



Joint Committee on Human Rights

Uncorrected oral evidence: The role of the Independent Public Advocate (HC 1613)

Wednesday 14 January 2025

3.35 pm

Watch the meeting

Members present: Lord Alton of Liverpool (Chair); Lord Dholakia; Tom Gordon; Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws; Afzal Khan; Baroness Lawrence of Clarendon; Lord Murray of Blidworth; Alex Sobel; Sir Desmond Swayne.

Also present: Andy Slaughter.

Heard in Public

Questions 1 – 8

Witnesses

I: Cindy Butts, Independent Public Advocate; Elkan Abrahamson, director, Hillsborough Law Now, and legal director, Broudie Jackson Canter; Rt. Hon the Lord Wills.

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Examination of witnesses

Cindy Butts, Elkan Abrahamson and Lord Wills.

Q1 Chair: Welcome back to today's 41st session of the Joint Committee on Human Rights. We have been joined today around the horseshoe by the Chair of the Justice Committee, Mr Andy Slaughter, who is very welcome. We have two excellent witnesses; we hope to be joined by a third as we proceed, but we have Cindy Butts, who is the standing Independent Public Advocate for England and Wales. She was appointed to the role's first statutory term following its creation, to support victims and bereaved families after major incidents and to strengthen accountability across public bodies. Her role is the first of its kind internationally and includes the power to report directly to Parliament.

Sitting alongside her is a lawyer who is well known nationally, but particularly in the part of the world I come from, the north-west of England. Elkan Abrahamson is a director of Hillsborough Law Now. He is no stranger to this committee either, because of the inquiry that we carried out into the public accountability proposals of the Hillsborough law earlier on. He is legal director at the law firm of Broudie Jackson Canter, where he specialises in major public inquiries and requests.

Because of the public accountability Bill, which we realise was to have been debated in Parliament today and has had to be moved—of course, its Second Reading is coming up in the House of Lords fairly soon—a number of us have been following these events. I suppose I should declare a sort of interest, in that I was a Member of Parliament in the city of Liverpool at the time of the Hillsborough disaster, but the public accountability goes much wider than that. Learning from what happened at Hillsborough, everything from contaminated blood to Grenfell and many other terrible scandals that we have seen unfold teaches us lessons about the way we deal with and handle the consequences of those issues.

One of the things that came up in 2014 in a Private Member's Bill was the creation of an Independent Public Advocate, which Lord Michael Wills was involved in—and he has walked in, absolutely on cue. You are very welcome. Following that, Angela Eagle, Member of Parliament, introduced a Private Member's Bill and it led to the creation of the role that Cindy Butts has.

One of the questions we will want to ask you in the course of our short hearing is: is this role adequate, what more can be done and is it a way of dealing with the plethora of public inquiries at vast public expense? What would need to happen to change that? We will start with Cindy Butts and then turn to Mr Abrahamson and hear from Lord Wills. Can you tell us what your interest is and what you think should happen next?

Cindy Butts: I will start with the fact that I was four days into my role when, as we all know, the horrific attack took place at the Heaton Park synagogue. Immediately, the team set about preparing for whether we would be deployed, and we were in fact deployed the day after the attack

took place. That deployment has brought into sharp focus the fact that this role is not symbolic but active and live. From day one, when an incident happens, we are there to support victims and survivors, making sure that their needs are met and that, where their needs are not being met, there is an independent strong advocate for them, making sure that organisations respond to their needs.

Following a major incident, that is when the really complicated bureaucratic processes kick in. It is our responsibility, as the IPA, to stand alongside victims, bereaved families and survivors throughout those processes, making sure that their voices are heard and ensuring that their concerns and questions are answered. Ultimately, we are there to make sure that they receive truth and justice. So that early deployment has brought into sharp focus the purpose of this role.

Chair: We will turn in a moment to my colleague, Mr Afzal Khan, a Manchester Member of Parliament, who will ask you a little more about Heaton Park, but first we will go to Mr Abrahamson to add curtain-raising introductory remarks.

