

Women and Equalities Committee

Oral evidence: The LGBT Advisory Panel, HC 163

Wednesday 19 May 2021

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 19 May 2021.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Caroline Nokes (Chair); Elliot Colburn; Alex Davies-Jones; Kim Johnson; Kate Osborne; Bell Ribeiro-Addy; Nicola Richards.

Questions 1 - 43

Witnesses

I: Jayne Ozanne, Director, Ozanne Foundation; Paul Martin OBE, Chief Executive, LGBT Foundation; Ellen Murray, Executive Director, TransgenderNI.

Written evidence from witnesses:



Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: Jayne Ozanne, Paul Martin and Ellen Murray.

Q1 Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's session of the Women and Equalities Select Committee and our one-off session with former members of the LGBT Advisory Panel. This afternoon, we have with us Jayne Ozanne, Paul Martin and Ellen Murray. Can I thank you all for agreeing to come in and give evidence to us this afternoon, and start by asking each of you in turn, starting with Ellen, how it was that you came to be a member of the panel and whether you feel that its formation was fully inclusive and representative of a broad spectrum of individuals and opinions?

Ellen Murray: I became aware of the panel through advertising for a public appointment. I was not contacted by any of the public bodies involved and I applied through the standard process. It was a slightly different process than may be typical because I have a disability and that affects public appointment applications and interviews. I went through the standard interview process in London and heard back shortly after.

In terms of how I found it, there was nothing unexpected about it. In terms of the timeliness, that was not an issue either. It was relatively timely from it being advertised to going to interview and then getting news back about the invitation to be appointed.

In terms of the diversity of the appointees, it was good to see a decent spread of people from across the UK, including from Scotland and Northern Ireland, and a relatively decent spread otherwise in terms of the different experiences and entities within the LGBT umbrella. Because I do not know everybody's backgrounds in detail, I am not sure I would be able to comment on exactly how representative it would be, but it seemed relatively well done in terms of the information that was made available.

Jayne Ozanne: I had heard of the panel through various means. I had been working with the GEO on the faith and sexuality survey that the Ozanne Foundation, which I lead, had been working on, and they had mentioned the panel to me, as had other members within the community. They urged me to apply. Crispin Blunt and my chair, Bishop Paul Bayes, had both written letters to Penny Mordaunt at the time to recommend me too, so I put myself forward. I felt it was important to have somebody, potentially, who could bridge the gap between the faith communities and the LGBT communities.

The panel has a broad range of expertise, which was its primary remit, and does look to represent all the nations, across the north and south of England and across the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans community. Questions were raised when we started about whether we were truly representative of the minority-ethnic LGBT community, but one of our members, S Chelvan, was sitting on the UK Black Pride board and would class himself as being from that community.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

A good deal of work had gone into trying to make sure that we had the expertise that we needed around the table, as well as the representation across the LGBT spectrum.

Paul Martin: Good afternoon. My name is Paul Martin, pronouns he/him, and I am the Chief Executive of LGBT Foundation. I was one of three organisational representatives who were asked to join the panel. I should say that it was not necessarily me personally; it was my role. It was the chief executives of LGBT Foundation, Stonewall and Consortium. You could say that we were not that representative by the fact that all three of us at the time were called Paul, which caused a little bit of confusion. There were many more Pauls than any other minority on the panel. We were asked to join, and so we were three of the 12, and the membership went, as I say, with our posts. During that time, we had Paul Twocock, who was the interim chief executive, and he was then replaced by Nancy, who was recently appointed chief executive. It was an institutional membership.

I would agree with Jayne in terms of the professional expertise and experience being very varied, and really helpful and useful. Some of the more minority communities amongst LGBT communities were not necessarily represented. We definitely could have had some more queer people of colour and would have benefited from a little more diversity of lived experience, but it is a real challenge when you are pulling together a panel in that way. There are always some people who are overlooked or missed out, but, in the main, it was a relatively representative panel of queer Britain today.

Q2 **Chair:** Staying with you, Paul, when you joined the panel, what were your expectations of the role that it would play, as well as you as an individual member? Did it meet them?

Paul Martin: As with all of these new endeavours and with my experience of working with Government, my expectations exceeded the reality. I was hoping for a little bit more. Both the then Prime Minister and the then Secretary of State for Women and Equalities were clearly minded to have a broad, representative panel of LGBT people across the country who they would actively involve and engage with. At that point, the Government were making some fairly impressive progress on their LGBT Action Plan and had recently delivered on the world's largest LGBT survey of its citizenry, so I went into the panel with quite high expectations.

At that point, we had very good relationships with GEO. There was a very clear, established LGBT staff team, which was growing. There was an LGBT budget that was allocated to do some really quite progressive work, including a national grants programme, so there was definitely a sense of high expectations. We had a Secretary of State in Penny Mordaunt who was really committed to the issues and to moving things forward at an impressive speed. I already had a pre-existing relationship with the then Equalities Minister, Susan Williams, and so I was very confident that she



was committed to the issues and passionate about this work. My starting point was optimistic, but that changed.

