

Justice Committee

Oral evidence: [Pre-appointment hearing: Standing Advocate](#), HC 1196

Tuesday 2 September 2025

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Members present: Andy Slaughter (Chair); Josh Babarinde; Pam Cox; Linsey Farnsworth; Sir Ashley Fox; Warinder Juss; Tessa Munt; Sarah Russell; Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst.

Questions 1-53

Witness

[I](#): Cindy Butts, Government's preferred candidate for the role of Standing Advocate.

Examination of witness

Witness: Cindy Butts.

Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Justice Committee, a pre-appointment hearing for the Standing Advocate. I and other members of the Committee will be asking a series of questions to the Government's preferred candidate for the post, Cindy Butts.

Welcome, Ms Butts. Thank you very much for attending. We will go straight into our questions after we have made our declarations of interest, as procedurally we have to do at the beginning of each Committee sitting.

Dr Shastri-Hurst: I am a practising barrister with No5 barristers' chambers. Otherwise, my interests are as per my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Sir Ashley Fox: I am Ashley Fox, the Member for Bridgwater. My interests are as declared on the register.

Sarah Russell: I am Sarah Russell, the Member for Congleton in Cheshire. My interests are as declared on the register. I am a solicitor—I do have a practising certificate, but I am not currently practising—and a member of some trade unions.

Linsey Farnsworth: Good afternoon. I am Linsey Farnsworth, the Member for Amber Valley and a former Crown prosecutor, and my interests are as per the register.

Chair: I am the Chair of the Committee, Andy Slaughter. I am a non-practising barrister. I am a patron of two justice-related charities: the Upper Room, for ex-offenders, and Hammersmith and Fulham Law Centre. I am also a member of the trade unions Unite and GMB.

Tessa Munt: Hello, Cindy. I am Tessa Munt, the Member for Wells and Mendip Hills. Everything is per my declaration of interests on the register, but I highlight the fact that I am the vice-chair of WhistleblowersUK, which is a non-profit company.

Pam Cox: Good afternoon. I am Pam Cox, the Member for Colchester. My interests are as declared, and I am the chair of the APPG on penal affairs.

Josh Babarinde: Hi, Cindy. I am Josh Babarinde, MP for Eastbourne. Folks can check out my interests on the register.

Warinder Juss: Good afternoon. I am Warinder Juss, MP for Wolverhampton West. My interests are on the register. I am a solicitor with a current practising certificate, but am not practising. I am a member of the GMB executive council and a member of various APPGs.

Q1 **Chair:** My first question, Ms Butts, is to ask you to introduce yourself to the Committee and to briefly explain your background and the role that

you have applied for.

Cindy Butts: I am Cindy Butts, as you know. My background is a very varied one. My experience has been forged by my mother. When my mum came to this country, she became a community activist, advocating mainly for young black men who had been arrested under the sus laws. She later extended that work to advocate for those who did not have a voice. That is the background that I grew up in, and that is what informed my choices, which I would say are not a career but a vocation. I began by being a voice for victims, advocating for them locally, mainly in respect of policing. In fact, you may know of some of that work, Chair, because I did a lot of it in the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and then extended it. That is my background.

Developing that community activism work, I made a conscious decision to work internally within organisations to try to effect sustainable, lasting change. That is when I pivoted from prodding and poking from the outside to working within institutions. I spent some time here in Parliament, as a researcher for Clive Soley and then Melanie Johnson, and then I went on to work at the Metropolitan Police Authority as an independent member. I spent about 12 years at that organisation, rising to be one of the deputy chairs, during the post-Macpherson and post-Stephen Lawrence inquiry period.

Moving on from there, I became a commissioner of the Independent Police Complaints Commission. That role was very much about investigating police officers for wrongdoing. I then spent a period of time as a commissioner at the Criminal Cases Review Commission. In between all that, I have done various other things, particularly focused on good governance, ethics and complaint handling. I still carry out one of those roles at the House of Lords.

That is my background in a nutshell. On your second question, I see the role as acting as an unflinching voice for victims and as a counterweight to the state and the agents of the state, to help victims in the aftermath of serious incidents, first to get the support that they desperately need, secondly to help them to understand the often complex and difficult processes that they will inevitably be engaged in, and ultimately to help them to get the truth and get justice. Those are the three pillars of the role, as I see it.

Q2 **Chair:** Is there anything specifically about this role that made you want to apply for it? I can see that it links to other themes in your career, but was there anything specific about the role of Standing Advocate that appealed to you?

Cindy Butts: The ability to make a difference at what will be the most difficult periods in people's lives attracted me to the role. I think that I have the right skills, experience and values to do that. In addition to that, one of the things that attracts me is working at the intersection with organisations: holding them to account while advocating for those victims. Working in that space is what really appeals to me.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q3 Chair: It seems to be a role that may have a variable workload, but could often have a heavy workload. Do you have any plans to continue or take on any other professional or voluntary work commitments?

Cindy Butts: I am glad you have raised the issue of time commitment. I responded to the advert that said that it was two days a week, and then full time at the point at which you are deployed. I do not think that that is the right way around. Given that it is a new office and there is lots to do, I think it is more important that I devote more time up front to get the role ready and the office match fit, all the while keeping my hands crossed behind my back, hoping that nothing happens. I think it is important to use that time wisely up front, then scale down to fewer days and be able to increase that at the point at which one is deployed.

I have put that to officials. I do not know whether they will agree to it, but that is the way I see it working to best effect. I have cleared my current portfolio in order to do that. In the event that they do not agree that I should have additional hours, I will obviously need to fill my portfolio, but I will make sure that anything that I fill it with is compatible with the role, in terms of conflicts, and allows me the time to give the role what it requires.

Q4 Chair: What are your main continuing time constraints?