Elkan Abrahamson: Cindy has described very well how we see the role of the Independent Public Advocate and, to an extent, what it is not as well as what it is. It is not there to provide legal advice or healthcare, as stated in the statute. It is there to hold the hands of the bereaved and those affected by major incidents. There is potential scope for enlarging the role, and there are certainly questions over what should constitute a major incident and when the Independent Public Advocate should be involved. At the moment, the system does not provide for feedback, so, if a Minister decides not to appoint an advocate, we do not know why that decision was made, and we need to know in order to learn, when it is appropriate. I see an extension of the scope of the role, in certainly the number and type of cases that it can usefully apply to.

Chair: That is very helpful. Lord Wills, as the originator of the 2014 Private Member's Bill that ultimately led to the creation of this role, very briefly, what have we learned from that experience and what would enhance the role now?

Lord Wills: My conception of the role has changed. Originally, it came out of my experience with the Hillsborough families starting in 2009. When I devised the Hillsborough Independent Panel, which eventually produced for those Hillsborough families the justice that they had campaigned for for 20-plus years, it was clear to me that that panel and the results it produced were a series—a whole chapter—of accidents. The Hillsborough families were remarkably united in campaigning for decades, as you will know, Chair—you were there at the start.

This was an accident, but we got that justice for them, so I was keen that we should find some way of ensuring that that never happened again. When I first met the families, that is what they said. I asked them, "What do you want out of this process and the panel?", and they said that no one should ever go through what they had been through.

The Independent Public Advocate grew out of that Private Member's Bill in 2015. It was constantly repeated by me and others, such as Maria Eagle, in the House of Commons, until it finally became law on the last day of the last Government—and we have got Cindy here to do the job, which is fantastic. But it is not enough: she needs more powers but, whatever they are—they are complicated, and we can discuss that later—she certainly needs more resource to do the job. She expressed that very eloquently. Her staff is skeletal, and we do not know when these great public disasters will happen. It could be Hillsborough, Grenfell or an NHS disaster involving hundreds of people—contaminated blood transfusions, for example. How will Cindy, on two days a week, cope with all that, with no staff? It is absolutely ridiculous.

Chair: That is why this committee decided to hold this hearing, so thank you for putting it so well.

Q2 Afzal Khan: Cindy, you mentioned the terrible event at the Heaton Park synagogue. I live in that area, and it has been a huge shock for the whole country. Starting from what you said, do you have any further reflections on your first few months in office?

Cindy Butts: Yes, I have quite a few. I mentioned that the importance of our role is being there at the very start and being able to respond as soon as an incident happens, so that the organisations know that we are there to advocate independently for families and the bereaved.

On my reflections, the first thing is to recognise that the landscape is complicated and there are many players and actors within that. One of my reflections is that we have to be conscious that there are a lot of players and that it is our role to ensure that we do not duplicate, usurp or confuse what victims and families understand about the system and who is there to support them. Trying to avoid confusion is absolutely crucial.

A key reflection is that incidents do not follow the same pattern. They are all very different in how they manifest and in what victims and survivors need, and it is important to recognise the full breadth and diversity of those incidents and how that impacts on the office and our readiness to respond to them. It is about recognising that we will need to be properly resourced so that we can respond to the tragic events, such as what happened in Manchester. That was, in comparison, quite small, compared to incidents that we could deal with in the future, if they resemble something like Grenfell or the Hillsborough disaster. So it is absolutely crucial that we are resourced so that we can scale up and respond to the smaller as well as the larger-scale incidents. It is important that we do not use the Manchester synagogue attack as a blueprint for what the office needs going forward, because that will be very different in nature and scale.

Chair: That is very well put. The other two witnesses can add to that in answer to the next question.

Q3 Lord Murray of Blidworth: We know that the Public Office

(Accountability) Bill currently in the House of Commons is the introduction of the duty of candour on public authorities and public officials in dealings with inquiries and investigations. In your view—we are interested to hear each of your views—are the provisions of the Bill adequate to prevent the cover-ups seen in previous incidents?