Q3 Chair: Can I just stop you on that? You are going to get some specific questions about ministerial engagement later on, so could we just focus on what your expectations started as? I know that Alex Davies-Jones is going to pick up on those issues when she asks her questions, if that is okay. Can I move on to Ellen and ask you about your expectations and what work you had anticipated the panel would undertake?

Ellen Murray: I can broadly mirror what Paul said in terms of expectations at the beginning being higher than they were as they developed. Most of my work up until that date was related to the Northern Irish Government, so I was expecting a different form of engagement in Whitehall. I was expecting to be able to have input and bring forward information on the more regional issues which were questions of devolution at the time, and on some of my own specific experience on trans communities. Similarly to what Paul said, that did not end up being reflected in how the panel worked in the end, but I went into the process with relatively decent expectations. Again, I was used to things going wrong here at home, so I, perhaps naively, had some higher expectations of central Government processes.

Jayne Ozanne: It is definitely a story of two halves. When I joined, we were in a very positive, celebratory mood. We had just had the survey, which had highlighted needs of the community, which had been reflected in an action plan. Our remit and my expectations were to be able to oversee the implementation of that action plan, to give advice and to be champions—that was the word that Penny Mordaunt had used in her letter to us. Certainly, for the first half of that first year, my expectations were exceeded. I thought it was a very good start, but it went downhill tremendously from September 2019.

I have reached out to other panel members and, if I may, I will quote one of them who wrote to me this morning, saying that she felt “deeply frustrated that they never felt we were able to inform or critique policy. We were left feeling disappointed because the direction of travel following the LGBT survey and development of the action plan had held so much promise, but it felt as if everything stalled or decisions were predetermined, commitment from Ministers waned and, arguably, viewpoints on how to proceed changed altogether”. It really is a story of two halves for me.

Q4 Kim Johnson: Good afternoon, panellists. My first question is in four bits. In your opinion, did the LGBT Advisory Panel operate effectively? Did it meet frequently enough to have a positive impact on policy making? Did you feel that the meetings mirrored the priorities of LGBT stakeholders? Were you given any opportunity to influence policy outside of the meetings?



Paul Martin: Jayne started my answer in terms of it being very much a tale of two halves. Initially, the panel formally met. It is really important for this Committee to understand that we met probably only about four or five times during the course of our appointment, although we started to meet separately as a panel on a monthly basis last year, just because of our frustration at the lack of engagement. I need to really clearly manage your expectations of what our advisory panel consisted of. It was initially established in a very formal way, with quite large, set-piece meetings, with everybody sat around a very large table, with a number of officials in attendance and a number of people coming in and presenting. Penny and Susan were really committed, and we understood that the Prime Minister was really positive, so it was an opportunity for us to engage and connect. It was certainly running in the way that I was expecting it to run.

Then we had a change of Secretary of State. We never met Amber. A meeting was being established, but then things changed quite quickly. When the current Secretary of State was appointed, her priorities and policy agenda did not involve engager stakeholders like us, so the interest in the panel really quickly diminished and we had only one meeting with the current Secretary of State.

The honest answer to your question is that we started to meet frequently, but that stopped very quickly. Initially, the meetings were very much about the priorities identified in the action plan and we were given quite a lot of opportunity to comment on policy initiatives that were presented to us. There was a sense that we were able to start to influence some policies. I remember meeting with the ONS and contributing to the census questions, which, as you are aware, included a sexual orientation and a gender identity question this time round. We met with officials from education and were commenting very much on the situation that was emerging in schools in Birmingham at that time. We were offering really practical suggestions. Some of our members had experience with young people in schools.

There were some really good opportunities to influence things early on. One of the frustrations is that we got very little feedback. Having had those meetings, we were not sure how our suggestions had landed. In all honesty, halfway through it all petered off and we have been an advisory group in name only. That is only because we have been meeting on a monthly basis and have written a couple of times to the Secretary of State.

Q5 **Kim Johnson:** Would you say that the panel had very clear terms of reference at the beginning? Did that change at all halfway through or would you say that they remained the same?

Paul Martin: The terms of reference did not change, but the lack of engagement with us did. We met with Susan Williams several times, who was our lead Minister, and we were having quite spirited conversations with her privately. They were real opportunities to try to influence



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Government policy, and it felt like a very positive experience, but it did become derailed. The fact that we had three Secretaries of State during the time of our tenure did not help, and the current Secretary of State has different plans in terms of her equality agenda.

Ellen Murray: Paul took the words out of my mouth. Again, in the beginning, with Penny, engagement was fairly good and the conversations revolved around those priorities in the action plan. With the changes in Secretary of State, it did not feel like it was a priority for them, and there was certainly a lot of frustration in terms of not being able to make contact or to understand what was going on ahead of time. What Paul said about feedback and follow-up being sometimes very limited and sometimes completely lacking is absolutely true. There were a lot of cases where that was a big problem, and it certainly hampered how effective we were able to be once we had left those meeting rooms for those couple of hours.