Cindy Butts: As I say, I have cleared them. I still sit on the House of Lords Conduct Committee. My time on that is up in, I think, October or November this year. Other than that, I have odds and sods of recruitment campaigns in which I am involved. I think I am due to chair the appointment of the chair to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, and a couple of other campaigns. Other than that, my time is clear in readiness to take up this role and do it properly.

Q5 Chair: You mentioned that you have previously worked for MPs. I think you have declared, though, that you have not undertaken any relevant political activity in the last five years. Is that right? Do you have any plans to engage in political activity in future?

Cindy Butts: To the first question, that is correct, and I do not have any plans to take up any political activity.

Q6 Chair: Do you see any conflicts of interest in relation to the post that you have applied for? You have previously worked as a public affairs consultant.

Cindy Butts: None at all. Some of my consultancy work has been around advising organisations and international Governments on good governance and ethics. I have carried out investigations—for example, I carried out an investigation on behalf of the Ministry of Justice a couple of years ago. It is that type of work, but again, I am conscious of conflicts of interest, and that is something I will always bear in mind going forward.

Q7 Sarah Russell: You mentioned having cleared your diary, which is phenomenal. From what I initially saw, this job was first advertised in September, 12 months ago. I wondered what timescale you had been



HOUSE OF COMMONS

expecting the appointment to take. Obviously, you have cleared your diary, but we have not appointed you yet—although you are very impressive; I do not want to make you anxious.

Basically, has this process been stuck for a while? Does that mean you have cleared things before you perhaps needed to? Has it had implications for you—without wishing to ask too much about your personal life? This is a long process.

Cindy Butts: It has been a long and protracted process. It has been nine months. It has been rigorous, but I think it has taken far too long. In part, it worked out because I had been doing some consultancy work that came to an end, and then I entered into this process, so I was able to clear it in readiness. It has not caused me huge amounts of difficulty, but the process has been far too long. That is not unusual for public appointments, which I am often involved in recruiting to, but it is not good when they are so long.

Q8 Josh Babarinde: Thanks for sharing, Cindy, that you had worked in this place before as a parliamentary researcher and that that had been for Labour MPs. You have had a lot of experience in between, doing completely independent roles and so on. It would be really helpful, on behalf of victims—who, God forbid, you will not have to be supporting—and people of the future, to know what reassurance you can give them should there be an incident, for example, under a Labour Government. Where a Labour Government, whether it is this one or one in the future, is not acting quickly enough to get the information out to support those families, what reassurance can you give that you will challenge where it is due to get those answers and provide that support and advocacy for victims?

Cindy Butts: In absolutely every role I have ever undertaken, I have acted in an independent capacity, always putting the needs of victims first—and not just acting independently, but also pushing back where that independence has been under threat. I will give you a very real example of that.

When I was at the IPCC, I led a very sensitive investigation into the death of a young black man called Jermaine Baker in Tottenham—the same area in which Mark Duggan was killed and in which riots subsequently erupted, as well as around the country. I made a decision very early on, based on evidence, to arrest that officer for murder. It was not a decision I took lightly, but it was based on the evidence. I made a solemn promise to the family and to the communities of that area that I would keep them updated about the progress. That was significant progress, and I decided to address the community and tell them.

I came under intense pressure—media pressure, but also pressure from the highest echelons of the police. Firearms officers at the time were threatening to down tools. In fact, the Prime Minister of the day, David Cameron, waded in too, so there was immense pressure, but I knew it was the right thing to do. I also knew, because I had trusted, deep relationships on the ground, that a pressure cooker was building. There



HOUSE OF COMMONS

was a vacuum of information, and in order to avoid a riot, people needed to be informed of the progress and my commitment to ensuring that there was a transparent and robust investigation. Despite the pressure, I went ahead and I did it. I do not think there is any greater example that I could provide, at least, of acting independently and with resolve.

- Q9 **Pam Cox:** Thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. We have some questions about the role and functions of the position. The Standing Advocate is a new role, and some people will not have heard about it. How would you summarise it in a nutshell for the public?

Cindy Butts: As an unflinching voice for victims in the aftermath of major incidents—there to ensure that the families, victims and the bereaved get the support that they need, to guide them, and to allow them to take part in difficult, complex processes, so that they can play a part and receive the truth and justice. That is how I would put it in lay terms.

- Q10 **Pam Cox:** What specific powers will the holder of the role be able to exercise in relation to those things?

Cindy Butts: In terms of supporting victims, the advocate has a very clear responsibility in statute to do that—to access documents and be able to share those not just with families but with other parties as I would deem fit. That is obviously a really fundamental tenet of the role.

It is also my responsibility to ensure that organisations in the aftermath of an incident adhere to the Hillsborough charter, and that they are always acting in line with that charter. Beyond that, it is about holding organisations and institutions to account for the way in which they not only allow victims to be a pivotal voice within any subsequent proceedings, but deliver for them in terms of truth and justice.

- Q11 **Pam Cox:** On your reading of the brief so far, do you feel that those powers are sufficient? Are there areas that give you any cause for concern at present?

Cindy Butts: I guess there are a couple. I think the first is in relation to not having data controller powers. Of course, the Hillsborough panel did have data controller powers, which allowed them to access all the relevant documents. Having said that, the Hillsborough panel had the power to investigate. They were there to run an inquiry, whereas that is not the role of the IPA. It is not the IPA's role to investigate.

I do not have data controller powers, but I do have—under, I think, section 34 of the Act—gateway access to information. I recognise that families, in particular the Hillsborough families, wanted the IPA to be almost a safe holding space for documents, so as to avoid what happened in Hillsborough, which is documents being withheld, destroyed or altered. They wanted the IPA to be a holding space. That has not transpired, and I recognise that will be a concern for them.

I have to work within the confines of the law. That said, I will monitor the situation closely. If I think that those powers are not sufficient, I will certainly push the case.

