

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: Propriety, ethics and the wider standards landscape in the UK, HC 899

Tuesday 21 April 2026

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Members present: Simon Hoare (Chair); Markus Campbell-Savours; Sam Carling; Lauren Edwards; Peter Lamb; John Lamont; Richard Quigley; Luke Taylor.

Questions 225 - 309

Witnesses

I: Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent, Baroness in Waiting (Government Whip) and Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office; Ellen Atkinson, Interim Director General for the Propriety, Ethics and Constitution Group; and Simon Madden, Director of Propriety and Ethics.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent, Ellen Atkinson and Simon Madden.

Q225 Chair: Good morning, colleagues, and good morning to our witnesses as we continue our inquiry into standards, ethics and integrity in public life. Lady Anderson, we are delighted to see you and congratulations on your appointment as, among other things, Minister for Standards because that is an encouraging move. Welcome to Ellen Atkinson and Simon Madden also from the Cabinet Office.

I will kick off the questions. I think we all know the importance of the Nolan principles, we all know why standards in public life are important and we know the reason for an effective standards system. Minister, could you set out for us in headline terms your assessment of where you think things currently stand and what you identify as room for change, enhancement, alteration?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Thank you, Chair. First, I would like to thank the Committee for inviting me. I have been in post seven weeks today and I expect to be in front of you on many occasions. I really want to work collaboratively with the Committee and with



everyone in this space. I think there is a significant amount of work to do. From my perspective, I consider this to be a once-in-a-generation moment for a stocktake. We have not had a dedicated Minister for Standards, which I am, and therefore it gives us the opportunity to reflect on where we have come from 31 years post Nolan principles, and to see what is unfinished business and what we need to take forward. The work of your Committee suggests that there is significant unfinished business.

I am reviewing every aspect of the standards landscape that is in the purview of the Government. Obviously there are other elements of standards that relate to this building, of which I am hugely passionate. What I seek to do is to secure the foundations of our democratic institution and start to rebuild trust and confidence.

Like many of you, I door-knock—with my husband—every week. The joys of being married to an MP mean that even from the other end I still campaign weekly. I campaigned during MPs' expenses, I was door-knocking at various points where there have been challenges, and on that basis I am as aware as you are of what the general public think of us collectively. I also am forever in awe of the people who work in this building and across Whitehall for what they seek to do. An overwhelming majority of us come into public service with one goal. Some members of your Committee will know this, but there are definitely easier ways to live your life and make a living than the one that we have all chosen, but we must make it clear that we are doing this from a sense of service.

From my perspective, nothing is off the table but action needs to be taken as we move forward together in a considered way to protect against the unintended consequences, some of which we have seen, but also to make sure that we get this right. We do not get to do this very often as a group of politicians. Outside the members of your Committee, I think many of our colleagues will not necessarily consider these issues in the round. We have this opportunity and I have the Prime Minister's commitment. The fact that I have been appointed makes it very clear that there is now space to build on the significant things that the Government have done already in the standards space since we came into office in 2024. We will allow some of them to bed in, but we also need to see what else we need to do.

Q226 Chair: An American governor, Governor Cuomo, once opined that politicians campaign in poetry and govern in prose. In the lead-up to the last election your party said that it had a plan to clean up politics so that by the end of its first term, "People don't just feel better off, they can see that politics is working for them." How is that going?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I remind you that we are not even two years into a Government. From my perspective, a Labour Government is a very unusual thing, and therefore I am hungry for change and to deliver for the people of the city that I live in, but also for our country. If you look at things that we have done in this space since



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we came into power, there does need to be some time for this to bed in, but we have revised and reissued the ministerial code twice. We have granted the Independent Adviser the ability to launch investigations without the Prime Minister's permission. We have launched a monthly register of Ministers' gifts and hospitality. We have new financial sanctions for serious breaches of the ministerial code and business appointment rules. We have closed ACOBA and transferred its powers to the CSC and the Independent Adviser. We have reformed CSPL and created the EIC. The House of Lords (Hereditary Peers) Act has received Royal Assent. Further legislation is promised on the removal of disgraced peers. The Government have asked the House of Lords Conduct Committee to review the Lords code of conduct and the Government have committed to the principle that second jobs for MPs should be banned with very limited exception. We have introduced the duty of candour legislation.

That is all within our first term. The reason I have done the list, much as a list can be irritating, is that it is easy in a world that moves as quickly as ours to forget what has already been done, and especially for us, because we are always worried about what is coming next and we live in such volatile times. The Government have already done significant amounts and seek to do more.

Q227 **Chair:** Does anybody in the Cabinet Office and/or No. 10 do any public perception tracking on these issues? Do people feel better about politicians, the same, not as good?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: There is a great deal of public information available about that. I am sure we will touch on some of those statistics, as Doug Chalmers in the Ethics and Integrity Commission touched on when he was here. I will have to come back to the Committee on the polling.

Q228 **Chair:** You mentioned you had been a Minister—

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: With these responsibilities.

Chair: —for Standards. You have obviously given considerable thought to it and it is demonstrable that it is an issue that you care about. If I was a journalist and stuck a microphone under your nose and said, "Now, Lady Anderson, what is the one thing in the seven weeks that you have noticed really needs dramatic attention—what is the thing that has negatively surprised you?", if there is nothing—

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: There is always something. There is a reason why we have asked the EIC to look at lobbying. That is where there is clearly unfinished business with a piece of legislation that has not delivered what anyone thought it would deliver. That also demonstrates to me why we need to ensure that whatever we bring forward works because of the unintended consequences of that, whether that is the VAT registration or others.



The other thing, from a very personal perspective, that has been addressed in the Rycroft review, and now we need to look forward to responding to, is the funding of think-tanks. Members of the Committee may not be aware, but I used to run HOPE not hate. That is an important thing to put on the record and it is a very political environment, a political space; who is funding it and the impact they are having is incredibly important. The Rycroft review has made clear that it is something we need to look at. That is also an important thing for me personally.

Q229 Chair: You have mentioned think-tanks there with lobbying. Have you a word or two on how that might encompass in a helpful way charities and the work that they often do in the lobbying sphere, and also this rather peculiar thing that we have called “friends of” who will often be providing briefing information, hospitality, trips, suggested parliamentary questions, interventions for debates and so on? I think I am correct to say that they are doing it in effectively a totally unregulated and uninspected realm, but please correct me if I am wrong.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I think there are responsibilities on parliamentarians to declare their engagements. This is where standards becomes challenging because I am responsible for Government standards. For the actions of parliamentarians, we have two very clear codes of conduct and standards regimes but the general public would not necessarily think about that. I am governed by two as a Minister—the Lords regime as well as the ministerial regime—but to the general public there is a requirement of clarity and a lot of what we are talking about also comes back to the communications. It is why I am so pleased that EIC has that expanded remit.

On your specific points, it is not that there is not a huge amount of advice and opinion on what we should do in the lobbying space, including your previous report from 2024, which we will include in our thinking when I get the EIC report; but someone needs to look back and consider every part of this in the round, which is what we have asked Doug Chalmers and the EIC to do. That has to include charities and has to include everybody, but there are conversations that are other people’s responsibilities in this building.

Q230 Chair: Just for transparency and clarity, I gave evidence to that EIC inquiry yesterday afternoon.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I am up next week.

Chair: If they are as gentle with you as they were with me, it is not a thing to—

Simon Madden: I want to highlight as well that, as the Minister said, there are lots of intersections—lots of bodies covering different responsibilities, and one of the important features of the EIC is that it has a formalised network now where it convenes several regulators, which allows it to not only gain intelligence on what is happening across all



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those standards regimes but also use that as a way of sharing best practice. It is also a way to communicate that intelligence to Government.

Q231 **John Lamont:** I want to start by following up on the question the Chair asked about the Labour party's desire to "clean up politics." In light of what has been happening in the House of Commons in the last few days with Mandelson and Doyle and everything else, you must think you have pretty much failed on that front.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I have been in post for seven weeks. Some of these things predate me but in terms of—

John Lamont: I am not suggesting you are responsible for Peter Mandelson's appointment or Doyle's appointment but the culture is set by the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister was responsible for your manifesto at the last election, so in terms of cleaning up politics, how is it going?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I think everyone would accept that there have been significant challenges, which I and other colleagues are now having to deal with. There is a reason why I am now looking at everything in the round to make sure that our processes are fit for purpose in the 21st century, and why some of the things that we believe—as the Chief Secretary to the Prime Minister has made clear on several occasions in your Chamber, some of the things that we were not aware of in terms of process and have been surprised about definitely in recent days, have had to be changed very quickly. I want to make sure that we are looking at all of those in the round about how we come forward.

I will also say, though, with the greatest of respect to every political party, everyone in every Government has faced challenges, whether those are devolved Administrations or in Westminster. While all of us would seek to ensure that the best of us are put forward for public service, that does not necessarily mean that is always the case, and there are always some challenges. I want to make sure that the regimes that we have going forward do not legislate for the exception—we need to have processes in place to deal with them—but that there are very clear standards, practices, based on Nolan, that take us into that space so that everyone knows what their responsibilities are when they enter public service for the first time and they are reminded repeatedly.

On where we are, to answer your question, I don't think anyone would want us to be where we currently are. My job is now to look at everything in the round to see what we need to do next.

Q232 **John Lamont:** Is it not ultimately the Prime Minister who is responsible for the standards of the people he appoints as Ministers and the people he appoints to represent our country?



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Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: He is absolutely responsible for the people who he appoints and he appointed me, but I also have my own responsibilities about my behaviour and how I act and that I comply with everything that is put in front of me.