Jayne Ozanne: When we were first constituted, we were constituted like a formal advisory panel would be. We had minutes, both confidential and public. We had terms of reference that we reviewed. Most importantly, we set our own agenda. At our first meeting, we looked at a future work plan and set what our priorities ought to be. We drove our work plan, but also then set up working groups. The ball was very much in our court. We even asked if we could have a budget, so that we could, if we needed to, commission our own research. It was run like a formal department.

However, at the two meetings that we had—one of which, sadly, Paul was unable to make—with the Secretary of State, we had no minutes. There was no structure. There was no clear agenda. There were no papers. We were not reviewing the action plan, which is what we had originally been set up to do. None of the working groups that we had advised ought to be started, bar the conversion therapy working group, ever got off the ground. We will come on to the conversion therapy working group, I am sure.

If I can be blunt, I felt that the Secretary of State was meeting with us because she had to. I am not convinced that she knew what was in the action plan. It was a very different approach to what was originally set up to be an ongoing advisory panel. In the original terms of reference, we were each told that we were appointed for two years, but we were then told that we could be appointed for two terms. There was always the expectation that this would continue as long as the Government were in place. It was a very different understanding of the panel from September 2019.

Q6 **Kim Johnson:** It sounds as if things were derailed, not because of policy but maybe because of personality. I would be quite interested to find out whether there was a consensus of opinion in terms of your priorities, given that it was quite a large, diverse group of people. Was there consensus from everybody going forward?



Jayne Ozanne: Yes. We had a useful debate in our very first meeting as to what we could usefully cover in each of our meetings, and that was set very much by timing. We had census questions that we needed to look at in order to impact the census, and similarly with conversion therapy. Overall, I would say that we were unified, but there was, of course, healthy debate about what we should be focusing on. Frankly, there is an awful lot to do within the LGBT community in terms of tackling bullying and looking at healthcare. They are all urgent, but we had to be pragmatic, and there was consensus in the final outcome.

Q7 **Kim Johnson:** Thanks, Jayne. Paul, what impact did the pandemic have on the operation of the panel, and what were the potential impacts of the pandemic on stakeholders? Could the panel have done more?

Paul Martin: The pandemic had an impact on everybody, not least the LGBT team at GEO, which was very diminished because people were redeployed across the civil service, so there was less focus on some of the policy agendas. There was also a change in emphasis in terms of how equalities should be delivered by the GEO as well.

My starting point is that I fundamentally disagree with the statement from the Minister for Equalities in the House, when, in answer to a question, she said that Covid-19 did not disproportionately impact on LGBT communities. I know that research work that my organisation, the LGBT Foundation, has done in the last year has been submitted as evidence to this Committee several times about the way in which Covid did and still does disproportionately impact on LGBT communities. There are huge issues related to mental health, domestic abuse, online bullying, isolation and loneliness that are contained in the Hidden Figures report and other reports that have been undertaken by other LGBT organisations.

In particular, we saw quite distinct disadvantage amongst older LGBT people, who are 40% more likely to live alone than heterosexual people. We also know that young LGBT people were disproportionately impacted. I was reviewing some of the evidence that was submitted to you earlier as part of the GRA inquiry, and I was very minded by Lui from Mermaids talking about how young LGBT people were really experiencing a lot of difficulty and discrimination in their home environments.

What we failed to achieve was cutting across the narrative externally about how Covid was impacting on our communities. Whilst we were generating evidence, we were not really given the opportunity to present it. Even though the Minister for Equalities had certainly received my report, she or her officials had decided that it did not warrant being included in her answer to the House.

We were very frustrated as a committee that we were unable to break through, present that evidence and engage. There was definitely a corresponding impact on our communities from our inability to break



HOUSE OF COMMONS

through and create a positive and inclusive narrative about the ways in which Covid was impacting on LGBT communities.

Kim Johnson: Thanks for your answer, Paul. That has been very helpful. Those were all my questions.

Q8 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Thank you to all our witnesses for joining us this afternoon. It is a pleasure to meet you. Paul, I will come to you first, but I would like to know views from all of you on this. Paul, you mentioned that Ministers and officials from across Government were involved in the panel's meetings, but did you feel that they contributed effectively?

Paul Martin: I believe that there were incredibly positive and good intentions initially with the establishment and recruitment of the panel, and the careful selection of panel members. The Secretary of State at the time, Penny Mordaunt, was very committed. We met her once at the very beginning and she was very positive and really encouraging us to, "Tell the truth. Challenge me. Hold me to account", and so it was a very positive meeting. I absolutely think that the officials at GEO were deeply committed to this work, and we had a really good, honest dialogue.

Not that it would be appropriate for me to go into the details, but at the time of the establishment of the panel, the Government were trying to think about their response to GRA reform. What we were able to do in those early days was to have a very private conversation about the Government's thinking, to give our honest opinion about some of the suggestions that were being proposed at that time and to really help to shape the eventual position. Of course, that position changed substantially with different Secretaries of State, but, absolutely at the beginning, there was a real openness to co-produce and co-design solutions.