Q12 Pam Cox: We will follow up on Hillsborough in a bit more detail in a moment. How is a major incident defined in the legislation, and what might a major incident entail?

Cindy Butts: The legislation is really clear: the Secretary of State declares a major incident, and a major incident has to involve death and serious injury. What the legislation does not do is spell out what serious injury means, and what it means numerically in terms of significant numbers. That is the definition of a serious incident. In practice, that could mean anything from a Grenfell-type fire to a crowd crush similar to what happened at Hillsborough.

There is another thing to say about major incidents. I am aware that discussions were had quite early on about the need for the Secretary of State to consult the IPA before declaring an incident, but that did not make it into the final Act. I am disappointed that it is not there. However, it would be my intention to have discussions with the Secretary of State to seek agreement that consultation, although it is not in the statute, will actually happen in practice. That is what I would like.

Q13 Pam Cox: You have twice used the phrase “an unflinching voice for victims”, so it is clearly uppermost in your mind. Have you had a chance to consult victims’ organisations about the kinds of services and follow-up that might be needed in the role?

Cindy Butts: I have not, because I am not appointed, but I absolutely intend to do so. In fact, I would quite like to set up an advisory group where I can be advised and informed by the experiences of victims from Hillsborough, Grenfell, the Manchester Arena inquiry and so on, as well as those who serve as representatives of and advocates for them. I would like to set up an advisory group not just to inform our work, but quite early on in the crucial set-up phase, to help us develop some of the processes and procedures.

Q14 Tessa Munt: May I ask a quick question? What is your annual budget?

Cindy Butts: I don’t know.

Tessa Munt: Do you know what the annual budget for the role is?

Cindy Butts: I don’t know what the annual budget for the role is. What I do know is that there is a £500,000-a-year figure that is very outdated. I saw that it comes from a document from 2018. I am really clear that that will be wholly inadequate to do the work that we need to do. I accept, of course, that these are public funds, but there is a lot of work that needs to be done. I suspect that there will be a need for quite a substantial budget in the early set-up phase, and that budget can be reduced later on, in what I call peacetime. Then there will be a need to scale up the budget and to draw down funds at the point at which we are deployed.

Q15 Tessa Munt: May I ask whether you have raised that? I am sure you have.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Cindy Butts: I have raised it, and further discussions will be had—fingers crossed—if I am approved in the role. I will be absolutely clear that we need the right resources and the right tools to do this role in the way Parliament intended and in a way that is deserving of victims and their needs.

Q16 **Tessa Munt:** I'm sorry; I do not want to divert from this, but you will probably have an idea of the sort of size of budget that you might want in the first year, and then in future years. Have you elucidated that anywhere? Have you suggested a figure?

Cindy Butts: I have not suggested a figure.

Tessa Munt: What do you anticipate?

Cindy Butts: I have done my own scoping exercise, but it has not been a detailed one. Of course, I also accept that there has been some preparatory work conducted by civil servants that I do not know the detail of, so it could be that more work has been done to prepare the office than I am aware of. That said, I am also conscious that I am independent, so it might be that that work does not meet what I am expecting. All I am saying is that I have done some initial scoping, and some more scoping will need to happen. I am clear that the £500,000 is not adequate, and I will be having further discussions with the Department to ensure that we get the funds that we need.

Q17 **Tessa Munt:** I do not want to press you too far, but let's ignore the set-up costs. What do you anticipate you might need in year two, or after you have set up, ish?

Cindy Butts: It is difficult to say, to be honest. My focus is not really in that middle, peacetime bit that you are referring to; my focus is on getting what we need from the start, because we need to be on a really firm footing in terms of setting up our operations. We will need to develop an operations manual. We will need a case management system. We will need to have additional advocates. We will need to have staff who are able to act as a point of contact for families, and be able to follow up on the support that they need. We will need comms support. At the moment, three staff are sitting behind me; we are the smallest arm's length body in the MOJ.

Tessa Munt: I will not press you any further, because I can see—

Chair: Yes, lots of other people want to ask questions.

Q18 **Sarah Russell:** Ms Butts, you said that there was a £500,000 figure somewhere. Where does that—

Cindy Butts: Not "somewhere"; that was in an equalities impact assessment that was done by the previous Government in 2018. That was what that figure was based on. When you look at that impact assessment, there was not much detail, because I could not work out how they even came to that figure, quite frankly. That is the only figure that I am aware of that is in the public domain, that I have found.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sarah Russell: Okay. At the moment, you are not aware of any specific budget at all. You do have three staff, though.

Cindy Butts: I have three staff, yes—three staff that I obviously will inherit. I had no part in their recruitment.

Q19 **Sarah Russell:** Has anything been said to indicate that there will be any capital budget, and anything beyond the three staff?

Cindy Butts: I have had discussions. I have placed on record what I think we need, and we will have further discussions at the point at which I am in post.

Sarah Russell: I understand that. Thank you very much; that was really helpful.

Q20 **Pam Cox:** Let me take us back to the independence of the role, as we have touched on various aspects of that. Would you be prepared to represent the interests of victims, even when those interests might not be priorities for the Government of the day? For example, if victims were calling for a public inquiry, but that was not supported by the Government, what might you do in that situation?

Cindy Butts: Represent victims' views—it is as simple as that. I will put the case, and put it forcefully. I will also point out if there are any risks in not doing what victims want, and put that forcefully. That is what I would do.

Pam Cox: Thank you very much.

Q21 **Linsey Farnsworth:** Thank you for your evidence so far. I have been really heartened to hear your determination to make sure that this office is effective; it is such an important role and an important office. I was really happy to hear you talk about truth and justice. I am just wondering what lessons you think we can take from the Hillsborough disaster, and how you, as the Standing Advocate, will ensure that the aftermath of any future incidents—we all hope they are not going to happen, but we know that they sadly will—is handled in a better way than we saw in Hillsborough, and what can we learn from Hillsborough to that effect.