Q233 **John Lamont:** Does it raise questions in your head when the person responsible, the Prime Minister, appoints people like Peter Mandelson to senior positions on behalf of our country?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I think the Prime Minister has been very clear about Peter Mandelson's appointment and he now has taken full responsibility for that appointment and wishes that he had not done it.

Q234 **John Lamont:** Did it raise any questions in your head at the time, given what all of us know about Peter Mandelson?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: To step back a moment, Peter Mandelson was a Member of my House at that point. I think that that was a political decision that was made and the Prime Minister is clearly now having to look at things in the round in response to that appointment. I would remind members of this Committee that there were lots of people who welcomed Peter Mandelson's appointment from across parties at that point.

Q235 **John Lamont:** Did you?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I was a senior Whip at that point. All of my work covered the Cabinet Office, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Those were my responsibilities in the Government. In terms of appointments such as the ambassador to America, those were far outside my pay grade.

Q236 **John Lamont:** As a Labour peer, as a Labour Whip, did you raise concerns about Peter Mandelson's appointment? Most people knew—I have been in politics for 20 years and throughout those 20 years I have known that Mandelson was a bad penny. And you did not raise any concerns, either internally or externally?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: No, I personally did not raise concerns. It was not for me to do so, but for the record Peter Mandelson did both extraordinary things and appalling things. I was not aware of the appalling things that he had done and I was not aware on a personal level of his associations with Epstein because that was not something that I had personally followed in the media.

Q237 **John Lamont:** Apart from being a liar and having to resign from Government twice.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Of course I was aware that he had resigned from Government twice but I entered Parliament in 2015. I stood for Parliament for the first time when I was 30 in 2010. I was not a member of the last Government. In fact, when we came to power in 1997



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I was not eligible to vote for the last Government, so in terms of my personal responsibilities at that point, let me be very clear about what I was and was not responsible for when I was 17 years old.

Chair: I am sorry, not because you have made me feel very old because I was a candidate in the 1997 general election—I was a very young candidate, not quite 17 but a very young candidate and very wet behind the ears. We have taken a lot of evidence from a variety of witnesses on what is an important issue. I am quite keen that we deal with—

John Lamont: Apologies, Chair; I will go back to my—

Chair: No, no need to apologise but I think we have had a little canter around that issue. I want us now to concentrate on—

John Lamont: Sorry, I just thought it was important to set the tone.

Chair: That is why I did not intervene.

Q238 **John Lamont:** Minister, the CSPL raised concerns about the complex and confusing system based on conventions, lacking independence and subject to the whims of the Executive back in 2022. How are the Government addressing that?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: The CSPL has now been given an expanded remit under the Ethics and Integrity Commission and we need to give them time to bed in to see how comfortable they are. They have additional resources and additional staffing and I want to see how their expanded remit works in the round. You will appreciate that as we speak I am exploring each part of the standards framework to see what changes are needed where. One of the issues that we always have in the midst of a political crisis is that we may overreact and change things that might not need to be changed at this moment. I want them to have time to bed in to see what needs to come next.

Q239 **John Lamont:** For the record, this is one of the suggested questions. In opposition the Labour party said that “bad chaps” are a feature of our political system that the current standards regime is ill-equipped to deal with and committed to “replace the weakened standards regime with a new architecture”. Has this assessment changed and if not, why have the Government not sought to establish this new architecture?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I suggest I am a chapess rather than a chap, but in terms of the action taken we have reviewed all the architecture and we have made significant changes, as I outlined at the beginning. That does not mean that there is not further to go. One of the things I announced was that we would be bringing forward further legislation about my Chamber and about retention of peerages. There is still significant work to be done but we have made a start, as I said at the beginning.



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Simon Madden: To add, if I may, a central and early part of the response from the Government following the election was to remove the Prime Minister's veto on the powers of the Independent Adviser, which had been called for by a number of bodies at the time, and this featured in the first revision of the ministerial code.

Q240 **John Lamont:** Minister, the Labour party also said that the system should be changed so that the Prime Minister is not the judge and jury in all cases of standards, but that has not been changed. What led to that change of mind?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: As was just stated, the Independent Adviser can now initiate his own separate investigations and all his investigations are then published. So, there is definitely more transparency in this space. Fundamentally all of us who serve as Government Ministers do so with the confidence of the Prime Minister, which is why the ministerial code is his document. The Prime Minister must have confidence in me to act and that is why he still retains those powers.

Q241 **John Lamont:** It was a change from what you said prior to the election.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: For everything I just said, that is why we are in the position that we currently are.

Q242 **John Lamont:** Just for the record, it was a change.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I would be interested to know what you are quoting.

Q243 **John Lamont:** You suggested as part of this discussion about bad chaps being a feature of our political system and changing the standards regime that was part of the suggestion of changes you were going to make.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I think when we have come into power we have looked at everything in the round. I would have to double-check on that specific commitment but we have made it very clear about the role of the IA and his independence.

Q244 **John Lamont:** If bad actors were to come into prominent positions within government do you believe the current standards regime is sufficiently strong to deal with that?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I do.

Q245 **Peter Lamb:** You said earlier that for the system to bed in it should not just be purely responsive to what happens at the time, and I agree with that. The rules we create must last well beyond the length of this current Government and need to take into account all possible eventualities as a result of that.

I have a hypothetical question for you. This is the last of the sessions we are holding on the ethics landscape. We have met with pretty much everyone involved in the system at this point. One thing that has become



increasingly clear through talking to people is that the system fundamentally, on this point about good chaps and chapesses, largely relies upon a sense of shame and accountability in front of the public on the basis of the public believing someone has done wrong. Say a party was to come into office that has a mandate that is largely based on being anti-establishment. Their base is deeply sceptical about the British state, with beliefs about a deep state holding them back, getting in the way of this Government trying to do things, so a MAGA-like base. Questionable characters are elected; they do not know who these people are and they have had to recruit people very quickly and not really vetted them properly. These people may not have the best back stories. They may well have a background of corruption and fraud in other areas of life.

At the moment our system depends upon the Prime Minister's willingness to enforce the ministerial code and we have had some questions around that as a Committee on announcements being made not to the House but instead to the press and a decision taken not to enforce that rule thoroughly. On the one hand, it is up to the Prime Minister. On the other hand, we have standards bodies and while they can initiate their own investigations, the sum total of that investigation essentially is a document trying to trigger a sense of shame so that action is taken.

Do you believe that with a party of a Trump-esque style, having safeguards built purely around people's good intentions is sufficient for safeguarding this country, moving forward?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Mr Lamb, I think you know my previous campaigning experiences and therefore while I genuinely share some of those concerns, I think there is a responsibility on all of us to make sure that we highlight those people, those individuals, and campaign hard to ensure that does not happen. On the protections that need to be in place in the event of that type of Government, I am very aware of the responsibilities of my role in looking at where we currently sit and where we maybe should be considering in terms of next steps. Having said that, you neither legislate nor set policy on the basis of what bad people might do unless we are talking about the criminal justice space. For us, I think the standards regime is to set the expectations of those things and make sure that the public have an awareness of the minimum standards we expect for the people who serve, but I am looking at everything in the round.

Q246 **Peter Lamb:** On the question of what can be done to enhance this, would you be open to considering putting some of this in a more legislative footprint? That would at least mean that an incoming Government would have to take time to remove these safeguards in a very visible way, were they to wish to crack on with whatever poor pattern of behaviour they wanted to crack on with.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I am looking at everything and I am not ruling anything out at this point. I would gently suggest that any political party that had those views would probably make a



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political moment of removing those pieces of legislation too, and they would view that as potentially a positive thing. Therefore, I think we need to look at everything in the round about how we ensure that the general public's expectations of us are clear and how we ensure that as much transparency is demanded as possible.

Q247 **Peter Lamb:** I am reminded of Benjamin Franklin, I believe in Constitution Hall, being asked by a member of the public what manner of government he provided them with and his response was, "A republic, if you can keep it". We may very well have the public as being our only real fundamental safeguard but I do wonder for some of us looking back five years from now whether we will regret not having taken opportunities while they were available to avoid what may very well be coming down the hill.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I would say the next general election is three years away. We are in the middle of a different election cycle right now and there is a huge job of work on all Members of both this House and the other House. When I talk about standards it is clear it is not the Government's responsibility, it is not solely my responsibility but it is all of our responsibilities to act to ensure transparency in this space. With a political hat on rather than my strictly Government hat on, we have to do the work that we have to do.

Q248 **Chair:** Just before we leave that, I want to underscore the thrust of Mr Lamb's point. I think there is a very good point about the insurrectionist-type approach to governance but we have a very mid-1950s way in our unwritten constitutional settlement of somehow or another instinctively people will know right from wrong, good from bad, that they can be shamed or embarrassed into doing something, that if advice is proffered it is taken, that if the pearl-handled revolver and the stiff whisky is left on somebody's desk they do not need a note of instruction to know what to do with it; they just crack on.

I think one surely has to ask, and I urge you to ask yourself and colleagues, whether that is a sufficient way of bolstering confidence in the public's mind that there is a great weight that is placed upon things that have a statutory underpinning, rather than merely guidance. Let us take, for example, business appointments for former Ministers and civil servants. They can receive advice, "I don't think it is a frightfully good idea that you should take this up," and they go, "Thank you very much indeed but I am going to do it." There is no particular shame or sanction.