It changed because the Secretary of State's policy priorities changed. This often happens in Government when you have a new Minister. The new Minister has different ideas and approaches and, sometimes, the machinery of a previous administration or Minister is dismantled. That is what we found ourselves in. Increasingly, we were side-lined and not contacted. I know that Caroline has written to the Secretary of State and is waiting for a reply. We are the same. We wrote to the Secretary of State several times and are still waiting for a reply in terms of what we believe the priorities should be for the new iteration of the LGBT Action Plan.

I would want to say that there were really good intentions at the beginning that changed as a result of new policy priorities. That is how I would characterise it.

Q9 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Pushing you on that, do you feel that the so-called revolving door of Ministers in this portfolio and the holding of a dual role mean that Government Ministers are not adequately engaged, if that is the right phrase, with LGBT issues within their portfolios? Did you feel like



HOUSE OF COMMONS

you were being listened to? Jayne said she felt like the Minister was only meeting with you as a panel because she had to.

Paul Martin: In terms of current Ministers, that may well be what Jayne was referring to. What I would say is that the original Minister for Equalities, Susan Williams, was really interested in what we had to say and went out of her way to meet with us and had follow-up meetings with some of us. It depends very much on the Minister and on what their priorities are. Who knows what would have happened if we had not had the pandemic over the last few months? That has really changed things.

The current Secretary of State has a very different view about equalities and a very clear idea that she wants to see an integrated approach to equalities. She also thinks that the Government Equalities Office should be operating in a different way. She was very clear with us that she did not see a role for GEO as a fund-giver. Previous Ministers had the LGBT Action Fund, which was distributed to organisations to undertake work, but she did not think that GEO should be giving money. She thought it should be very much about commissioning research and did not see its role as holding the rest of Government to account. There was just a change of emphasis and approach, and we became redundant as a part of that.

Q10 **Alex Davies-Jones:** Jayne, would you agree with that assessment? Has the change in Ministers and priorities for this Government affected the panel and your input?

Jayne Ozanne: Very much so. I agree with Paul that there is a difference. Penny Mordaunt had a big portfolio as Secretary of State for Defence and Minister for Women and Equalities. She could not always make the meetings but was still actively engaged, as was Baroness Williams. More importantly, she deputised to the GEO and made sure that we had the meetings, even if she could not make them, and that the work would continue.

That is the difference in the second half, where we had no meetings with GEO. In fact, in our last letter in February, we wrote saying, "We want to serve you. Why can we not still have meetings with your deputies? We will take the work forward". Like all the other letters—and we wrote seven in total—we have not had a response.

The first two letters that we wrote to the Secretary of State were about funding. You asked about the impact of Covid. One of our pieces of advice is being absolutely adamant that we should be monitoring the impact on LGBT people, particularly in terms of deaths and hospitalisation. That advice was not acted on. Most importantly, we wrote two letters in April, because all our funding dried up and the impact on the LGBT community, both at home and abroad, was significant, at the one time we needed help. Again, none of those letters were responded to.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

There was a difference in approach, where we would be asked our opinion ahead of time under Penny. You may remember that the Secretary of State came to talk to you on 28 April, and we only read about the international conference and GRA reform in that speech. We then wrote to her asking, "Please can we meet to talk to you about it? You need to listen to our concerns about GRA". It was after the horse had bolted, as it were, and that was not a great way to kick off a relationship, if I can be honest.

Q11 Alex Davies-Jones: Ellen, do you feel that, under the new ministerial priorities for this Government, your panel has been made redundant, effectively?

Ellen Murray: In a word, yes. As Jayne said, the panel very much felt like an afterthought or a box-ticking exercise in a lot of respects, especially when things were announced on the Floor of the House or before any engagement with the panel. It questioned what the point of it was, ultimately. With the change of Ministers, there was definitely a different atmosphere and a different amount of valuation of what the panel meant to them. That reflects the current Minister's approach to equalities, how those should be enacted and what that means in terms of engaging with communities. I do not see that as being much of a priority for the current individuals.

Q12 Alex Davies-Jones: That is really concerning to hear. Jayne, I want to push you a bit more on some of the comments that you have made. You have previously raised concerns about the "hostile environment", as you called it, for LGBT people within the current administration. You have stated that the GEO Ministers took action that was directly against your advice. Paul also mentioned that his report was ignored in terms of the impact that the pandemic has had on LGBTQI+ people. Are you able to expand on this and what you mean by that "hostile environment" for the Committee?

Jayne Ozanne: We have to look at the context and then at specifics. The context is that we have heard various speeches from the Secretary of State that talked about fairness, rather than understanding that what we are trying to deal with is protecting individuals who are often bullied, and looking at full equality. There is a massive difference. The context is that we were listening to speeches where we were told there was "a war on woke" or that they would not listen to campaigners or special pleading, so you are automatically coming from a negative point of view.

Add to that the context of a rising level of transphobia in this country, and what is seen as, if I can be honest, statements by the Government and decisions—and GRA reform is just one—that have fed into a belief that we are going backwards on trans rights. Add my concerns about conversion therapy, where we saw massive delays. Research that we know has been conducted and has finished has not yet been published. We heard the rhetoric of only ending conversion therapy, not banning it. We heard speeches that did not take on board any of the concerns of



HOUSE OF COMMONS

survivors. You start building a picture where, as an individual who has been trying to change things and help people understand, you feel completely ignored. People on the ground listening to Ministers, which the media will pick up on, are feeling terribly concerned that they are under threat.