Elkan Abrahamson: No, in a word. There are a few issues. First, the Public Office (Accountability) Bill is stage 1 in a process. We need a change of hearts and minds. The Bill provides for codes of practice for training and education. There is a long process to persuade people, not just in public bodies but generally, that there comes a point when protecting your colleague has to stop. That is what it boils down to.

There is also a substantial issue with the Bill as it stands with regards to a carve-out for security services that has not yet been resolved. If it is not resolved, in that area at least it will not do enough to protect the public.

Chair: As we meet today, that issue is being discussed in Downing Street, so we will keep watching that space.

Lord Wills: This is a very good question. The intention of that part of the Bill is admirable. Of course people should tell the truth. There has always been a common-law duty of candour, and this puts it on a statutory basis. But the key thing is to try to engineer a cultural change in these organisations, so that they realise that their duty is to the public and to tell the truth, which has so seldom happened in the examples. Mr Abrahamson has represented all sorts of victims of these disasters, and he will know better than me how difficult it is to penetrate the defensive walls that these organisations build around themselves.

That is what this part of the Bill is meant to change: it is meant to introduce a new culture of openness. It is unbelievably difficult to do this with public sector organisations. The committee might want to talk to Jeremy Hunt, who, when he was Health Secretary, had a really commendable initiative to try to introduce into the health service a culture of “no blame”, which is what has dramatically improved the safety records of airlines. Many years ago they introduced a culture of no blame—something goes wrong, everyone is open, there is no blame; they try to work out why it happened and then to put it right. Jeremy Hunt tried to introduce this into the health service and I recommend that you get him in front of you and ask him how that has gone. It has not got very far, for all sorts of complicated reasons.

It is very difficult, this. It is an admirable aim but is not necessarily going to work, as it is currently framed. Personally, I would like to see much greater protections for whistleblowers, which would dramatically increase the incentive for people to observe this duty of candour. Currently whistleblowing protections are very weak and we need to improve them. The Government are not doing enough, in my view, but if you just think of Hillsborough there cannot have been nobody within the South Yorkshire Police seeing the disgraceful behaviour that was going on. It

needed only one person to feel sufficiently protected to tell the truth about that disgraceful behaviour and those Hillsborough families would not have suffered for 30 years or more. But there was not the protection for them and there still is not the protection. If you look at the awful example of Josie Stewart in the Foreign Office with the disgraceful behaviour of Dominic Raab about the Afghan refugees, you can see how weak those protections are. To make that duty of candour work, in my view, we need greater protections for whistleblowers.

Cindy Butts: I really am very supportive of the Bill. It is a momentous step forward. Of course, I accept that it is not perfect and will not be a panacea, but it does help. I had the privilege of sitting with the Hillsborough families at Second Reading and I know what the Bill means to them. That is not to say that it cannot be strengthened, and it should be strengthened in respect of the security services. I would like to see the IPA mentioned in the Bill. It is a fundamental mistake to not mention it. On the one hand, there is candour and, on the other, there is my role, which is there to deliver advocacy. They are part of the same architecture about delivering justice and truth-seeking. The fact that the two are not mentioned together in the Bill weakens the Bill, so that certainly is one of the changes that should happen.

Chair: It is not too late for us to make representations about the provisions of the Bill. I am not pre-judging what the committee may decide but we are listening very carefully to what you have to say. We have not had Second Reading yet in the House of Lords so there will be opportunities to raise these points. There is another question, though, on the provisions of the Bill.

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws: I think Ms Butts wants to finish—

Cindy Butts: I do want to come in with one other area that at the moment is a big legitimacy gap. It has taken 36 years to get to this point where we can legislate for candour, and that comes on the back of a hard-won victory for those families. I believe that those families should be hardwired and written into this law so that they have a part to play in ensuring that it goes from being in statute to being lived in practice, in real time. That is why I have made suggestions, which you will see in my written submission, that they ought to be present within the Bill so that they can inform and influence the way in which the duty of candour is delivered within public sector organisations.