I just wonder whether it is not a little complacent of the establishment, with a large and a small "e", to think that how we have always done it, irrespective of some tweaks—you mentioned that Sir Laurie Magnus can now instigate as the Prime Minister's ethics adviser without instruction from the Prime Minister—of itself is sufficient to meet the size of the challenge that the system faces, irrespective of political party.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I have two points. First, you are absolutely right and the challenge is something we need to continue.



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My mother always says that you should not put your head on someone else's shoulders and just because that is how I would approach something does not mean that someone else would. That is probably the best piece of advice in this space that we can consider for your challenge.

I have just finished reading a book by Dorothy L Sayers where a revolver was put in front of somebody at the end and that was a very different time and you are right. I think though, for the majority of people and their future employers, there is something about the public statement, especially if their future employers have any contract with government. There is still something very important about how public we make this and the level of transparency. We also have introduced sanctions for Ministers in the business appointment rules and our severance pay if we are found to have made a significant breach of the business appointment rules. That does not mean that I think this is all perfectly good and proper and that there are not some people who will ignore all rules regardless of what the rules are and regardless of sanction, however punitive the sanctions are. I think we have seen that throughout our history.

The core premise of any work that we undertake in this space going forward is that enforcement needs to happen and that we also need to have a very clear understanding of people's obligations. Some of that is about how we communicate with people when they leave office but also as importantly, when people come into office what their responsibilities are. I once gave evidence to a Select Committee as a recently elected Member of your place and I was asked about our induction process. In 2015 I was given three inches of paperwork, which would have included the Nolan principles, and I think my response was that there are many people—

Chair: We were the same vintage exactly.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: We met each other on our first days as MPs, which I probably should have declared at the beginning. We were given a huge amount of paperwork and a tote bag from the parliamentary estate to carry it around with. Chair, you would agree, we were just very excited to be here.

Chair: We were.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Hugely excited. You were in government and I was in opposition, so I think you were more excited, but we were both hugely excited.

Chair: The excitement usually wears off.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: That is true. The reality is that probably, as I said then, three months after our appointment we should have come back to the key issues about the things that were expected of us. On the day you are appointed as a Minister it is a genuinely exciting



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moment in your life and you go and do the photo in front of the flag and you shake hands with your Secretary of State and your Permanent Secretary. Obviously I had already signed the ministerial code as a Whip but I signed the ministerial code again, filled in my paperwork again and then I went and saw my family for a celebration as normal human beings should and would.

I think we then need to reflect on what comes next, and about making sure that people do understand what they have just signed up for and what the expectations are on them as Ministers but also when they leave. I would also include that for the civil service and for everyone touched by the business appointment rules. Whenever you get a new job it is the same as getting married—you rarely think about the divorce unless you have already signed the appropriate paperwork, I suppose.

Chair: Unless you are Elizabeth Taylor.

Q249 **Richard Quigley:** The Government chose to fulfil their manifesto promise to create an Ethics and Integrity Commission by replacing the Committee for Standards in Public Life with that commission rather than a new and separate body. Is there a reason for that?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I think it was about making sure that the EIC had the institutional history that understood the landscape well. One of the things you will appreciate, Mr Quigley, is that there is also the issue here about the number of arm's length bodies that we were looking at in this space to try to consolidate so that those we have are effective in the round. That is one of the reasons why the decision was made to have the CSPL become the EIC with expanded remit, revised remit and more resourcing.

Ellen Atkinson: If I may, I think it is also worth saying that point about the overall standards landscape and how it sometimes looks fragmented, so putting another body into that landscape would not have helped. It was much more important to think about consolidating and bringing it within, using an existing body to grow rather than make more bodies.

Q250 **Richard Quigley:** Okay. Correct me if I am wrong, but the EIC has no regulatory power or political power to enforce standards. Will its creation change anything?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I think so. As we have already said, it is the network they have, the annual reports that they will do to the Prime Minister, which we will respond to, of the standards regime in its entirety. It is the fact that they are truly independent of Government and the fact that we have asked them, because of their expertise, to undertake a review of the areas where we think there is scope for change in the standards regime. They do not do casework, so one of the key important things, at least for me, which touches on some of the conversations we have had so far, is their role in determining and helping devise the code of conduct for the duty of candour Bill, which generally



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will be the most important part of how we deliver cultural change in this space.

I think it would be fair to say that a lot of the standards regimes that have existed are tick-box exercises, as I just touched on. You sign a bit of paper because you are excited to sign the bit of paper, but it is how we live and breathe it. One of the important parts of the duty of candour is how it can help us drive cultural change in this space too.

Q251 Richard Quigley: For members of the general public out there who look at very brief snippets of standards in public life, how will the EIC improve confidence in the public and how will the public know things have got better?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: One part of the expanded remit of the EIC is its communication responsibility and engagement plans. It is still very new and bedding in and I look forward to seeing their plans for engagement. We fund their core staffing and they will come to us with their plans. I look forward to seeing their plans. When I was a Member of Parliament, going into schools was one of my favourite things and still is. I am a kid from a council estate with a single mum who ended up in this building. I have a delight of going into schools and saying, "You could be me." The education part of this for all of us is an important element. I don't think it should just be in schools; it should be throughout the world.

We live in an age of social media and an age of quite challenging political environments. It is having people reaching out in all your constituencies with your constituents to make clear the expectations they should have for their parliamentarians. It is making sure that they are not weighed down by whatever is in the news that day and how difficult it is and whatever is on their social media feed. Reminding people of the expectations they should have is an incredibly important thing. One of the pieces, Chair, I talked about some of the statistics available. The Bank of England has extraordinarily high confidence rates with the general public, which I thought was very interesting. What I was not aware of is that they go out and do roadshows around the country.

I look forward to seeing how the EIC wants to operate in this space. There is also a responsibility—we may be touching on this later—on every elected politician regardless of level, from parish council to the House of Commons and non-elected in the House of Lords, to accept that the Nolan principles are important for a reason and that we have a responsibility when we do public engagements, wherever they are, to make sure those expectations are set.

Q252 Richard Quigley: This is a question for all three of you. Do you have a very clear idea of what success and failure look like? In terms of success, what are the handbrakes or the things you need to focus on?



Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: It is very easy in this building to think success looks like a piece of legislation or success looks like the next headline or a speech that I have given. That is not what success looks like in this space. Success looks like everyone understanding what their responsibilities are and the general public being aware of them. Having said that, to get to that point, I might have to do all of those. It is about the steppin- stones to get us there but, as I said, right now I am reviewing everything to try to secure the foundations so that we know and I am confident on behalf of our Government what changes need to be made. I expect to be back in front of you before summer recess to talk about what we need to do next.

Ellen Atkinson: I am in exactly the same place. I think sometimes we tick the box because we have produced a piece of guidance over the code of conduct that will fall out of the Hillsborough law Bill or we have updated the civil service code. It is people living and breathing it every day and how we make sure that is happening that is the important thing. I know that is very much what the EIC is thinking about in the code space.

Simon Madden: I will add more generally that for you to have a successful standards regime you need everyone in public life to operate not to the rubric of any rules, but in a way that is representative of the culture that you want to embed. That is why that is one of the key features of the EIC's work—to promote the Nolan principles, to educate the public but also all of those in public life about the Nolan principles. Success in the long term is that the EIC is seen as an expert voice on ethical standards, that it is authoritative and it advises Government and the wider public sector.

Q253 **Richard Quigley:** What would failure look like?

Simon Madden: The easy answer is the opposite. The checklist, that what we see is an over-codification or rubrication of standards. I think that the EIC, and certainly Doug Chalmers, without putting words into his mouth, is very keen to ensure that it is the culture of standards in public life that is created. Failure would be no movement in a checklist approach.

Q254 **Richard Quigley:** I guess a repeat of where we are this week.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: There are always political moments. We have a free and independent press for a reason, which is to hold truth to power. Our standards landscape has evolved on an iterative basis over hundreds of years in the civil service. There have been moments in all of my briefings where I feel very, "Yes, Prime Minister", like the Radcliffe rules. There are some parts of this we have had not just for decades but over 100 years, 200 years, in the civil service code. There are parts of this where because life has evolved standards must evolve. When I could first vote, social media was not a thing and in the 1997 general election I think 80% of the general public received their



news from the BBC in some format. That is clearly not the case any more. YouTube did not exist and I did not have an email address.

Richard Quigley: The joy.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: It does sound like fabulous times, but the world has moved on. The environment that you campaign in, live and breathe in has moved on. Even the demands from your constituents on MPs' offices are not the same as they were when I was an MP, never mind when I could first vote. Everything has changed. People's expectations from public servants have changed but also the expectations we should have for ourselves in different remits need to be clear while protecting people's private lives, because I think that everyone still has a right to a private life. That is what I meant when I said earlier about the unintended consequences. I want to do this in such a way that it is easy for everyone to comply with because the easier it is the easier enforcement is, but also the easier it is for everybody to understand what their obligations are. That is the space I would like to be in, which is why everything is anchored in Nolan. The principles of Nolan are good principles. We now need to make sure that we are still living and breathing them.

One of the reasons why I think it is so incredibly important—the 2024 general election is a case in point. Over half of your House were brand-new. The average length of service in the civil service used to be many decades of service. That is now not necessarily the case and people will leave or join later in their careers. That means that they did not necessarily go through the civil service code indoctrination that they would otherwise have had. They have come from industry and different places. We all have different lives now, so making sure that this is straightforward and easy and is living and breathing is success. If we get it wrong, that is failure.

Chair: Mr Carling, I think you want to come in to tie in what you were going to ask in any event.