The final straw for many was the lack of funding. This has been an exceptionally difficult year. Donors are not giving to charities, because they are under pressure themselves. The Government have had to tighten their belt. To cut back on all the major work we were doing to support the most vulnerable in our communities—and, indeed, on international funding—at this time has been devastating.

Add all that together. You see us falling down the international league tables. We have gone from being at the top to being middle-ranking. The picture does not look good. If you ask members of the communities, they will talk about fearing going back to a Section 28 Government and the horrendous days. That spectre looms very heavily on the LGBT community. I am afraid it is a Tory Government that brought that in, and people are concerned.

There are not as many specifics there, but it is the whole context and the cumulative effect of speeches, decisions, delayed action and a cut in funding that have really impacted us.

Q13 Alex Davies-Jones: Deeds not words. You have also stated previously that GEO Ministers are known within the LGBT community as “Ministers for Inequality”. Can you explain why they have been given that label?

Jayne Ozanne: Because of the decisions that have been taken and the lack of action on key matters, and speeches that talk about fairness and undermine campaigners. One says, “Too often, the equality debate has been dominated by a small number of unrepresentative voices, and by those who believe people are defined by their protected characteristics”. That was a line from the Secretary of State’s speech back in December. It felt directly aimed at an LGBT Advisory Panel that she had not met and did not want to engage with.

We are not campaigning for protected characteristics, but for protections of people who are, frankly, some of the most vulnerable and most unrepresented in our society. That just showed me that she did not understand the people who she was there to champion. We need a Minister who truly understands and wants to stand and be our voice in Government for the concerns that we have. If anything, we were seeing the very opposite of that.

Alex Davies-Jones: You deserve to have that. Thank you.

Q14 Elliot Colburn: Jayne, if I can stick with you for my first question, why did you decide to resign from the panel?



Jayne Ozanne: First, thank you for all the work you have been doing on conversion therapy. I am someone who fundamentally believes that it is better to be at a table, no matter how difficult that table is, so that one's voice can be heard. For me, resigning was not an easy option. During the petitions debate on conversion therapy, which you led, I heard the Minister for Equalities Kemi Badenoch's speech, which yet again continued to use the rhetoric of ending conversion therapy. She used the word "ban" only to talk about not having a ban. Most importantly, she did not seem to understand any of the concerns that we have been raising for over three years now regarding religious practice, spiritual guidance and the role of prayer. None of that seemed to be being championed by the one person who is supposed to be trying to protect us. We have been waiting to see the research that has been promised for so long. We have been waiting for action. To me, that speech was just a red light that we are going down the wrong road very quickly, and I needed to push a nuclear button.

In resigning, I hoped to bring attention to my concerns, and I was fortunate enough that the media picked up on it. We have had a lot of reassuring promises since. We still have a long way to go after the announcements of last week, which are another matter. I was very concerned about the fact that the Minister had not met with survivors at that point. From what I understood, they had been meeting with evangelical leaders. They had not involved any of my interfaith advisory board, who had written to her five times asking to meet. We are talking about senior faith leaders: the Bishop of Liverpool, the Dean of St Paul's, the former president of the Methodist Conference, the chair of the UK Baptist council, a member of the Hindu Council and the ambassador to Europe for Buddhism. These senior faith leaders have been asking to meet to talk about conversion therapy, but not even their letters were responded to.

Again, this has had a cumulative effect that says, "You are not listening to the right people. You are going down the wrong road and we need to do a U-turn very quickly, if we are going to protect the people who we need to".

Q15 **Elliot Colburn:** Ellen, you also resigned from the panel. Were your reasons similar? Tell us a bit more about your decision.

Ellen Murray: They were similar to Jayne's. The response to conversion therapy was certainly a significant part of why I decided to resign. Again, it was not a massive change of mindset from my side. It was not a snap decision that day. It was the result of a fairly long-term working out of how the panel was being responded to and accommodated for by the Government. Specifically, some of the "hostile environment" topics that Jayne discussed in the previous question were also big factors, but conversion therapy was the straw that broke the camel's back in this instance.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

The development of this Government's approach to human rights, especially after the massive public shift in conversation in 2020 regarding different human rights issues, and especially after the global explosion of the Black Lives Matter movement and the Government's approach to "activist lawyers" and things like that, really just shows a complete disdain for human rights at a base level. I did not feel like I could take part in that, because, in my own moral standing or how I would consider things, I do not want to give legitimacy to that sort of action. I do not think that panel members who did not resign are, but, in my own case, I was just very uncomfortable with that.

Conversion therapy is just one example of how the Government's changing approach to human rights is manifested. It is not something that affects just LGBT communities; it is also seen in asylum policy and human rights in general, especially over the last year. It was a point in my own decisions.

Q16 Elliot Colburn: If I could ask you both, but perhaps sticking with you, Ellen, first of all, how did GEO respond to your resignation? Do you feel that it understood in that response the concerns that you raised and that led you to do so, or did it respond to you at all?