Chair: Thank you; that is a very helpful addition. We have a further question on the Bill itself, and I am going to turn to Mr Slaughter to ask it, and ask you, Ms Butts, to come in first in the replies.

Q4 **Andy Slaughter:** Thank you, Chair. I was just looking at the amendment paper for Report in the Commons. That is a very weighty document, which shows how much people want to put into the Bill that is not in there already. We should take as a compliment to the Bill that it has huge support as it is; it is just that there are further changes to be made. As you say, the other area, apart from duty of candour, that features

strongly in the Bill is the issue of legal representation and funding for that, the aim being to ensure in some way equality of arms between the parties. This question is to any of you who wish to answer: how far do you think that the Bill in its current form achieves that—getting that balance right between the state on the one hand and victims and their families on the other, whether that is at inquiries or inquests?

Elkan Abrahamson: I will start on that and also cover a few other points. Ironically, one of the versions of the Bill did include the IPA. That was the second version of the Burnham Bill—I think this was at your request and Maria Eagle's request—but the IPA was created before the government version of the Bill was drafted and I think they forgot about you at that point.

Andy Slaughter: Maria has tabled an amendment to that effect.

Elkan Abrahamson: Whistleblower protection is needed, absolutely, because what the Bill does is impose sanctions on those who fail to tell the truth; what it does not do is offer protection to those who do not fail to tell the truth. The government response to that is, "Well, it is a different department. The Department for Business and Trade is looking at whistleblowing", so we are trying to get to speak to that department. I do not think we will get substantial provisions in this Bill but perhaps there will be another Bill with an office of the whistleblower.

In the version we had, there was really a nuts-and-bolts parity of arms system, where the coroner could say to all the parties, "How much are you paying your lawyers? This disparity isn't right. Why is this happening?" That did not get through and we just have the idea of parity.

One of the problems is that the Government have no figures at all on what public bodies are paying their lawyers. They have just never collated those statistics. They have undertaken to collate and share that information—this is a process that is going to take some time—so that we can have the information and identify disparities. From the information I have, you will find, for instance, a barrister acting for a local authority being paid roughly five times what a barrister is paid under the legal aid system—both out of public funds.

Baroness Kennedy of The Shaws: I have always complained about it.

Chair: Would you be able to provide us with some examples of that so that the committee, if it wished, could write to the Lord Chancellor and pursue that issue specifically?

Elkan Abrahamson: It is very limited because it is very hard to get that information, but yes.

Chair: We can press the Government for that information, so it would be helpful if you can give us more on that. Would other colleagues like to quickly come in on this before we turn to Sir Desmond Swayne, who has the next question? Ms Butts?

Cindy Butts: I fully support the provisions in the Bill. I think they are much needed. It is a travesty that families walk in with grief, whereas organisations walk in with armies of lawyers, and this provision will help to deal with that. That said, there is an issue around the lack of transparency in terms of what public bodies are spending on their legal provision. That is why I have suggested that that gets written into the law so that they are required to provide aggregate data on what they are spending, so that we can test over time whether or not the law is actually working. That is really important.

I know Elkan has just said that there has been an agreement that the Government will move towards that, but I would like to see that in the Bill because otherwise we know that over time these grand and well-meaning commitments to doing this might slip. I would like to see it in there so that it truly happens.

Chair: That is very helpful too and Mr Slaughter has already pointed to some of the amendments in the Commons but, in due course, if these are things that you would like the committee to pursue, we are entitled to present amendments. There is still just about time for this committee to do that if suggestions are made to us. I leave that invitation with you. Let us go to Lord Wills and then to Sir Desmond Swayne.

Lord Wills: Very quickly—I am aware that we may not be quorate any more and will have to conclude—on the parity of arms: obviously, there is an admirable intention there. There are problems with it, not just to do with cost. What I have just heard from my colleague on the left here is what should have happened in the Bill if you wanted parity of arms.