Q255 **Sam Carling:** I have a couple of questions on what you said there. You mentioned the EIC not taking on casework. What is your perspective on the risk that potentially without that direct exposure to the issues that are coming up within the standards regime daily the EIC could have a bit of a limited perspective on some issues, and therefore potentially have its ability to make recommendations hindered?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: One of the reasons why it is so important they have a broad network and they bring together all the regulators is for that very reason. I think they have monthly meetings with all the regulators to make sure of that, and I hope it is more than a shared counselling session. It might not be, but they can look at some of these issues in the round and also see what patterns are coming through to then advise us if there are changes that need to be made. They are not dealing with day-to-day casework. I realise I am talking to someone



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who has to deal with day-to-day casework. It is about being able to sit above that, to look at patterns and to see where public concern has been, whether that is in the news environment or with people who approach them. They have their own website independent of the Government but their engagement exercises are also quite key as part of their expanded remit in this space. I think that is the way that I would expect them to work.

Simon Madden: It is worth adding that the members of the commission, so those who form the commission themselves, are drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some are independent members drawing on legal or academic expertise but there are also political members representing all the main political parties who can draw on a wealth of experience and a political angle that sometimes needs to be brought to bear on these issues.

Q256 **Sam Carling:** On that topic of the network it has, the EIC is currently running an inquiry into the UK's ombudsman sector and its different strands. When you were setting up the EIC, was it the Government's intention for it to have that broader remit and look at public service effectiveness and efficiency as well as integrity? Is that the right level of breadth?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I think everything comes back to transparency, ethics and integrity. The CSPL did 29 inquiries in their 30 years. I think this was one that they wanted to undertake, and as Members of Parliament you might appreciate them wanting to do it in this space. This is not a matter for your Committee but there are certain things that I have looked at that I have therefore asked for responsibility for. I have taken ministerial responsibility for the Correspondence Unit in the Cabinet Office because transparency and parliamentarians being able to get access to information that they need is also part of the wider space. We cannot on the one hand say that we want to live and breathe the standards regime and to do cultural change and not also undertake some of the inquiries in that space. We look forward to seeing what they have to say. As a truly independent organisation, I look forward to reading what they come back with.

Q257 **Lauren Edwards:** The EIC is carrying on the Committee on Standards in Public Life's function but I think it is certainly the view from a number of people that recent Governments have not really responded to its previous reports in a timely manner nor have they taken on its recommendations. How are this Government intending to change that approach with the EIC?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: In two ways. First, we have asked them to do an annual report, which we will respond to. I am a new Minister. How much trouble can I get myself in?

Chair: Keep going.



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Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Thank you, Chair. I always need your encouragement to get into trouble. I would expect their reports to be responded to in the same timeframe as a Select Committee report and I undertake to do that.

Chair: That is really encouraging.

Q258 **Lauren Edwards:** For those who might not necessarily be aware, what is that timeframe?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I am aware that you are awaiting responses to one. I will get your responses as quickly as I possibly can.

Chair: Six weeks is the operating norm.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Six weeks is the operating norm. There are some times when there are other issues that the Government are considering so it takes slightly longer than that, but I will actively encourage us to operate within that similar space.

Q259 **Lauren Edwards:** Thank you. That is helpful. So the timely period would be around six weeks.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Challenge accepted.

Ellen Atkinson: We will see if we can do the response in six weeks.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: As long as it is not on 24 December. We might need to add an extra week.

Q260 **Lauren Edwards:** The Prime Minister has written to the EIC to carry out an inquiry into lobbying, disclosure, and access to Government. In a similar vein, this is an area that has been looked at by our Committee, by the Committee on Standards in Public Life and others and recommendations have been needed. Is it your expectation that that timely six weeks response period would also apply to any recommendations coming out of that review?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: We have asked them to do that in as timely a way as possible, knowing how many investigations have already been done, including your own as the previous Committee. When they come forward with their recommendations I will need some time but we believe that they will deliver their report before summer recess. I believe that is what Mr Chalmers said to you last week and that is our understanding too. I want to be able to come forward with a response in the autumn, given the timings of when we will be sitting. I think it is incredibly important that I come back with a response to the House. While this is something the Prime Minister has asked to be done, it is directly related to my responsibilities.

Q261 **Lauren Edwards:** A lot of work has already been done in this space. You have talked about reviews wanting to have a look at things in the round.



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What is your response to the challenge that the Government are commissioning a lot of reviews and are not necessarily taking action?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I think we need to understand the environment in which we are operating. There has been a series of reviews. I know how frustrating that can be but I want to assure the Committee that we are not kicking this into the long grass. There is a job of work to be done here. There is unfinished business, as I said at the beginning. I want to make sure as far as I can that we have an appreciation that we are taking everyone with us and that we are engaging appropriately. I look forward to genuine, I hope, collaborative discussions about what the EIC recommend and our response to it and the policy response that comes, but I want to make sure that we have considered everything in the round.

As we saw with the 2014 legislation and the unintended consequences of something that on paper sounded totally sensible—the VAT exemption for individual operators—no one thought about foreign entities not having to be VAT-registered or people setting up numerous businesses that did not meet the VAT threshold to do this work so they did not have to declare. There are unintended consequences that come through from legislation and I want to make sure that we mitigate those as much as possible.

I also want this to work on a cross-party basis. Standards is not just the Government, as I said earlier. This is every single one of us, so we need to be cross-party.

Q262 **Lauren Edwards:** If as part of these reviews it is clear that statutory legislation is required, would the Government be prepared to act on that?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Nothing is off the table but you will have to let me go and make that political argument with the decision makers on legislative time available on the Floor of the House. I am very aware that your House unusually sat later than mine last night but I sat past midnight last week more than once. There is a balance here. I need to make sure that we get the legislative slot, so I cannot make commitments at this point but I understand that if I need to change the 2014 Lobbying Act I cannot do that without looking at everything in the round.

Q263 **Chair:** Just to clarify, the quotation that Mr Lamont referenced comes from a speech that Angela Rayner gave as the shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to the Institute for Government.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Okay. I will look at the quote and I will come back to the Committee.

Q264 **Sam Carling:** Again, I am following up on what has been discussed around the lobbying landscape. I appreciate waiting for the responses to a lot of the work the EIC is doing, but at the moment do the Government have a particular view on the Office of the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists and whether that has the powers it needs, or whether that



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needs to be changed or amalgamated into one of the other standards bodies? Is there any thinking in that space at the moment?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: There is a lot of thinking but I genuinely am going to wait for the EIC to report. I cannot ask someone to do this piece of work and then start pre-empting it. I am interested to see what they think. I am meeting with Ms Bassett next week, so it is also what their views are about the organisation she runs and then looking at this in the round.

Q265 **Sam Carling:** It is useful to know that work is going on. The EIC has been tasked with examining "current concerns about standards of conduct of all public office holders, and report annually to the Prime Minister on the health of standards in public life", which will be done in the form of an annual letter, which we discussed a little bit. What value do you see that adding to the system?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I think that looking at all these issues in the round is incredibly important for a standards review. Sorry, would you repeat your question?

Q266 **Sam Carling:** Sorry, I was quoting. The EIC has been tasked with examining "current concerns about the standards of conduct of all public office holders, and report annually to the Prime Minister on the health of standards in public life".

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Okay, so it is the annual report. I think the annual report is an incredibly important space. It will give both your Committee and me a stocktake moment of where concerns are, what is working and what is not working. I think that is an important marker. What your Committee chooses to do with each report will be obviously of interest to the Government but we will directly be responding to it every year as well. It makes it very clear that everyone is paying attention to what is going on in this space and therefore holding people accountable and holding some of the individual organisations that have responsibilities accountable is also quite clear. The more information that we have about how some of the individual organisations work, the better.

I have a very good appreciation, and I did before I was the responsible Minister, for how HOLAC, the House of Lords Appointments Commission, operates, because I was subject to HOLAC. I am not sure when I was a Member of Parliament that I had much appreciation of what HOLAC did or its responsibilities. I think this is a very good thing about looking at all these spaces in the round, the role of the Civil Service Commissioner, that there are various parts here that not necessarily everybody is considering as one framework for standards and this allows us to have the opportunity to do that.

Simon Madden: In a nutshell, I will add that it is effectively seen as an annual MOT on the standards system and holds a mirror up to that system as to how it is operating and how it has operated over that last



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year. It is also a way in which the EIC demonstrates its independence from Government to be able to provide that challenge to the Prime Minister and the Government on the operation of the system we have in place.

Q267 Sam Carling: That is a useful way of looking at that. Of course the EIC has also been tasked with advising public authorities on the development of clear codes of conduct that will complement the new requirement from the Public Office (Accountability) Bill. What is the Government's vision for how the EIC will carry out that responsibility?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I think that is genuinely, on the practicality, a matter for the EIC, as Mr Chalmers gave evidence to you. What he is not going to do—especially because of how our public service operates. We are not just the NHS. There is each trust, of which we have several, and the integrated care boards. There are a lot of different entities even within one sector of public life, and providing clear guidance on what they need to include so that they can develop it to make it work for them is really important.

As I said, a significant part of this for me is about how you drive cultural change, and therefore how you embed this as living, breathing documents, not just as a tick-box exercise. That will be the case for the EIC in this space as well. There will have to be training undertaken now. The EIC is completely independent in this space but I suggest “train the trainers” is what they will need to do because of their capacity but also even how their core principles would apply in a mental health trust versus an acute trust or a primary care trust. Those are very different things. It is also how it might apply in a category A prison or a category C prison, which might be different things. Providing not necessarily even templates but providing the core principles that should be included in the documents that then need to reflect the environments in which they will be adopted is how I would expect them to work and then train the trainers.