Ellen Murray: I did get a response in the form of a one-line email confirming receipt, but nothing beyond that. I was not expecting it. If the panel as a whole had never received responses to things, why would I expect a response as an individual person? There was no response other than an administrative "we will pass this on" thing.

Q17 Elliot Colburn: Jayne, was that the same for you?

Jayne Ozanne: Very much so; it was just a one-liner. I also had a meeting with Kemi Badenoch planned to introduce her to some survivors, and I got an email saying that that meeting would be cancelled. I then raised concerns about that, because it would be the first time she met with survivors of conversion therapy, and I was promptly told, "Yes, perhaps we had better meet with them. Could you tell us who we need to meet?" I set that meeting up and it was only the day before that they realised it was my own Zoom link that they were going to use. It was complete chaos, I am afraid, in the secretariat, which we may come on to.

I chair the Ban Conversion Therapy coalition, which is a large group of all those who are campaigning for a ban. As a group, we wrote to Kemi Badenoch after that speech, sharing our concerns and asking to meet, and that too has never been responded to. There is a pattern here. You may hear from Paul, but I know that members who stayed—and perhaps we will get on to this—never got a letter before they read in the media that they were being stood down. Communication has not been good, and it certainly has not been at a level that the Government would be proud of.



Q18 **Elliot Colburn:** That seems like a good point to bring Paul in. You remained as a member, but is it fair to say that you had concerns about the operation and that relationship with the panel and the GEO whilst you were still a member?

Paul Martin: Yes. I was in a very different position, being an organisational member. I had been appointed rather than applying, so I felt that my responsibility was to stay to the very end in order to use any and all opportunities to influence the agenda. We had a very honest conversation as a panel. It is really important to remember that the panel was meeting separately at this point. We had organised a monthly Zoom call, and so we were meeting and discussing things on a monthly basis. We were trying to communicate and engage with the GEO and with the private office, and we were not getting any response from either at that point. It really felt that things had closed down on us.

From my perspective, it was very much about staying to the very bitter end to see whether or not there might be an opportunity to contribute. I have the utmost respect for my colleagues who stood down and went public with it. There was no animosity on the panel at all in terms of the individual decisions that people made. By this point, it is important to remember that there was just no engagement at all, and we were very clear that there was unlikely to be any further engagement. At the meeting that I recall having with the Secretary of State, there were some promises to meet with the Minister for Equalities and with the new director of the GEO and other officials to raise with them some of the issues that were raised with her. Those never materialised either.

You have to understand that it was a very low bar at that particular point, and so expectations were set very minimally. It is really important to reiterate that there was no disagreement amongst the panel in terms of the decisions that individuals were making.

Q19 **Elliot Colburn:** Sticking with you, Paul, could I ask you about your understanding of the decision to disband or, as the GEO has termed it, the thing that was always going to happen in terms of the coming to an end of the LGBT Advisory Panel? There seems to be a conflict of language around whether it was disbanded or if the terms just ran out and that was always going to happen. What is your understanding of that panel coming to an end? In your opinion, why did the Government take the decision to disband or bring it to an end?

Paul Martin: What is really important is that, unlike Jayne and Ellen, I never got a letter of appointment. I was asked in a telephone call and I had to wait quite a while for the recruitment process to be established. I was told that it was going to be a two-year tenure, so I assumed it would be a two-year tenure. I do not have the same nuance as Jayne in terms of it being disbanded; I just felt that it came to the end of its time.

What was very clear was that the policy agenda had changed quite radically, the ministerial priorities had changed, the Minister had



changed, and there was no longer room at the inn for an LGBT Advisory Panel. As Jayne has mentioned, the Secretary of State had made it very clear that she was not looking to engage with individual identity groups or stakeholder groups. She had a much more integrated equalities hub vision. I know that you are waiting for details of how that is going to work, how it will be staffed and how it will operate, and so are we.

It was made very clear that it would be unlikely that we would be continuing in our role. We tried to do the best that we could, within the very limited parameters that we had to influence things for and on behalf of our communities. We had some very positive and progressive conversations at different points, and we certainly continued to contribute to the best of our ability in terms of what we thought the ongoing priorities were. We can quite happily share the letters that we wrote to the Secretary of State outlining what we thought those priorities should be for a more slimmed-down, focused LGBT Action Plan, because we still feel that there are plenty of inequalities that need to be addressed.

My expectations were really met in the sense that I did not really have many. When you notice that the policy environment has changed and the agenda has moved on, you regroup and look at how you might influence in different ways. I know that different people have been attempting to influence Government policy in different ways. We have been turning our attention to the NHS and the National LGBT Health Advisor that grew out of a lot of this work. I know that Stonewall has been developing really close links with advisors at Number 10 and other parts of Government, and so looking to influence the agenda in a different way is where we have been moving on to, because it was very clear that GEO's time as the centre of LGBT equality had come to an end and moved on.

If the Minister and her private office are not engaging with GEO, and if there is a lack of understanding around who is doing what, you understand—I keep saying this, and I do not mean to keep repeating myself—that the policy agenda has changed and moved on. We were waiting for our time to come to an end, but we were still trying to influence until the very end, which is really important to bear in mind.