Cindy Butts: I think that there is a lot we can learn from the decades of pain, anguish and pursuit of the truth that the Hillsborough families had to endure. The first is treating people with dignity and compassion, recognising the impact and the trauma that they face; being committed to ensuring that their voices are always central, so involving them; and not seeing them through the prism of the tragedy that they experienced, but seeing them as human beings who are deserving of that dignity.

The other lessons include transparency and openness, the lack of indifference to truth and to finding that truth, and making sure that families understand what has happened to them, but also that those responsible are held to account. Those are some of the key lessons. For me, and this role, first and foremost we have to be victim centred. We have to be trauma informed. That means safety. It means dignity and



compassion. It means being honest. It means allowing victims to co-design and have a say in what we do and how we do it. It means a relentless commitment to finding the truth and helping them to get the justice that they deserve.

Q22 Linsey Farnsworth: Thank you. That leads me on to the next question. We know that the Standing Advocate does not need to be legally qualified, but you clearly want to have a good impact on the way you deal with, treat or interact with victims and survivors. Part of that, I imagine, will be the need to explain to them legal processes that they are involved in, some of which may be quite complex. What experience will you draw from, and what skills do you have, to make sure that that support to those victims and survivors is firm, adequate and accurate? If there is a part of the system that is particularly complex and you feel that you might need some support in guiding those victims and survivors, are you content that that support will be available to you?

Cindy Butts: On the first part of your question, I have a lot of experience of supporting victims, particularly through complex processes. When I was a commissioner at the IPCC, for example, I supported countless families through the inquest process, explaining complex issues, and, where things were confusing, explaining to them in very layman's terms, but also helping them to understand their rights and how they can take part in such processes. I did that during my time at the IPCC for six years. I have also done it in my previous grassroots work on the ground. That is something I will make sure we are able to do.

The other thing I would say is that I also worked with Inquest when I was at the IPCC to develop a handbook. It was in paper form, a small booklet that explained complex terminology—for example, the role of a coroner, or how the CPS works. I have already been thinking about how I might develop that. I was thinking about developing an Independent Public Advocate companion—something that would be AI-driven and therefore responsive to individual needs, which victims and their families can utilise to not just understand the processes, but act as a resource for them in terms of what local services might be available to them. That is something that I would really like to see developed.

Linsey Farnsworth: And the second part?

Cindy Butts: Sorry, on the second part around support, yes, I think it is really important that we are able to access the legal support I might need and the office might need. We might have, for example, a need for legal advice on routine matters. For that, I think it would be effective and proportionate to access the Government legal department where we might need advice. But if there were contentious or sensitive issues, in particular if there was an issue where Government might itself be implicated, I would want to have recourse to outside legal counsel, with a view to ensuring that the legal advice is independent, sound and beyond reproach.

Q23 Linsey Farnsworth: Are you satisfied that you will have that?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Cindy Butts: No, I have not had those discussions yet. There is only so much I can do in the time, but again, those will form part of the early discussions that I will want to have around recourse to outside legal counsel, because it is absolutely crucial to give confidence to me, in terms of the advice we receive, but also to give confidence to stakeholders and families as well.

Q24 **Linsey Farnsworth:** This is my last question. You will be expected to prepare an annual report as part of the role, but I understand that you will also have the power to prepare a report at any point, at your discretion. In what circumstances might you need or want to prepare such a report?

Cindy Butts: That is a really good point. I see my ability to provide annual reports as a really important accountability measure in terms of what I and the office are doing, but also as a really important lever informing parliamentarians, stakeholders and the wider public on the work that we are doing on any issues that arise—but also good practice as well, I would hope. The discretion, again, is an important lever, particularly when there is a need for quick-time learning. That is, I think, its real value. When there are issues that cannot wait for an annual report, which you really need to be able to flag in the hope that change can come about and people can adapt to anything that needs to happen in very quick time, it is a really important power that I will use.

Linsey Farnsworth: I am sure you will, thank you. That is everything from me.

Q25 **Chair:** Before we move on to another subject, can I check that I understand what you have said so far? You have been very clear about your role in relation to victims, and that is clear in the Act as well—it is almost a pastoral role of supporting victims—but you also talked about how it is the Government's responsibility to determine what is a major incident and set the agenda for what any inquiry should cover. Are you content with the extent of the powers that you are being offered, or would you like to see an extension of those powers so that you could, for example, set up something equivalent to the Hillsborough independent panel if you felt that victims were not getting what they wanted from Government?

Cindy Butts: That is a good question. One of my additional powers or responsibilities, which is in the Act, is to advise the Secretary of State in the aftermath of an incident on what subsequent inquiry or type of proceeding ought to come next. I think that that is really important. Having said that, I think my core powers of supporting victims and helping them to navigate the systems and get justice are right. Even though I do not have investigation powers, which I also think is right, a key responsibility of mine will be to ensure that where an investigation or inquiry is established, it is robust, and that the voices and needs of victims are heard. That is a really important relationship that I will have with those subsequent processes.

Q26 **Chair:** What if victims were saying to you that they appreciated very



HOUSE OF COMMONS

much the support you were giving, which is clearly vital in terms of getting justice, but that what they really wanted was for you to press for quick, effective and transparent action to get to the truth of the matter? Often victims, even in the process of inquiries—either during the setting up or because of the length of time they take—say that they do not feel that they are being heard because the system has taken over.

Cindy Butts: Those are the things that I will press for change on, if they are telling me that their voices are not being heard. Let us take for example the victims of the Grenfell fire: the inquiry was set up and victims across the board lobbied the inquiry chair and members to investigate the role that race and class had in the unfolding tragedy, but the chair did not take that up and it did not form part of the terms of reference. If I am involved in a situation like that, and victims are saying to me, “These are the answers we want from this inquiry, and these are the things we think ought to be explored,” I will make that case strongly and firmly. That is my role: to ensure that they get the answers they deserve and that they are involved and engaged in those processes.