Simon Madden: It is also an opportunity to embed the Nolan principles in all of those codes. It is hard to believe that some codes of conduct do not have the Nolan principles in them. That will establish the seven Nolan principles as a foundation of the standards culture.

Ellen Atkinson: To say something positive about the standards landscape, I hope that they will highlight some good practice that already exists in some of the codes of conduct. Seeing what is out there and working can be powerful.

Q268 Sam Carling: Do we have a sense of when the Public Office (Accountability) Bill will complete its passage through Parliament?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Conversations and engagements are ongoing, but I am not in a position to give you any further update.



Q269 **Luke Taylor:** The Government have tasked the EIC with engaging in informing the wider public on the values, rules and oversight mechanisms that govern standards in public life. That is very complex, as we are finding out today. What are your expectations of how the EIC will carry out that function and how it will engage with media, politicians and local government to make sure that the message is understood by the public?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: EIC is an intermittent organisation that has been tasked with a clear remit. It is now for it to develop plans to come forward with what those will look like. It will not surprise you, Mr Taylor, but I would like it to go as big as possible. That is my area of responsibility, making sure that what we are doing works, what it is choosing to do works. I hope to see engagement that supports the work that key stakeholders are also doing. It is not that they have to take full responsibility themselves for doing this, but it is in everyone's interest, in this building and across Whitehall, that people understand this space and the responsibilities. I hope, although this is a matter for EIC, that that is the approach it will consider taking.

Q270 **Luke Taylor:** We heard Doug Chalmers describe this as his biggest challenge. There is a huge role for us as elected parliamentarians, and also those in the other place, to communicate, explain and show a good example. Given the particular challenge with trusting Government, what do you see as the Government's plan to take part in that exercise? As we have discussed, and as has been happening in a much more exciting Select Committee than ours—

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I am so sorry to disappoint you.

Luke Taylor: I apologise. I am at least self-aware enough to know the world's cameras are not on us at the moment. What are the Government going to do specifically? It may well be putting the other issues of the day in the context of how that will be governed, overseen and mitigated in the future. Are the Government keen to put their elbow to that?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I am. I cannot talk about embedding these principles, the code of conduct, the work that we are doing and have expectations that that is for everybody else to do and not for the Government to do. It is incredibly important. There are recent statistics about civil servants' awareness of the civil service code. It is relatively high, but not as high as I would want it to be. There is a responsibility of every part of the regulatory framework, and also of the Government, to help facilitate and drive. What that looks like—I look forward to their recommendations.

I would also expect them to have recommendations for us about engagement, but I am aware that colleagues sitting around this table and I are political campaigners. If we are sometimes better than others and if we have any skills, they should be about how we can engage with the public. That is what we are meant to be good at. We have a unique



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offering in this space to make sure that those messages are getting through.

Ellen Atkinson: On the civil service piece, Simon has a presence at Civil Service Live every year and also does a lot of engagement with the OECD.

Chair: Is Civil Service Live the administrative equivalent of Glastonbury or something?

Ellen Atkinson: It is, yes.

Simon Madden: It is, but no fallow year.

Q271 **Luke Taylor:** A final question. Research clearly indicates that the public think politicians put party before the nation. I have picked up populists now suggesting that the way they are different is that they put residents ahead of the party, they are independent, they do not take the Whip and so on. That reinforces the view that the established parties have this cabal of party interests over and above that of the public. A lot of that forgets the fact that all politicians have to get elected, and they want to do things that are popular and support residents in a way.

Do you think that there should be a review of the role and adherence to standards of political parties that help with that reduction to this populist messaging that, as referenced earlier, gives rise to politicians and those who want to be part of politics who actually just want to break it and damage what is public service and what is politics in general?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I will step back for just a second. This is an incredibly important question that I genuinely consider every day. One of the best examples where party before country simply is not true is Select Committees, in my experience. I was on the Defence Select Committee for nearly five years. The work that we did to hold the Government to account was genuinely cross-party and engaging and I formed lifelong friends with people on the other side because of those things. Outside of this building, that always surprises people about the relationships that we form across party and how important some of them are.

For me, that is very much country before party because holding Government to account regardless of what political party is the Government and what political party you represent is the joy of this building and the scrutiny that this building does. It is very important. We live in an age of disinformation and misinformation with political bad-faith actors. While we will always jibe about the parties that are represented around this table, and some of the materials that we put out in elections and so on, we tend to operate within a clear set of 1950s rules. I am proud of the fact that we operate within the appreciation of what that looks like.



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There are people that do not think the things that I hold to be true and important, who seek to undermine and belittle the things that I hold to be important. How we deal with that is fundamental for standards, and for me it is one of the reasons why I am so pleased and excited that the Prime Minister has asked me to do this. I believe this to be the next big political challenge. When we talked about failure earlier on, this is the big challenge—whether we can protect the institutions that are so important, not for the sake of protection but for the sake of the country.

Q272 Luke Taylor: To the specific point here about the operations and the activities of political parties, are you open to such review and then implementing the recommendations of that to drill into how political parties frame debates and also try to instil misinformation and misrepresentation, which we are all concerned about, when some people play by the rules or, again, being quite self-conscious, who see a particular set of rules as being important, but then you have people who have no compunction to smashing those boundaries down?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I am. There is nothing I am not open to. Obviously, that is not a matter for Government; that is me with a Labour party hat on. I am not the leader of my party, but there are conversations that we need to be having cross-party about what standards look like and what we expect of each other. I live in Staffordshire, although I am in Stoke-on-Trent City Council. Staffordshire County Council is on its fourth leader since last May. In terms of this environment, I think there is a conversation to be had.

I am well aware that June marks 10 years since Jo Cox was murdered. At that point, we talked a huge amount about there being more in common and about the environment. I am aware that for other colleagues Sir David Amess's murder had exactly the same issues as Jo's. It did for me for Sir David, but Jo was my friend. Ten years ago we made really significant promises about the type of political landscape we wanted to live in. We still need to make that the reality, and how we do that is incredibly important to me. There is a party political conversation to be had that is separate to the work I am doing for the Government.

Q273 Chair: Just pausing there, Minister. It has counterintuitively, and really depressingly, got worse, and people will point a finger and say that there is this thing or that thing and so on, but things that might have been thought are now spoken out loud and normally; the strident become ever more strident; the intolerant ever more intolerant; the didactic ever more enforced in their rightness and everybody else's wrongness. It is a very hard dial to move in the opposite direction, isn't it, because social media acts as a great accelerant to all of this as people seek their Warhol-esque 15 minutes of fame by saying something inflammatory? The confidence of the vast majority of our fellow citizens is being knocked and buffeted on a daily basis as a result. If you cannot work out who to believe, the easiest thing is to believe no one. It is a monumental task.

Are we being pessimistic to think we are almost past the point of no



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return, if not past the point of no return?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I refuse to be that pessimistic. I have great faith in the electorate, except when they voted not to have me, but I still have great faith in the electorate.

Chair: They are allowed to make mistakes.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: They are allowed to make mistakes, occasional mistakes. I do have great faith in them, and I am sure that for colleagues around the table—when I was an MP, and there were big moments in here, it was my constituents that anchored me about the issues that I was going to do. There is always a difference between what people think about you as their local Member of Parliament and what they think about the people who are MPs—local MP/MPs. There is a very different type of conversation.

This is going to sound counterintuitive, but most of the general public think about politics less than five minutes a week. That may be slightly different right now because of events going on in the world, but I am not sure that people are not turning off their news sources even more now because of how scary it is, so it might even be less than five. I might be wrong, but I can imagine that the world feels even more terrifying than it did, so they necessarily want to go away from it.

If you can get your algorithms right on social media—mine have been full of how to make Passover recipes for the last month, and I have no idea how that happened, but I am grateful that it has been about, bizarrely, “West Wing” clips and Passover cooking.

Chair: “West Wing” clips are all over the place

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Yes. I do not know where they have come from, but it has made me quite happy.

Chair: No. They are marvellous. They are absolutely great.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: My algorithm has shifted and I do not understand why. I appreciate that that is not the case for a lot of people who are seeing and being continually fed negative content about us. If people are only paying attention five minutes a week, they are probably only hearing the very bad parts of whatever happened that week, even with everything else positive that may have been done by the local authority or by the Government.

This is a huge challenge in a world that has different communication vehicles than they had even a generation ago. I have huge faith in the general public, and this building, rightly or wrongly. We will find a way to make this better. It requires us to collectively figure out a way to do it. There have been moments that have turned into huge disappointments. I remember when Jo was murdered and Anne-Marie Trevelyan and others went and bought hundreds of roses so that we all had a rose to wear for Jo.



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Chair: Yes. It was a white rose.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: It was a white rose, and it was a huge thing that the other side of the House did for everybody. There was that moment of hope about what the world could look like next. Then two weeks later we had Brexit and the debate that followed, and then we had the hours of anger in this building that then fed out into the general public. I had a six-foot piece of graffiti written about me where I was called a traitor, a Nazi traitor, which as a Jewish woman was very scary. It was put outside a school around the corner from my house. I came up to a senior member of the Government at that point and burst into tears, because I was really scared. He did not know what to do, but there was also nothing he could do to fix it because the language that was being used in here was so intemperate. That was having a knock-on effect on all of us.

That has candidly not got better in what is happening with how people are treated as politicians and in our community. We have the Defending Democracy taskforce; Mr Speaker has launched work; additional security is offered. There is also how we come together collectively at moments, and these are moments. I have faith. I am glass half full here. Very bad moments, but glass half full.