The way it is phrased at the moment, it will potentially cost huge sums of money because every single person who could claim to be bereaved—with Hillsborough, it could be over 200—gets legal advice, and then every family gets a legal advocate. It is not the money that is the main problem; the problem is the delays that will be caused. That is crucial for these families, who have been suddenly bereaved and are suffering intense trauma and grief from that bereavement. More than anything else, they want the truth of what happened to their loved ones—why it happened—and they want that truth quickly. But it drags on for years—decades for Hillsborough, and seven or eight years and counting for Grenfell—and every single thing increases their trauma and grief, because there is no closure for them. That is the problem with the Bill as drafted.

On the role of the Independent Public Advocate, that whole process could be shortened with an appropriate role, funding and resource for the Independent Public Advocate to be part of that mix of how we understand why what happened happened and get closure for these bereaved families. The problem all along is that those bereaved families have never been front and centre of the process: the state takes it over from the moment the disaster happens. It is completely wrong.

Cindy Butts: But they are now.

Lord Wills: They are, because of you.

Cindy Butts: They are because the Independent Public Advocate exists. We are the only body that is there to represent the collective voices of victims and survivors. We have a hotline to Parliament and to Ministers, where we can raise those concerns in real time—not later on down the line in years to come—and bring attention.

Lord Wills: You have to have the funding and resources for that.

Cindy Butts: We do, and I am fighting for that.

Chair: We will come back to resources in a moment.

Sir Desmond Swayne: Cindy, why do you want the Secretary of State to be under a statutory duty to consult you before declaring a major incident?

Cindy Butts: I want that because, at the moment, it is the sole responsibility of the Secretary of State to declare an incident and then decide whether to deploy me. My experience of a little over three months shows me that people have been making representations and asking questions: “Why were you deployed to the Manchester synagogue attack? Why weren’t you deployed to the Huntingdon train attack? We don’t understand”. I can play an important role in being able to ensure that the Secretary of State has to give written reasons for why I am deployed, and I should be able to make representations when an incident happens to say that I should be deployed. They can accept or reject that but, whatever decision they make, they should then give a written rationale for that. That would aid transparency, aid openness and protect Ministers, and it would also protect my office, because people ask me questions about why one thing and not another. It would bring in an element of fairness and transparency.

Q5 **Chair:** I will turn to resource and ask all three of you to comment on that. You have said publicly that you are underresourced. It would be helpful to the committee to know what resources you have and what you think you probably would need to do the job in the way you described.

Cindy Butts: At the moment, we have three members of staff, all full-time, and me—as you know, I am mandated to be two days a week, but I go up to full-time when there is a deployment. So I am currently full-time, but at some stage I will revert back to two days a week. I am clear that our challenge is not just to deal with the current deployment but to set up proper foundations for this role so that we can be prepared for incidents, when they happen, particularly where they are larger in scale. We need to be able to scale up.

Of course, there might be incidents where we will manage a number of different incidents at the same time. I am clear that we do not have the resources we need. I have just brought in a chief of staff, and her first task is to do a proper sizing and scoping exercise so that we can understand the future needs of the organisation. That work is currently

under way. I will not put a figure on it now, because it is really important that it is formed by that evidence base of the sizing and scoping. But that work is under way, and it will be completed reasonably quickly. I will be happy to report back to you in due course.

Chair: That would be helpful.

Lord Wills: I wanted to pick up on Sir Desmond's point. The problem, looking at when one of these big public disasters happens, is always that Ministers and officials have a vested interest in closing it down as quickly as possible, however they do it. We saw that over and over again, with postmasters and contaminated blood, for example. Successive Ministers, from both parties, just wanted to push them away and close them down

So, in my view, it is really important that we have a locus for the Independent Public Advocate, who has no other remit than to represent those who have suffered and been bereaved, and to push for it. Once that person—Cindy, or whoever it will be in future—has that locus, it becomes very difficult for Ministers and officials to resist it. But my experience shows how much Ministers and officials want to resist doing the right thing. I set up the Hillsborough Independent Panel, and this is not the place to detail exactly how much opposition I had in Whitehall and from all my colleagues in Government at the time—honestly. It was for different reasons, but that is why we need this.

