have lost the capacity for what to do if those signals are not working. How well advanced are you? We must build that “What do we do next if this is not working” philosophy into all sorts of things. That is the biggest challenge.

The other big challenge is building local and neighbourhood resilience, the way in which communities can support each other. That requires creating the right environment in which local community organisations come together and work together so that neighbourhoods can support each other. That is also a long-term endeavour—rebuilding society at the most local level.

Q29 Viscount Stansgate: It is not always easy politically to legislate on or to develop long-term planning. What advice do you have for the current Government or any future Government on how to strengthen resilience in the future?

Dr Kathy Oldham: We need to start by creating a shared and compelling vision of resilience and where we want to go. We need to take resilience into the space of preventing emergencies—disaster risk reduction—and we need to engage the whole of society in its delivery. I am not sure that as a country we have that vision that really speaks to people and starts to engage them. That is particularly important given the dynamic risk landscape. The advice or the ask of people over time is likely to change as risks change, so it is about trying to share that understanding of how dynamic this is.

Also, we perhaps need to surface resilience more clearly with debates about our risk tolerance, the trade-offs that we are prepared to make between addressing risks and other priorities. Are we very clear about the sites that we choose to build on and the risk of exposure to flooding, for example. Do we surface those debates? To what extent do we wish to invest in coping capacities and safety nets for those who are affected by emergencies? The whole debate needs to be more visible to everyone. Some of that creeps into regulation and standards. If we could align investment plans across different sectors, particularly to protect the infrastructure sector to a greater extent, we might be able to leverage some resilience benefits out of those investments.

As a long-term agenda, it is difficult. Although emergencies are usually infrequent at any specific location, when you look back over time you find that they occur fairly regularly. These emergencies are potentially increasing in frequency and perhaps in scale.

Coming back to where we have perhaps been already regarding considering resilience in all our policy decisions, the Stronger LRFs pilot is

asking locally elected members to be more accountable for place-based and whole-of-society resilience. If there is that call from a national level, perhaps we should ask this of our national decision-makers too.

Lord Harris of Haringey: Also, we should be taking the public into this process. In Sweden, there is a booklet, *If Crisis or War Comes*, which is delivered to every household. In Finland, there is the home preparedness brochure and a 72-hour emergency kit. I am told that there is a nervousness in this country about doing something similar, either on the grounds that people would be too cynical and laugh at it, as they did with the *Protect and Survive* booklet in the 1970s, or because suspicion would grow, "Why are they circulating this now? Is something about to happen which they're not prepared to tell us?"

The reality is that over the next few years we have to socialise this, maybe starting in schools and elsewhere, so that everybody recognises that preparedness and resilience is something that they can contribute and have a responsibility for as well as the public authorities.

The Chair: Thank you both very much.