Chair: Like you, I have faith in the coalition of the decent and their power. No better example of the coalition of the decent can be found than Mr Lamb.

Q274 **Peter Lamb:** Turning to the issue of local government, the Government have indicated that they plan to legislate and introduce a new standards system for local authorities, including a mandatory code. Having been at council quite a long time, this is desperately needed. There was a noticeable decline after the removal of the Standards Board for England. When is this legislation likely to be introduced?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: When parliamentary time allows is the line I have been given, Mr Lamb. I will go and speak to colleagues to see exactly what the plans are. It is being done by MHCLG, as you would expect it to be done, when parliamentary time allows, so we are still committed in this space.

Q275 **Peter Lamb:** One of the concerns we have heard is that people have not understood the local government standards system, which is understandable. What consideration has been given for reducing the complexity and matching it up with the standards regime in Government and Parliament?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: One of the things that Simon and I were discussing earlier is that the more consistency we can have, the easier it is to comply. As I said earlier, everything should be about making this as easy to comply with as possible while also embedding a code of conduct that can help drive the cultural change at the same time. That is why the duty of candour is so important to me. I touched on



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Staffordshire earlier, and you will appreciate what I am talking about. Having a clear and solid standards regime is even more important now than it has been. I hope to see, especially with the passing of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, that as we have different types of devolved powers to different authorities in England, that we can have a level of consistency always anchored in general principles.

Simon Madden: A CSPL report on leadership in practice gave us the three C's for standards: clarity, consistency and consequences. Those are three elements of any reasonable standards regime.

Q276 **Peter Lamb:** Consequences have not been absent for a while now from the system. What role do the Government envisage EIC playing in standards at the local level?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: That is a good question which I do not have an immediate answer to. I would expect it, as its remit is clear about everything in the round—we talked about the public health ombudsman inquiry that it is currently undertaking. It has clear responsibilities in this space for the specifics. That is a matter for it, but I would expect it to also be active in this area, unless I am wrong.

Simon Madden: No, that is right.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Sorry, that is as far as I can go.

Q277 **Chair:** While we are on local government, can we impress upon you, Minister, when thinking about the application of standards and also things like, when you have left office, business appointments and so on, the very significant roles that lots of people play in the regional governance space, mayoralities and those around them—there are huge engines for change and often potentially very lucrative post-public service careers—there is a bit of a lacuna in how the regulations apply to those? They are growing in importance and efficacy. Can we make sure they are on your radar as well when thinking about that more uniform application?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: They are on my radar, and I look forward to discussing that in more detail with the Committee when I have more to say.

Q278 **Peter Lamb:** Mr Madden, the Government have changed the title of the Independent Adviser and increased its ability to initiate inquiries. In practice, what effect do you believe these changes have had?

Simon Madden: They have provided clarity on the role of the Independent Adviser. They have strengthened his ability to act independently without the Prime Minister's permission. In recent cases, there is a new mechanism that was introduced, a self-referral mechanism—although it is not referred to as this in the ministerial code—that had not been in place, and that has allowed Ministers to seek



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clarification from the Independent Adviser, for him to offer a review, often more swiftly, in response to quite a lot of media reporting.

Q279 **Peter Lamb:** Is there any evidence that we have seen an increase in public confidence as a consequence of the changes made to that role?

Simon Madden: As far as I am aware, we do not measure public confidence in the Independent Adviser. I am not aware of any survey of that type.

Q280 **Peter Lamb:** Given the changes being made to the standards regime and the goal to address some of these issues of public confidence, is this something we could potentially have the Cabinet Office try to do—to assess not necessarily that role but public confidence in the system as a whole?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Leave that with me and I will take it away.

Q281 **Peter Lamb:** It was recently reported that the Independent Adviser can only investigate a current Minister. It cannot investigate a Minister who is suspended or resigned. Where is that rule set out?

Simon Madden: It is in the ministerial code. The ministerial code applies to Ministers. That is not being facetious; it is a fact. I say that because there are specific provisions within the ministerial code where the ministerial code continues to apply to former Ministers. That would be in respect of the business appointment rules and the Radcliffe rules—the rules around memoirs and books where you draw on your experience in Government. Technically, a Minister not complying with those provisions has breached the ministerial code, even though they are no longer a Minister.

There are specific provisions for former Ministers. By logic, the rest of the code does not apply to Ministers. As you are an officer holder, holding the confidence of a Prime Minister, you are either a Minister or you are not. There is no provision for Ministers to be suspended. That is one of the reasons why the self-referral mechanism was introduced—to help provide a process whereby a Minister can seek clarification from the Independent Adviser, seek his view on the issues and provide swift advice to the Prime Minister.

Q282 **Peter Lamb:** If we do have these areas where former Ministers are still held to account, does that mean that the Prime Minister has the ability, if he chose, to modify the code to enable former Ministers to similarly be investigated?

Simon Madden: I suspect the Prime Minister would have the power to do anything in respect of the ministerial code. It is his code, his document. It is a political document rather than a legal one. As a matter of practice and convention, we do not tend to investigate former employees of Government, former Ministers, former office holders. Once



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they have left office, they are no longer under the jurisdiction of the Government or the Prime Minister, because they can no longer be sanctioned by the Prime Minister in that way. They could be through party political means but not as a Member of the Government, because they have ceased to be a Member of the Government.

Q283 Peter Lamb: It still affects public confidence in the system. Is there a reason you can think of why we would not want former Ministers to be able to be investigated where there had been some evidence of wrongdoing?

Simon Madden: As I say, it is currently the practice that that is not the case. There are recent exceptions to sanctions, where sanctions are available to the Prime Minister on former Ministers where, for instance, they breached the business employment rules having left office. That is something that while a Minister they sign up to voluntarily, to be subject to those provisions. As a general rule, the position is that once a Minister leaves office, they are no longer subject to sanction by the Prime Minister because they are not a Member of the Government.

Q284 Peter Lamb: The Government have changed the guidance, so if a Minister has breached the code or is subsequently found to have breached the code, they are expected to pay back their three-month severance payment. If the Independent Adviser does not investigate former Ministers, who makes that judgment?

Simon Madden: The Prime Minister is the arbiter of the ministerial code. As I say, it is his code. He need not ask the Independent Adviser to investigate anything. The Prime Minister, as previous Prime Ministers have done, can make a decision on their own. It is open to them to ask the Independent Adviser or the Cabinet Secretary to look into the issues. Recent convention has meant that it is the role of the Independent Adviser to do that. The Prime Minister is completely free, and it would be perfectly proper for him, not to engage the Independent Adviser if that is what he wanted to do.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Just to clarify one point here, the Independent Adviser has been given responsibility for the business appointment rules that apply to ex-Ministers. So, it would be highly likely that Sir Laurie would be the person who would know if there had been a breach of the recommendations. In that space specifically, post-ministerial action, because Sir Laurie has been asked to oversee post-ministerial office appointments for future employment, he would know.

Simon Madden: Sorry, if that is what your question is— If it was specifically the business appointment rules, the Independent Adviser has been tasked with overseeing those business appointment rules for former Ministers. He would provide advice to the Prime Minister on whether there had been a breach of those business appointment rules for the Prime Minister to then decide the next steps.



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Q285 **Peter Lamb:** That would mean that the only context that the severance payment might be required to be repaid would be for a breach around those rules?

Simon Madden: There are two aspects to the severance rules. One is at the time of the Minister's departure, where a Minister would not be paid severance now, or after leaving the Government and there is a breach advised by the Independent Adviser and agreed by the Prime Minister. Under those circumstances, they would be expected to pay back. There is the at the time of departure, and then post-departure, anything between nought to two years after leaving, they are within the window of eligibility of paying back.

Peter Lamb: If you know you have done wrong in the role and you are about to be found out, you are best off to resign because you will get a severance payment?

Simon Madden: You might well say that. I cannot possibly comment.

Q286 **Peter Lamb:** What do you understand by the term "individual ministerial responsibility"?

Simon Madden: What do I understand by that?

Peter Lamb: Yes.

Simon Madden: Each Minister has their own responsibilities set out in the ministerial code. Those are the expectations placed on them by the Prime Minister and they apply to every Member of the Government.

Q287 **Peter Lamb:** So the convention that Ministers are not only responsible for their own actions but those undertaken by those underneath them in the structure no longer remains a part of the UK constitution?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: What do you mean?

Peter Lamb: The premise of individual ministerial responsibility is that Ministers are responsible for everything that happens in their Department, regardless of whether or not they are directly involved.

Simon Madden: Do you mean ministerial accountability to Parliament?

Peter Lamb: The term that I have heard used throughout my time doing two degrees in politics is "individual ministerial responsibility" but I am happy to take any term within that.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: There are issues here of my personal responsibilities as a Minister and how I choose to operate; the collective responsibilities that I hold as a Member of the Government, where I have clear collective responsibility. What happens in my Department that is under my auspices and my responsibilities, I am responsible for those. I don't believe that any change has been suggested that Ministers are not responsible for what happens in their own Departments and on the part of their auspices.



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Obviously, the right hon. Darren Jones MP as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster is responsible for the Cabinet Office, but I would expect to be held accountable for what happens in the space that I am responsible for within those operations—that is the House sitting, right? I had a moment of “this is very early for a vote”. On the normal understanding of you and I about individual ministerial responsibilities, both departmental and personal responsibilities, I don’t believe that has changed. In fact, I would suggest that that has strengthened.