Q20 **Elliot Colburn:** Ellen, on that same point, do you want to add anything to what Paul said about your understanding of the disbanding or coming to an end of the advisory panel?

Ellen Murray: When the panel was initially set up, the terms of reference set out the time period and so on. That was all understood. My expectation going into it was that it was a time-limited appointment, which makes sense and is pretty standard, but that it would not be a remit that would be dropped necessarily. That expectation shifted with the Ministers, although I cannot recall ever being specifically told, certainly not in writing, while I was a member that it would be disbanded. I do not think that happened. The amount to which I would have been surprised changed a lot over the course of that. When I found about it, it



was not a surprise at all. That matches very closely with what the Minister's approach is and what is politically useful for that approach.

Q21 **Elliot Colburn:** Jayne, coming to you on the same question, I will add a little extra for you, if I may. Your evidence stated that GEO Ministers ended the panel because "they do not want to engage with LGBT people nor be challenged over their lack of action". Could you expand on that a little more and explain what you were talking about there?

Jayne Ozanne: I said that based on my own experience of not being listened to, not being challenged and, in asking for meetings, having the door closed. That is how it felt. The terms of reference that we were sent in their original form said that each member will be expected to commit to two years, and a maximum of two terms will be permitted, i.e. four years. Those were revised at our first meeting and we were told that it would be appointment for two years but we would be free to reapply if we wanted to. It was a very clear commitment to an ongoing panel.

In January this year, I asked the GEO whether there were plans to carry the panel on or not. Frankly, I was looking at my own time commitments. I sit on various other boards and on the General Synod, and I had to look at where my time was going. I understood that the deputy director is still to meet with the Secretary of State, and I am sure you will be asking them how often they have met with their officials, but it was very difficult to have any steer whatsoever as to what was going on. The communication between the Secretary of State and her own staff is something that somebody, dare I say, needs to be looking into.

I said that I did not think we were being listened to. When we challenged, we had two meetings, during one of which we focused on GRA reform, and the Secretary of State had made a statement, which I thought was incorrect, about the fact that Europe did not have this, whereas we know that Norway, Belgium and Ireland do. There are good case studies. I do not want to be rude, but there were levels of perhaps a lack of understanding, which we, as advisors, were there to help with, but instead it was seen as competitive or that intervention was not welcomed.

Perhaps the same could be said over conversion therapy. I had been appointed, perhaps primarily, because of my experience and understanding in the area of conversion therapy and because of my work with faith leaders on both sides of the divide. None of those opportunities to meet or suggestions of which faith leaders they should be meeting had been taken up at all—not one. To me, that was exceptionally concerning, and I am sure we will get on to this.

As many of you will know, I led the Global Interfaith Commission on LGBT+ Lives, which was sponsored by the Foreign Office and culminated in a major event in December. The GEO had asked us to remove a line from the declaration to do with conversion therapy, because it saw it as



HOUSE OF COMMONS

too contentious. We did not remove that line. To me, that again showed a complete lack of understanding of what we were trying to do.

I am afraid that, cumulatively, I was very concerned about the level of understanding and the desire to be challenged, to take on board concerns and to embrace people who might disagree.

Q22 **Elliot Colburn:** Jayne, you mentioned that you had contacted the GEO to find out if the panel was going to be continued or not. The GEO has said that a replacement for the panel “will be set out in due course”. Are you aware of any conversations that have taken place about the establishment of this panel and when it might be?

Jayne Ozanne: What I understood was that the Secretary of State said she wanted a panel to look at the international conference. That is what I had read. I understood that all sorts of options were being debated back in January, February and March: should there be an equalities panel that would reach across all the different interest groups, or an LGBT panel? I have not understood about an international conference panel. I have not heard any more, apart from what we have all read in the media, so nothing concrete has been set out.

If I can be honest, again, that would have been something that the panel could have been asked about. We could have been asked to reflect on what was and was not working well, given that priorities had changed, and perhaps what the Secretary of State needed. Our last letter to her at the beginning of February said that we were keen to support her in any which way that was appropriate, in order to serve the country and the needs of the queer community positively. Frankly, if that meant, “We do not want to have a panel but we would like to be able to draw on each of you”, we were all there wanting to be positive, and I felt that it was a real slap in the face that none of that was taken up.

We are doing this voluntarily. I do not get paid to go to any of these meetings. In fact, that was an issue we raised right at the very start: volunteers who work part-time with charities do not get a per diem. We give our own time. A thank you would have been nice.

Q23 **Elliot Colburn:** Ellen and Paul, are you aware of any conversations about the establishment of this new panel? Do you know anyone who has been approached from the former panel to sit on it, for example?

Ellen Murray: The answers to those are no and no. I am aware of the general discussions around the international conference, which is a whole other story, but I do not know anything about the replacement panel or who has been approached, if anybody.

Paul Martin: There has been speculation about having some kind of panel for the international conference. I understand that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office feels that it has that well-covered. As with Jayne, I have heard some whispers about some idea of some kind of equalities



panel. Maybe the answer will be in the letter that you are expecting in terms of how the equalities hub is going to work.