Q27 **Chair:** One last question from me, and then I will let others have a go. You have used Grenfell as a very good example: we spent many years and a lot of money, but many people involved do not feel that they have got justice from it at the moment. Would you see yourself as having a role in looking at inquiries that had already started before the Act and your appointment? Do you think you will be able to take an active role there as well, looking at exactly the sort of state failure that you have talked about?

Cindy Butts: I plan, at the very least, to do a desktop exercise to look at the inquiries that have gone before and the lessons learned, and ensure that I am taking those lessons to help inform the way in which we do our work—absolutely. In particular, if there are systemic issues that I think we need to be championing and arguing for a change in, that will be something that I absolutely expect to do.

Q28 **Chair:** Do you have those powers, or would you be lobbying to get them?

Cindy Butts: That does not need power. That is about understanding the importance of learning from what has gone before and ensuring that we know and understand it and embed that in our work, and that we are committed to ensuring that lessons of the past—regardless of what the tragedy is—are learned going forward. That does not need legislation.

Warinder Juss: Before I ask what I wanted to ask you, may I follow on from what the Chair said? You have acknowledged that you will not have investigative powers.

Cindy Butts: That’s right.

Q29 **Warinder Juss:** Do you think that not having powers to investigate will hinder your ability to get quick and just results for victims?

Cindy Butts: No, I don’t, because it is for others to investigate. The Act is really, really clear: the purpose of the IPA is to support victims and help



HOUSE OF COMMONS

them through the processes that allow them to get justice. That does not mean that we would not be involved in any subsequent inquiry or review process; of course we would, in the sense that we will advocate for families so that they get the answers they need from those processes, to ensure that their voices are heard. The Act does not allow for us to investigate. That is clearly not our role.

Q30 Warinder Juss: Will you therefore have the power to tell or ask others what they should investigate?

Cindy Butts: I will be victim-centred first. It is about what victims want. I will use the powers that I have—the statute and the moral authority of the organisation—in order to represent the views of those victims. A lot of that will depend on developing trusted relationships, whether it is with the inquiries themselves or, indeed, other statutory partners. As much as this role is about the powers, it is about being able to influence, to persuade and to use a victim-centred evidence base in order to effect change.

Q31 Warinder Juss: You appear to be very focused on what you want to achieve in your role, but it will involve the setting up of a new organisation. Do you have any experience of that? What challenges do you foresee in setting up a new organisation, and how will you deal with those? Do you have a timeframe in mind for setting it up?

Cindy Butts: Yes, I have experience of setting up a new organisation. The Metropolitan Police Authority was established in the aftermath of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry as a result of one of the recommendations. I was there from the very inception, in its shadow form, and I had an involvement in developing the processes, the procedures and the committee structure.

More recently, I chaired the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket. That was a body I set up from scratch, developing the procedures, the policies, HR and the IT systems, recruiting the commissioners and the secretariat and, first and foremost, setting the right culture, ensuring that we had the right values and the right ways of working.

I set that up during the pandemic, which had its own challenges but also its benefits. It meant that we had to work very quickly and make decisions quite quickly. It was harder to develop relationships between the team. That was one of the challenges, but I devoted a lot of time and effort to developing a one-team ethos, as well as working with stakeholders, some of whom were sceptical of us and our work. We could not meet with them face to face, so I had to develop those relationships virtually. I spent a lot of time doing that, making it clear to stakeholders and those who had been harmed by the game that we were there, we were open, we were listening, we were transparent and we had them at the heart of our work.

Q32 Warinder Juss: I read about the work that you did in relation to the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. Thank you so much for that.

We have already had a discussion about resources. You have said that you do not know how much money will be available to you, and that you have



HOUSE OF COMMONS

three secretarial staff, but have you been given any other information about what staff you will have? You mentioned earlier that you would like the ability to refer matters to lawyers. Will you have access to lawyers, within the resources that you will be given?

Cindy Butts: As you say, I do not know the budget; I just know the outdated figure, and I know that it will not be sufficient. I have argued and pushed for, and will continue to argue and push for, the funds that we need in order to do this role properly. We have three secretariat staff at present. I do not anticipate having a permanent lawyer—I do not think that that would be proportionate or provide value for money—but I intend to access lawyers for routine matters and go outside where I need to.

I am really clear that victims cannot be failed because the structures have not been properly resourced. I will engage in constructive but firm discussions to ensure that this office has the resources that it needs to do the work.

Q33 **Warinder Juss:** Dealing with major incidents can be very complex—they can involve many different authorities and vast amounts of documentation—so the need for proper resources will be really important. You will advocate for that, will you?

Cindy Butts: Yes. I am glad that you raise the issue of large-scale incidents, because we could face an incident in which there are 50 fatalities and 100 injured. Then there are the secondary victims, if you like: the business owners or shop owners who have had to close, and the wider community who are victims as well. That is very complex, and it can be further compounded.

I take this from my experience at the IPCC, where I dealt with a lot of deaths in custody. You might think that you are dealing with a single family unit, only to discover that mum and dad are divorced or that there are estranged siblings. There might be family conflict, where one set of family members are not talking to the others. They will also have their own individual needs, whether that is by dint of disability or of other vulnerabilities. They may all have their own lawyers representing them or other advocates supporting them. Before you know it, for that single family unit, you are dealing with about 10 separate members of the one family who have differing needs and might want you to engage with them separately.

It is a complex picture, and if you multiply what I have just described by 50, 100 or 150 victims in a complex situation, you can begin to understand why it is important that this office has the resources and the ability to scale up quickly.

Q34 **Warinder Juss:** This is linked to the question of resources, but to aspects of the organisation as well: the Secretary of State has said that in the sad event of a major incident, she may appoint other advocates to work with you as the Standing Advocate. Have you thought about how you may build up and maintain relationships between the different advocates in that

situation?