Elkan Abrahamson: On the resources issue, it is important that there is flexibility and agility. I am sure Cindy Butts does not want an office of 50 people twiddling their thumbs waiting for the next major disaster, and it is important that the funds are available as needed but not available necessarily just to waste.

Why should there be consultation? The duty of consultation should be with the bereaved or those directly affected, who may—and probably mostly will—opt to go via Cindy Butts, but they should have the option of saying, "Actually we don't want the IPA. We want to do this ourselves". I am sure Cindy would respect that. But the reason consultation and reasons are necessary is that, as Cindy says, we do not really know how this works at the moment. I do not understand why an appointment has been made in one case and not another and, if we can understand that, we can be more rational in our requests in the future. We will see how the system works and perhaps see whether there is justification to extend the scope.

The idea of tying the need for an IPA to the number of deaths is probably misconceived. It should be associated with the issues that arise from the incident, rather than the almost arbitrary outcome of how many people happen to die as a result of that incident. There is room for scope extension there.

Cindy Butts: I absolutely agree. I do not want our office—and it would not be right or needed for our office—to be the size of the Home Office, for example. I completely agree. I disagree on the IPA not wanting to sit

around doing nothing. There is no “doing nothing” stage. Let us be clear: there is no peacetime in this role, because incidents have long tails. There is an inquiry process, there might be an IOPC investigation, there might be criminal proceedings and there is the inquest. These incidents have incredibly long tails, and we must be there with victims from the start until the finish.

Chair: That is a graphic and good way to put it.

Q6 **Lord Dholakia:** Cindy Butts, are there any key recommendations you would make to strengthen the role of the Independent Public Advocate?

Cindy Butts: I have already talked about the issue of consulting the IPA. That is really important. I also think, and this comes back to something that Elkan said—it is in my evidence—that trauma does not know numbers. There is a need for “exceptional circumstances”, so that the IPA is able to support victims in their time of need when there may well have been just a single death, as opposed to significant numbers. I have suggested that and in fact, after I submitted my evidence, Dame Anne Owers completed her review into the death of Harry Dunn. She recommended that the IPA ought to be given “exceptional circumstances” provisions, and I fully support that. The Government have accepted her recommendation, in the sense that the recommendation is framed so that they should consult on the idea and they have agreed to do so. They are just working up that consultation, but we absolutely ought to have that ability to help families where there is perhaps just a single death.

Chair: That is a very interesting distinction you have made.

Lord Wills: Very briefly, I want to support that. It was not in my original conception of the IPA at all. I wanted to differentiate that role from a coach crash that killed 60 people, or whatever. However, I have changed my mind about that and one of the reasons is the Prime Minister's speech at Second Reading in the Commons, where he made it quite clear that this was about addressing state failures. Cindy has just given a good example of that: it could be state failure in the case of one person, but it is state failure that should be the deciding factor—not the number of deaths or the fact that it is a public disaster, or whatever it was, as I first thought it should be, but state failure.

Cindy Butts: I am grateful for that support but the one thing I would say is that, if it is agreed, the criteria should be drawn quite tightly. What I would not want is for us to spread ourselves too thin. We are there to support victims and survivors following major incidents, so they would have to be drawn very carefully—not so tightly that there is no incident that could fall within it, but not so wide as to mean that we are spread too thin and cannot do our core purpose, which is supporting victims following major incidents.

Chair: You are obviously giving quite a lot of thought to those criteria.

Cindy Butts: I have given it a lot of thought, yes.

Chair: If you are able to share that with us, Ms Butts, I think that would be helpful to the committee.

Cindy Butts: I am happy to. Thank you.