Q288 Peter Lamb: The premise is that ultimately, regardless of whether or not a Minister is aware of something that is happening within their Department, they are still accountable for it and have to take responsibility?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: We have seen throughout my lived experience—especially under the last Labour Government; I am not going to talk about the last Conservative Government—that sometimes people have taken responsibilities. There may sometimes be mitigations and there may be reasons, not least because of reshuffles or who knew what when. Sometimes there are more complicating factors, but in how I operate as a Minister, and my expectations of what I am to know, that is clear.

One of the things that we have done, that we have not touched on, is expanded the number of paid Ministers, in no small part because of this very reason. Government has changed. We had many Ministers that were no longer being paid because of the sheer scale of what was happening in Government Departments. I cannot promise you that I know every email that Simon is sending, but I would expect to be held to account for the actions of what was happening inside the Government.

Q289 Peter Lamb: Regardless of whether or not you were aware of them?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I know what you are getting at, but there is an element here of justice to be done in terms of fairness and the expectations of would I reasonably have known versus am I held to account because—it is slightly different because I am in the Cabinet Office and our direct responsibilities are slightly different. But if it had been a—

Ellen Atkinson: It is not our responsibility to advise you and give you good advice. You are responsible for the broad portfolio.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Yes. What I was trying to do was not pick on a specific Department. If something went wrong in a hospital, I am responsible for the strategic positioning but I am not necessarily responsible for what happened at that moment.

Q290 Peter Lamb: If there was something in the central Department, there would be an expectation that you would have been having sufficient control?



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Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I would expect to know. There are clear expectations of what I would expect to know and there are responsibilities that I have that I would expect to be able to communicate.

Chair: If only we had Donald Rumsfeld here, he would be able to help us enormously.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: The known unknowns.

Q291 **Peter Lamb:** The point here—and there is obviously a very specific case that comes to mind at the moment around this—is we still teach students this as being a fundamental part of the ministerial role. And I cannot think of a single occasion in the last decade and a half, at least, where any Minister has resigned from their role on the basis of principle because someone underneath them failed to do something appropriate and the Minister took responsibility for their Department.

Chair: Amber Rudd, Home Secretary.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I was going to say.

Chair: Before that you have to go to Peter Carrington.

Peter Lamb: There may be the odd example. They stand out as outliers for precisely that reason. This is still viewed as being a basic part of a ministerial role in our constitution. As the constitutional affairs Committee, it is challenging to see how it applies when we can point to any number of examples where we would have thought someone would be obliged to resign on the basis that something has gone wrong in their Department, and they have not taken accountability for that decision.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: That is an interesting point. Having an unwritten constitution—which I am firmly supportive of, by the way—means that there is always a level of flex. Whether you and I have always been happy about the flex is a different matter in specific instances. I come back to my genuine faith in the general public because in my experience those people are then held accountable in very different spaces.

Peter Lamb: I will drop my hypothetical. This is as much depth as we are going to manage.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: We are, sorry.

Q292 **Markus Campbell-Savours:** This is a question possibly for the Baroness or Mr Madden. It relates to public appointments. The Commissioner for Public Appointments has highlighted that timeliness is an issue with public appointments, and the Government have set an expectation that the appointments process will be completed within three or four months, depending on the importance of the role. This Committee's understanding is that only 16.7% of appointments have met this expectation. Can you tell us why the Government cannot make timely appointments?



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Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I can update the Committee on what we have done, and we need a little bit of time for this to bed in to see whether it works. On 30 October we issued the revised Government's code on public appointments, designed to make the public appointments process faster and more flexible in the future. Ministers now have the ability to appoint candidates found appropriate from a previous public appointment campaign either run within their own Department or across Government over the last two years. That should help shorten the process.

Ministers may also step back from various decision points in the process while remaining responsible and accountable to the appointment, to take out some of the pinch points. The Cabinet Office published annual departmental performance data for the first time in December 2025, which is how you have your statistics. This will enable effective scrutiny and act as a mechanism to hold Departments to account for the time taken to run an appointments process.

This has been one of my frustrations. There will not be a Minister that you speak to who has not been frustrated in the last 18 months about some of the delays to this process. We have now sought to change how the process works. Given that we only started that on 30 October, we need a little bit of time for that to bed in, given that we expect the average time to be four months. I am aware of the one that you are going to come to that has taken longer, but I want to assure you that we are aware of the concerns in this space and we are trying to fix them.

Simon Madden: We now have a fully digital applicant tracking system, which is how people can apply for a public appointment. They can also register their interest and CV more broadly. The applicant tracking system is a website with a back-end case management system that allows us to track more effectively right across Government every single application so that we can understand what the pinch points are. The Cabinet Office can then inform, challenge and put pressure on Departments on the pace that appointments are going to see if there is anything the Cabinet Office can do to unblock issues. The benefit of that tracking informed the changes to the Government's code because we identified what those pinch points were. It is open for Government to respond, if necessary, to remove further pinch points.

Q293 **Chair:** Is the key pinch point usually No. 10, that refuses to allow Secretaries of State to appoint without some faceless person in No. 10 crawling all over them? That delays the system because there is so much going on in No. 10.

Simon Madden: Public appointments are obviously important appointments. A lot of them oversee lots of taxpayers' money. It is reasonable to expect the Prime Minister's office to take an interest in them.

Q294 **Chair:** Why?



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Simon Madden: They are exercising a lot of public money.

Q295 **Chair:** On that basis, Mr Madden, you would get rid of every Secretary of State and let No. 10 control everything, because Ministers spend vast amounts of money daily.

Simon Madden: Where Secretaries of State are the appointing Minister, they still make the appointment. As I said earlier, with the benefit of the tracking system—

Q296 **Chair:** They make the appointment, of course, but it is only when they are allowed to make the appointment.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: This has been an historic truth.

Chair: I am not sure it is not a new phenomenon.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: It is definitely not a new phenomenon. What we have tried to do is take out some of the pinch points that exist.

Chair: No.10 is the pinch point.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: No. 10, as I am ever reminded, is a building and there are people within it who we need to work directly with. There are some moments where, for very good reason, the centre of Government wants to be aware of potential appointments. We have made 467 public appointments since we came to office. This is a significant number and we have significant responsibilities. One of the things that I have found reassuring is that we have identified where some of the challenges are and have changed the Government's process to help fix that. We have also ensured that people who have already been through the process can be pulled out. There is a genuine issue here that if it takes too long, we lose people who we may wish to appoint.

This is not a paper exercise for the sake of having a paper exercise. There will be people who get alternative employment or positions that mean they cannot do the work that would be beneficial to the Government. Speeding this up is important, but it is also doing it in such a way that public appointments represent the diversity of our country and that the majority of them come from outside London. I say that as someone who lives in Stoke-on-Trent.

There are lots of ways that this is important. One of the conversations that I would hope to have with parliamentarians at this end of the building is making sure your constituents—I am aware that in my former constituency, very few people would even apply or think to apply for public appointments because they think it is for other people, not for them. There is a responsibility on us—not a responsibility, but it would be a very good thing for Members of this House to be actively encouraging people to apply so that there was a bigger and more diverse pool.



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Ellen Atkinson: There are always points in the system where we can look at processes, but this is about getting diverse, high-quality fills. We have some extraordinary people who want to come into the public sector. We also must make sure that we have diversity. I would not describe some of that as a pinch point. It is about getting the highest-quality people and attracting people. Some of the delays we see in the system are because we have not managed to attract the diversity and quality of field that we want.

Markus Campbell-Savours: It is an interesting day for us to hear about No. 10 slowing down appointments, Chair.

Chair: Let me think of an example where that has not been the case.

Q297 **Markus Campbell-Savours:** Lessons learnt. At what point does this Committee ask the question, "Where are we with these improvements?" At what point do you anticipate that we will see a change? The concern previously raised to this Committee was that the process was taking so long that good candidates were walking away from the process because waiting six months was not tolerable for them.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I completely agree with the premise, which is why I just stated it, but I would be grateful if the Committee gave us a year for the new system to bed in, which is this October. I am not kicking it into the long grass, but it is only fair to see whether the changes have worked. If they have not worked, I am more than happy to come back to you, hands up, and ask, "What else do we need to do?" I come back to the fact it is very important to all of us that we get the right people in the right place. It would be a good thing if there were people who are beyond the usual suspects coming forward for these positions.

Q298 **Markus Campbell-Savours:** You anticipated before that there might be a question about a particular candidate. Perhaps you could update us on that process and explain what the problems have been?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: The appointments process for the new CPA is ongoing and we will update the Committee in due course. I expect this to move relatively quickly now.

Chair: That was civil service Top Trumps bingo, "in due course".

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I did not say "at pace".

Chair: No, you did not, that is true, so you only get 75%.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I expect to be able to update the Committee very quickly.

Q299 **Chair:** We do not need to be updated. When is the announcement going to be made? Now I feel like Jim Hacker.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Sir Humphrey?



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Simon Madden: The campaign has closed for the appointment.

Chair: Yes. When did it close?

Simon Madden: It closed a number of weeks ago.

Chair: When?

Simon Madden: The end of February. It was extended a number of times to be able to get the best possible pool of candidates. We would look to start the interview process, having done the pre-interview processes, very soon.

Chair: When is that?

Simon Madden: Very soon.

Chair: Could we define very soon? Is that within three weeks?

Simon Madden: Certainly by the end of next month.

Chair: That is not three weeks.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: That is six weeks.

Chair: Six weeks, okay.

Simon Madden: By that I mean that hopefully the interviews will have concluded.

Chair: Yes. We should have an announcement?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: You will have an announcement before summer recess.