Cindy Butts: As you rightly say, it is the Secretary of State's responsibility to appoint additional advocates, but I expect to be heavily involved in that recruitment. Obviously, thinking about the kinds of expertise that we will need, I would expect to be involved in developing the job descriptions, in shortlisting and in interviewing. Everything from the beginning right to the end, I would want to be involved in.

What I am really clear about is that we must have a one-team ethos. The advocates must all have the right values and the right commitment to delivering for the needs of victims. That is really important, but it is also really important that families do not have a fragmented or inconsistent service that is dependent on which advocate is involved. It is really important that we have that continuity of service, shared values and culture.

Although the Act says that the independent advocates have autonomy, my job description says that I have a responsibility in terms of their management and their leadership. That is really important for me: that leadership and a victim-centred approach that is trauma-informed, with victims right at the heart of everything we do.

Q35 Warinder Juss: A final question from me, Cindy: when the Victims and Prisoners Bill was going through the Commons and the Lords, attempts were made to amend it so that the Standing Advocate would be a data controller. But you are not going to be one, so how will you ensure that you have access to all the relevant data? How will you be involved in sharing that data as necessary?

Cindy Butts: As you rightly say, I am not a data controller, but section 43 allows me gateway access to the same information that families are entitled to, and it allows me to share that. What will be important is to develop good relationships with statutory bodies and others so that it is absolutely clear what access I am entitled to.

I have already thought about the need to engage with the Information Commissioner's Office. They don't know this yet, but I would quite like them to help to develop guidelines, so that everyone is clear about the parameters and what I am entitled to, but also to give them reassurance that they can give access to documents as I need them and in a timely fashion. I am hoping that I will have those discussions with the Information Commissioner. On the back of that, I fully intend to develop a memorandum of understanding with the relevant organisations, to provide clarity on when they can share and how that ought to be done.

Q36 Warinder Juss: Presumably you will need resources to do all that.

Cindy Butts: I will need resources to be able to do that, but also to manage that information internally. We have to ensure that we treat the information we get safely and securely.

Q37 Josh Babarinde: May I make a very quick point? I think it is bonkers that you have not been given a budget or a sense of a budget, and that all you



HOUSE OF COMMONS

have been able to go on is a figure that you found from 2018. For what it is worth, while we have been sitting here, I have submitted a written parliamentary question to the Ministry of Justice asking what it intends the budget to be for the office in the coming financial years.

Cindy Butts: I am grateful for that. I guess what I would say, in defence of officials, is that they do not want to pre-empt this important process. Were it to be the case that you deemed that I was not appointable, who would want that information to be in the hands of little old me, having not been appointed? What I am saying is that I recognise that they are in a bit of a difficult position. There is only so much they can tell me. I quite wish that they would tell me, of course, so I can begin thinking and planning—but I say that to be reasonable, which I do like to be when it is required.

Josh Babarinde: It is a matter of public interest for us to know what the budget of the office is.

Cindy Butts: Absolutely. Thank you for putting in the written question.

Josh Babarinde: No worries.

Chair: But it was of your own volition, for the record.

Q38 **Tessa Munt:** I want to take you into a scenario in which there are a very large number of victims—maybe people who are deceased, people who are severely injured—and many family members. You have explained a little about how you might approach that, but I just wonder how, in practical terms, you think you would manage a situation in which you have a devastating incident.

Cindy Butts: First, I have to be honest and say that I have not worked out yet how it will actually operate in practice. That is one of the early tasks that we will need to set about doing: to develop an operations manual. How will we work with smaller incidents, and how will we work in the event that it is a large-scale incident? How will we be deployed? What are the resources that we will need immediately, on the ground? What liaison and key points of contact will need to be established between my office and the different organisations and agencies who will do that work?

I appreciate that we will need to work that out in detail, but that is why I have talked about the bedrock of this being consistency in service and in standards, so that we are able to scale up and give victims what they need at the point at which they need it.

Q39 **Tessa Munt:** I just wonder whether you can project yourself forward a little and think about the fact that different sets of victims might have very different interests, in the widest sense. You may have a tension between different groups who are victims of such an incident. How would you deal with that tension, where you may have two sets of people who want completely different things?

Cindy Butts: Victims are not a monolith. They are diverse; they will have different views and perspectives, different wants and different needs. If

they have differing perspectives, it is my responsibility to represent those differences in all their complexity.

I understand the tendency for the Government or any other agency to want a neat and tidy consensus view, all packaged up: "Tell us what people think to inform what we need to do." They want that certainty to help them make decisions. I understand that tendency, but that is not our role. It is not my role to adjudicate and to try to find a sort of majority view; it is my responsibility to represent those views in their full complexity.

When I think about this, I think about the Grenfell fire tragedy and the different views of survivors and their families in terms of the memorialisation of the tower. They have not just divergent, but conflicting views on what should happen. In such circumstances, it is my responsibility to represent and convey every single different view, because that is what my role is. It is not to find a consensus view for the comfort of the Government or any other organisation. I will hold firm to that.

- Q40 **Tessa Munt:** You have explained a little how you have already supported people through inquests and inquiries. Do you anticipate any difficulty with the lack of public funding? As an MP, I have certainly come across situations in which no publicly funded legal aid or other representation is available to victims and families, particularly at inquests, where you can have the might of a huge organisation—for example, a police force with 15 barristers—and the parents of a single victim of an injustice, as they see it. What do you feel about that lack of public funding? Do you have a view?

Cindy Butts: I have a view, and a very strong one: I think it is profoundly unfair and it needs to change. I have seen it time and again, through all the work I have done: the might of organisations and institutions against people who do not have that kind of resource to support them and to get proper legal representation. I will lend my voice to the many voices who have championed the need for that change, including yours—I know it is an issue that you feel strongly about. The pursuit of truth and justice should not depend on how deep your pockets are.