Elkan Abrahamson: I do not think I really have anything to add. I agree with both witnesses.

Q7 **Chair:** Let me conclude, if I may, with a last question to each of you. You may want to make an additional remark. Over the more than 36 years since the Hillsborough disaster, the Hillsborough families have been let down again and again. I do not think any of us around this horseshoe would want to be part of anything that we felt was yet another disappointment or had let them down. Are you confident that with improvements being made to what you have all said is a good Bill—I agree with you, and it is good that it has been placed before Parliament—it will do what we all hope it will, or do we have to make the changes that you have alluded to during this afternoon? Let me start with Mr Abrahamson.

Elkan Abrahamson: I have a real concern over the treatment of the security services. They are effectively being given a carve-out from their duties under the Bill. The families are meeting the Prime Minister as I speak. The latest proposed government amendment was shown to us this afternoon and I am afraid it does not do the trick. Unless they are prepared to reconsider, my answer would be no, irrespective of the other issues that might arise.

Chair: Ms Butts, do you want to say a last word to the committee? I think Mr Slaughter would also like a supplementary. Do you want to do that quickly, because we are going to lose our quorum?

Q8 **Andy Slaughter:** My other question was about a national oversight mechanism. I can shortcut this, because I think you are probably all in favour of that mechanism. Do you see that the Independent Public Advocate may have a role in doing their own whistleblowing if they do not feel that an inquiry has been properly executed in that way? That is a major flaw, I think we would all agree, where you have good recommendations that do not get implemented. Do you think you should have a role in that or, when decisions are taken by inquiries—I am thinking all the way back, for example, to the Leveson inquiry for victims of press intrusion—could you have a role in saying, “This is something that politicians may need to address, even if they do not find it convenient”?

Cindy Butts: The short answer is yes. As the statute stands at the moment, I actually think we have the ability to do that—to draw those issues out and raise them where recommendations have not been implemented, as well as raising systemic issues that reoccur over and over again. We have that ability now and it is what I intend to do where we come across those instances.

I am in full support of the oversight mechanism. At the moment, when recommendations are not being fulfilled and when there is inertia, it is left to the families and survivors, in their grief, to have to fight for answers about whether recommendations have been implemented and to try to drive change. That is wrong.

Lord Wills: I also support it very enthusiastically, because everyone round this table has their own examples of how things just drift on through Whitehall as Ministers come and go. Worthwhile recommendations just drift off into eternity, while the grieving, bereaved people wonder what has happened to stop the sort of thing that happened to their loved ones ever happening again. This goes back to the question of resource. It requires significant resource and an oversight mechanism. The IPA is an obvious vehicle for it; representing the bereaved needs resource. It needs monitoring on a daily and monthly basis, and so on. It needs resource.

Elkan Abrahamson: In that respect, I would support the existence of an independent oversight mechanism. I would urge the committee to listen to Deborah Coles from INQUEST, who has been lobbying for this for decades.

Chair: That is a very helpful footnote to add to those remarks.

I draw the proceedings to a conclusion with this thought. This committee looked at the proposals for a Hillsborough law. We followed carefully what had been happening with the Hillsborough Law Now campaign and the role that the families have played with great admiration. We called witnesses before this committee, including Andy Burnham and Bishop James Jones; Mr Abrahamson gave evidence to us as well, as did many other people. We were able to play a very small part but it was a part that was, I hope, helpful in that we recommended going forward with some form of public accountability. That included not just the duty of candour but the things that have been talked about this afternoon on the level playing field, and the need to engage with and involve those who are victims in the kind of circumstances that you, Ms Butts, have rightly alluded to today. We must never lose sight of those who have often been treated by institutions with utter contempt.

It is the job of committees like this to try to push the margin out to bring about some kind of reasonable change. We have legislation before Parliament at the moment. I hope that this committee is able swiftly to make some small contribution to that debate and, in doing so, we will rely heavily on what you have said to us in evidence this afternoon. With those words, I thank all three of you for coming. The proceeding is now closed.