Chair: You heard it here first, ladies and gentlemen. Just to clarify, summer recess 2026?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Yes, this summer recess.

Chair: The war will be over by Christmas; they just did not say what year.

Ellen Atkinson: Late summer.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Late summer.

Chair: Civil service late summer runs from middle of August through to Christmas Eve.

Simon Madden: In all seriousness, the current term of the commission expires in September. It is incumbent on us so that there can be the proper scrutiny through this Committee and also the proper induction and handover.

Q300 **Markus Campbell-Savours:** We can look forward to the new CPA updating us on the delays in October?



Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: Yes.

Simon Madden: Yes.

Q301 **Chair:** I am conscious of time. We wanted to raise with you House of Lords appointments. Reform of the appointment process to the Lords was a manifesto commitment of the Labour party. What are the Government's plans for reforming it? The Prime Minister obviously has an unlimited ability to appoint peers. This potentially casts a shadow over the standards of membership of the Lords as a whole. If the Government are committed to the highest standards, is this also a priority for reform?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: When I was appointed, there was no such thing as the citation to explain in my appointment. It was introduced in December 2024 that there now has to be an explanatory note as to why the appointment is made—beyond obviously being fabulous.

Chair: That is all it needed to say.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: That is all it needed to say. There is now a more detailed understanding so that people can appreciate why the Prime Minister and the leaders of Opposition parties are making those recommendations. This is not to dismiss it, but I am seven weeks in and I have had my first engagement with Baroness Deech about the current process. I want to work with her, given this is her area, to make sure that the right support is in place and the right vetting processes are being undertaken for propriety, what needs to change and how it needs to change.

Separate to that there is also a party political conversation to be had about how the parties are doing due diligence on the people they are putting forward. There are two separate parts of this space. It comes back to party and Government conversation too.

Q302 **Chair:** Will the advisory board be able to say no and that is it—it is a binding decision?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: It is for the leaders of the parties to choose the people that they think bring the skillset that they want into the House of Lords. I am aware that it is a lifelong appointment. I am personally aware it is a lifelong appointment. It is also important for me that I have no democratic authority at the other end of the building and I am probably there, unless this end of the building changes its mind, for quite a long time. On that basis, it is making sure that the right skillsets and the right people who are not going to bring this building into disrepute are appointed. This is an important part of maintaining the legitimacy of the other end of the building. For all the reasons that you will appreciate, that is important to me personally but also to the Government, given the role of the House of Lords. I know how many votes you have from Lords messages at the moment.



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Q303 **Chair:** Given that, as the lone star principle, that would be very hard to argue against, as night follows day, it must be axiomatic that the people who are appointed to scrutinise a nomination should have—the whole thing is surely strengthened if they are able to say yes, and that yes is binding, or no, and that decision is binding. They would have to have reasons. They could not just say they do not like the cut of his jib or do not like their politics and so on. There has to be a reason as to why they are inappropriate. We could call it a vetting process.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: They do a vetting process.

Q304 **Chair:** They do, and the advice to the Prime Minister is, “We don’t think this person is appropriate,” and the Prime Minister says, “Thank you very much indeed, but I am going to crack on anyway.”

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: That would then be made public. There are two things here: propriety and suitability.

Q305 **Chair:** I am not suggesting that this is taking place privately, but it speaks back to the point that Mr Lamb was raising on the proviso that the person who is receiving the advice, or commissioning the advice, knows the difference between right and wrong, and is capable of “feeling a sense of shame” if they were to proceed with something, but if they are entirely inured to all of that, and just want to carry on regardless—the bucking of the system, the kicking up of the traces around the establishment and so on, that is not a great way to proceed.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: There are two parts to this. There is the entry to the building and the exit to the building. Currently the exit to the building has almost, in its entirety, been voluntarily and you would still get to retain your title. That is one of the reasons why not only do we want to strengthen our relationship with HOLAC, but there is also the responsibility to be put on the political parties about their expectations that we have for them to do due diligence on appointments. This is where it becomes a very different thing in responsibilities.

Q306 **Chair:** I am not suggesting for a moment that HOLAC does not fulfil its function to the highest of standards. The point I am endeavouring to make is that once they have done that piece of work and have determined that a nominee is not appropriate, for citable reasons, is the system of public confidence, that we recognise collectively as being important, not strengthened by that determination being final and binding on the Prime Minister, rather than merely advisory, and the Prime Minister of the day can, if he or she wishes, say, “Thank you very much indeed for that advice; I am not saying I think you are wrong, I am just not taking it”?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I would always want to work collaboratively with the Committee on everything we are trying to achieve. As I said, I am reviewing everything in the round. There is also, however, that these are on behalf of the Crown, these are appointments that the Prime Minister exclusively gets to make and it is how we manage



that process. One of the things that I am personally very committed to, just as you have a recall mechanism in this Chamber and there is accountability for your behaviour and the benefit Members at the green end of the building have are the letters after their name, it is the letters before my name that I get to keep regardless, because of my letters patent, of my behaviour. If I have been badly behaved, I should have those removed because they give me standing outside the building. We cannot look at this in isolation. There is both incoming and outcoming of that in the round.

- Q307 **Chair:** We will come to the removal of title in a moment. I am just going to press you on this point. What is the argument that rebuts the assertion that the system is clearer, firmer, better by HOLAC, or a successor body, the decision on, following vetting and due diligence, a political nominee for a peerage binding on both the Prime Minister and the leader of the party that has made it if they are from the Opposition parties? What is the argument that says, "No, that would be the wrong way to do it. This is the downside to this"?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I am currently considering all of this in the round, as I have said. I am not in a place yet in terms of either advice or my final decision, or my relationship with the members of HOLAC, to make those assertions. The only thing I would say, again, is given other events, we need to be very careful about the language between vetting and due diligence because those are two very separate things. A conversation needs to be had about the expectations on the political parties of due diligence and about who they are putting forward. There is also the vetting conversation and what happens with the vetting.

Having said all of that, I will ask the indulgence of the Committee to give me a little bit of time because it is appropriate for me to have those conversations with HOLAC and its commissioners. You can keep pressing me, but if we can refer back to it, I would be grateful.

- Q308 **Chair:** We will press the pause button on that discussion, but we would be interested to hear in due course what the knock-out or killer blow is to say no, in actual fact, prime ministerial discretion to accept or refuse or ignore advice is helpful to the process.

You have referenced, Lady Anderson, the removal of peerages. Obviously, this is a debate that was sparked by Mandelson and before that Baroness Mone, so this is not a new thing. I appreciate that there have been some contradictory answers from Cabinet Office Ministers in the Commons. First of all, it was going to be frightfully complicated; then it was enmeshed with the Lords needing to look at their standards procedures and so on.

There is a simple way of dealing with this. The Life Peerages Act 1958 refers to the conferring of a peerage for life. It needs a very small amendment that effectively says, "or until the letters patent are revoked," and then there can be a whole series of reasons as to why the



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letters patent can be revoked. It is not frightfully complicated. It will take a bit of time but it is not a social conscience question. Where are we on seeing a Bill? When Mr Jones and the junior administrator of the Commons—who I am going to say is Chris Ward?

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: It is, yes.

Chair: Yes, thank you. No disrespect to Chris; I was having a senior moment on names. The Commons was given the impression that the Bill was imminent.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: The King's Speech is a matter of weeks away.

Chair: It is. We wait on tenterhooks.

Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent: I look forward to the King's Speech hugely, not least to find out finally what my responsibilities will look like for the legislative programme. I would expect to see it in the King's Speech. I do not think I am breaking any rules, given who I am sitting next to. I am definitely not breaking the ministerial code by suggesting that, and the detail will be in there. The specifics are slightly more complicated because regardless of anything else, while I truly believe that bringing Parliament into disrepute is at the heart of what we should be trying to address in trying to remove people's peerages, we will also need to make sure that there is a clear process to be followed that cannot be hijacked by anybody.

Q309 **Chair:** I will reserve the final question of this session to Mr Madden and Ms Atkinson. Minister, you may wish to close your ears or take up a Sudoku puzzle. You are both experienced officials in this area of ethics, integrity, standards. If you were given a clean sheet of paper and the essay question was what one thing should change, be introduced, be tightened to make that bit of the landscape better, more trustworthy and more inducing of public confidence, if I was your Minister asking you that question, what would your answer be to me as your Minister?

Simon Madden: Could I have two? I believe that lobbying is unfinished business and it needs further consideration. Linked to that—and the EIC will look at this—it is about more generally access to Government and privileged access to Government and ensuring that there are proper regimes in place to make sure that they evolve with the pace of change.

Chair: I have allowed you two luxuries on your desert island.

Ellen Atkinson: Mine comes back to this living and breathing point. How we genuinely, in everything that is happening across the framework—we go back too often to: is the document right? The document sits on a shelf, and it gathers—it is about how we genuinely make that a factor of how people in public life are operating daily, through things like the Public Office (Accountability) Bill and any updates we might make to the ministerial code and the civil service code.



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Chair: That is very helpful. I see colleagues not seeking to catch my eye. That means we have had a good canter over the course of the issues that we wanted to raise with you. I thank the three of you, on behalf of the Committee, for your time. We look forward to and will take you up, Lady Anderson, on your kind offer of a collaborative relationship. These things are much better evolved through dialogue and mutual discussion, rather than fait accompli. We will play a very active part in, obviously, scrutinising but also trying to help to move these important issues forward. Thank you for your time. Best of luck. We look forward to catching up in due course, in the fullness of time and after every stone has been looked at and every angle considered.