- Q41 **Sir Ashley Fox:** I have been looking at your CV, Ms Butts, and have noticed that you were a commissioner for the Criminal Cases Review Commission. That is a five-year appointment, and I think you served for two years. That was a position in which you could stand up for victims of injustice. Could you explain to me why you served only two years at that organisation?

Cindy Butts: Yes. I joined that organisation because I profoundly believe in its remit and what it is there to do: to identify miscarriages of justice. That is why I joined. You are quite right that I spent, actually, just under two years there. I did not enjoy my time there, to be frank. I did not like the culture, and I said so. I found the work isolating and I felt isolated, in part because the period in which I was there was during the pandemic, so you were literally just going through cases on your laptop. There were



HOUSE OF COMMONS

times when we had virtual meetings and committee meetings together, but by and large I found the work really isolating.

I did not like the culture, and that was about big things down to little things—and little things also matter. For example, I live in London and the office is in Birmingham. When we were not in the pandemic—before then—we were expected to spend two days, quite rightly, being a visible presence in the office, and then we would have our committee meeting the next day. You did not get recompense for hotels—no, that had to be out of your own pocket. To be fair to the previous chair, she lobbied for a change, but there was this sense of “You need us more than we need you.” That was the first thing.

The second thing for me was the isolating nature of the work. The third thing was operating almost with one hand tied behind one’s back. That is in relation to just how tightly drawn the legislation is, in terms of the test for referring cases. I know it is a conversation perhaps for another day and I am veering off, but that was, I thought, quite restrictive.

Q42 Sir Ashley Fox: How did you go about challenging that within the organisation?

Cindy Butts: In terms of the legal test, I think it was broadly known—

Sir Ashley Fox: Sorry, not the legal test.

Cindy Butts: The culture and the isolation?

Sir Ashley Fox: Yes.

Cindy Butts: I spoke about it openly with the chair and my fellow commissioners. There were times, which I will not go into the detail of, when I had to robustly challenge, and I did that. Even with those challenges, it was my intention to stay longer.

What then happened was that the ECB wanted to set up the commission. I applied for that as somebody who has cricket in her blood, who has championed issues of fairness and equality and tackled discrimination, and who has inquiry experience. I jumped at the chance to do that work, and that is why I left.

Q43 Dr Shastri-Hurst: Picking up on your experiences from the CCRC, how do you envisage doing this role? Do you consider it to be a hybrid role, a remote role, or an in-person role?

Cindy Butts: I consider this to be a knee-deep role. I expect to be out there engaging with people and with the team—absolutely not remote, but with the ability to engage remotely. Depending on the circumstances of any incident we are dealing with, it might be that victims and their representatives prefer engaging virtually, so having that as a capacity is important. It is my intention not to be in some ivory tower. It is to be out there meeting people, talking to people, and developing those trusted relationships.

Q44 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** Would the same apply to your team? Would you expect the team to be in so that you foster those relationships?

Cindy Butts: Oh yes, I have already told them that. They are aware and are up for that. I think they very much want to be out there and engaging.

Q45 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** There was one thing you identified. You have said you have had conversations about how you would like things to operate, but you have not always had answers back that have given you the full details of that—for instance, around budget and whether you would have the support of legal personnel and so on. It is going to be a very challenging job if you do not have what you require. How will you deal with that if you do not get the answers that you are looking for?

Cindy Butts: In part, it is my challenge to make sure that I make a robust business case grounded in evidence, and to be clear about what the implications are of not resourcing the office properly. I will absolutely make that case. I will use the levers that I have. I presume this will not be the first and last time that I see you all. I would want to update and engage you on the work that we are doing and the challenges that we face. I will use whatever levers I have: this Committee, my annual reports, discussions with senior officials, and of course Ministers as well.

Q46 **Sarah Russell:** The media scrutiny of the authorities' response to a major incident is often very intense, as you have already alluded to. The work of the Standing Advocate may well come under some scrutiny and potentially some criticism, including from victims' groups. How do you anticipate that you might respond to this challenge?

Cindy Butts: All of my working life, in all the roles I have dealt with, I have been under intense media scrutiny. I was the deputy chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority in my mid-20s, and we often made difficult, sensitive, contentious decisions, either with the media in the room—all our meetings were very public; there was immense commitment to transparency in that role—or camped outside it. I am used to that; it comes with the territory. I thrive in it.

I do not come out with a rash when I think of the media, and that is because I think they are incredibly important. They are an important resource in order to promote the office and the work that we will be doing. They are an important vehicle for getting the views, perspectives and needs of victims out in the open, so they are an important resource for me. They do not scare me.

That said, I read the Kerslake report of the Manchester Arena inquiry, and there were some sections of the media who dealt with those victims appallingly—doorstepping and printing their personal details. They were retraumatised by the experience they had via some sections of the press and the media. That is why I have already opened up discussions with IPSO, for us to meet and talk about how we might ensure that the press is able to do its important job but to do that responsibly in the aftermath of an incident. I hope we will have those discussions and arrive at really good

processes that will be steeped in the right values, in order to protect and give victims the dignity they deserve.

- Q47 Sarah Russell:** My key concern for you is actually not conventional media. There is also now the behemoth that is social media, which is obviously significantly less regulated, can amplify people's voices, treat people appallingly and provide all kinds of misery, as my colleagues and I all know, unfortunately. How do you think you will handle that? If you end up taking on or advocating against large corporate or other vested interests, that could be challenging, to say the least.

Cindy Butts: I thought long and hard before I applied for this job. I think it is incredibly important, but I am also conscious of the fact that it will be difficult. This is difficult, painstaking work. It requires an approach that is deeply human. It requires tenacity and courage—all of that in an environment where incidents are increasingly weaponised with misinformation and disinformation. This is not a job for the faint-hearted. I am not faint-hearted.

Sarah Russell: No, I can see that.

Cindy Butts: I know that those challenges will present themselves, and that is why it matters that I am able to build relationships with IPSO and others to ensure, for example, that the Online Safety Act is delivering in terms of my remit and my ability to raise that with organisations directly. Where that fails, being able to escalate those concerns to your good selves and to Ministers is absolutely crucial, but there is also a wider ecosystem that I would expect to tap into—those NGOs that work in this space, other charities focused on these issues, as well as, for example, the Victims' Commissioner. Those are all organisations and roles with which I will need to develop good relationships, and I will need to call on them when my advocacy may have not delivered what I need, so that we can band together to be a powerful force for change.

- Q48 Tessa Munt:** I was going to ask you about your ability to challenge authority, but I think I am fine on that; it was a question thought up a long time ago. What I would like to ask you about is the proposed Hillsborough law and the duty of candour for public servants, and how you feel that might assist you in your role. Have you had any discussions as to when you think that will happen? I think we know that we might be discussing this as a subject—as a piece of legislation—in the next three months or so. How quickly would you like that to come in to assist you in your role, if it does? That duty of candour—what do you think?

Cindy Butts: First and foremost, the duty of candour is a fundamental ethical responsibility of everyone, especially public servants. I do not know why there has been a delay, and I cannot account for it. Many weeks ago, I wrote to officials and asked for a briefing on the status of the duty of candour, because I think it is essential. I would like it to be in place as quickly as possible. That said, even without the duty of candour being in statute, I will push for it, and wherever I see it lacking, I will first and foremost challenge individual organisations. Where necessary, if that



HOUSE OF COMMONS

candour is not forthcoming, I will escalate, and if necessary, I will use my public platform to expose where I think the duty of candour is lacking.

- Q49 **Tessa Munt:** Thank you. I am going to ask one question in which I have a particular interest, which I have declared, and that is whether you are familiar with calls for an office of the whistleblower and whether you see some interaction, because it again relates to people who are raising problems. Have you any thoughts on that?

Cindy Butts: I am aware of it—some impression I made! I came and spoke at one of your events last year, so—

Tessa Munt: You did; I was not curious enough to ask you at that point. I did not expect to be seeing you here, but it is very nice that I am.

Cindy Butts: Absolutely, I fully support that. Again, that is one of the issues: while the success of this role is not dependent on it, I think it will greatly enhance the work that we will be doing.

- Q50 **Chair:** As we are asking about a lot of responsibilities that go beyond this post, I will ask you one more. Are you familiar with the campaign for a national oversight mechanism—the idea that there should be an independent body to look at whether the conclusions of inquiries or current inquests are implemented? Is that something you would support or see as having a role coming out of your work as the public advocate?

Cindy Butts: Yes, I am aware of it, and yes, I support it. There is no point in setting up these public inquiries if their recommendations are not implemented. If there is one thing we know, it is that lessons are often not learned. Having that function is really important, because otherwise it is just performative, isn't it? Unless real change emerges from an inquiry, regardless of whether it is statutory or otherwise, it will have been pointless.

- Q51 **Josh Babarinde:** I want to ask about how you view success and how you will assess success if appointed to the role. You spoke about doing an annual report, for example. What metrics will you report on if and when you are back at this Committee reporting on the work you have done, should the appointment proceed? What things do you hope to be able to say have happened?

Cindy Butts: First, it is not for me to judge success. Success will be judged by those we serve. The key tenets of that will be whether they have felt heard, whether they have been included in processes in a meaningful way and whether there has been transparency and openness. Those will be the key things that victims will judge us on. Ultimately, it will be whether lessons have been learned and actions have resulted in no other family going through what they have gone through. That is what success will be for them, but it is not for me to judge.

We will use a number of different metrics. I am sure there will be the harder-type metrics: how long did it take for us to respond to requests for support and engage with relevant organisations on that need? There will be those types of metrics around timeliness. However, there will be the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

key softer metrics that are quite difficult to measure in individuals and families who are going through trauma: "How did we treat you during those difficult moments?" That is not easy to discern, but I will certainly find a way of doing it because it is absolutely crucial.

Q52 Josh Babarinde: What forums, spaces or mechanisms will you create for victims, bereaved families and so on to hold you, as the Standing Advocate, to account?

Cindy Butts: As I said before, I am absolutely committed to developing an advisory group that can bring together victims, advocacy groups and perhaps some key lawyers who operate within this space in order for them to help us to carry out our work. I would also develop mechanisms to get feedback and, indeed, any complaints, because it is really important that we are committed to continuous learning and are able to learn from people's experiences. I will set about developing the mechanisms that will allow people to do that.

The other thing that I would say is about setting up processes and systems so that we are transparent in the way we work. I would like our website to be able to demonstrate where I have had meetings and who I have had meetings with, for example, to try to foster a culture of openness and transparency in the work and my engagement. That equips victims and other stakeholders with the information that they need to hold us to account.

Q53 Josh Babarinde: This is my final question. We have asked very many things; we have learned a lot from you and have gained a lot of insight into your experience, what is driving you and what you would do. Is there anything that we may not yet have given you the opportunity to share? Is there anything else that you would like to let us know?

Cindy Butts: No, I don't think so. We have covered quite a lot of ground. I guess I would just reiterate the fact that I have thought long and hard about this role. I do think that it is going to be a difficult one. I think I have the right values, experience and skills to do it, and to do it well, but I need the tools and the resources to be able to do it as Parliament intended and as victims deserve.

Chair: Thank you. I do not see anybody else indicating that they have a question. We have kept you for a quite a long time and have probably gone beyond the strict limits of the brief. Thank you very much for your time and for answering all our questions very frankly.

We will now deliberate in private and, as soon as we can, let you know what decision we have made. Thank you very much for attending today.