There are a number of disagreements across Government and across Departments about how things should go forward. It is really important to say for the record that there are lots of people who think there should have been an LGBT Advisory Panel and that some form of panel should have continued, and that the views of stakeholders, members of the community and their lived experiences should have been taken into account as the Government developed their policy agenda.

We are talking a lot about what happened and what the financial decision making was, but that does not take into account the fact that there are plenty of people across the civil service who think that this panel should have continued in some form and been listened to in a more meaningful way. Had the panel been listened to and engaged with, maybe some of the difficulties and challenges that the Government have found themselves in, particularly around a lack of reform of the GRA and dragging its heels on conversion therapy, might not have happened, had the panel been enabled and empowered to act in the way that it should.

Q24 **Elliot Colburn:** Let us stick with that point about carrying the panel on in some way. Let us assume that there will be a new panel. What key changes should the GEO make to the LGBT Advisory Panel? That is not to say the way they interact or the communication problems that you have all eloquently raised, but in terms of the set-up of the panel, its operation, its remit and what it is there to do, do you have a view on what changes, if any, should be made to a reconstituted panel? Would replicating what was in place, with a much better set of relationships and communications in place, do the trick?

Paul Martin: Lessons can definitely be learned. It will come as no surprise to you that my starting point would be to say that there needs to be a Cabinet-level Equalities Minister, with a complete equalities brief. That would be incredibly helpful for just about every single agenda that this Committee concerns itself with, as well as cross-Government harmonisation and improvement to meet the needs of people who are disenfranchised and disenfranchised.

In addition, the original intention, where there was close engagement with the Minister and her panel, was really important. We were her panel and we had been appointed to advise her. Being allowed to advise the Minister, creating a safe, trusting and respectful place where we could disagree, talk truth to power, challenge and be listened to, and listen to the political realities, would be really helpful.

It is really important that, if there is to be an LGBT Advisory Panel, individual members represent the whole of the LGBT community, coming from a completely inclusive perspective. It is really important that that is a fundamental philosophical point of the establishment of any new panel.



There is lots of work to do. As we pointed out in our last letter to the Secretary of State, there is a whole research agenda, and there is the Government harmonisation of monitoring sexual orientation and gender identity. There is a huge amount of work to be done in the health and wellbeing field. There is lots of urgent and important work to be done in education. There are pressing needs for LGBT people seeking asylum. These were the priorities that we were urging the Secretary of State to look at, and a reinvigorated panel that was supported by officials and had that close relationship with the Minister, sitting in a Cabinet-level position, would be really helpful in ensuring that the messages from the panel went straight to the heart of Government's thinking and decision making.

Q25 Elliot Colburn: Ellen, on the same point, what changes, if any, would you like to see in the panel?

Ellen Murray: I would agree with what Paul has said. In terms of the panel being useful for Government and for the communities that we aim to represent, it requires a Cabinet-level position and a person who has a good understanding and approach to human rights, and not just specifically LGBT human rights and cultural issues there. There are some merits to taking broader, all-encompassing approaches to equality and human rights rather than specifics, but they need to be done with cultural competency and an understanding. I would have approaching zero confidence that that would happen at the moment.

When the panel was started, there was much more of an air of welcoming challenge and accountability. It has been said already that there was an expectation that we would be forthcoming with our viewpoints and that there would be weight behind them, and that they would be taken with that weight. I am not sure that that is possible with the current approach to human rights and community engagement that this Government takes. I would be sceptical, but if those were to somehow change, what Paul said would be a good approach to that.

When the panel is effective and listened to, we can advocate for the communities that we come from and represent, but also support that same Government with communications and cultural competency issues that will help in delivering those changes in policy for the better. I am assuming that an advisory panel is appointed because there is expertise there, so using that can be quite beneficial.

Jayne Ozanne: I completely agree with Paul that what we need is a Cabinet-level Minister who has a heart for this work and wants to be a champion of, in our case, the LGBT+ community. One of the challenges that you face—and you must face this as a Committee—is that women and equalities is a very broad remit and can, sadly, include some competing groups. By that, I mean, for instance, when the race inequality commission was set up under Kemi, various members of my interfaith advisory board wrote saying that they had hoped that there would be a consideration of LGBT people of faith from minority ethnic



HOUSE OF COMMONS

communities because they are often the most targeted. That was seen as campaigning rather than giving advice.

That, to me, is about one's attitude to whether the people around the table are seen as advisors or as people trying to lobby you for change. If you are someone who wants to welcome being challenged and to understand community, you will not see it as campaigning, but as people who really do want to speak through their lived experience and their expertise in their areas.

This is a relatively long answer, but this is probably the most important question about how you go forward. One of the things that I was quite concerned about in the early days is we were looking at maybe creating a chair out of one of the panel members, but that would have introduced a level of hierarchy amongst us, and it was important that we were all seen around the table as having equal weight and equal right. The decision was made that the Minister herself would chair the panel and, in her absence, the deputy director for LGBT policy would chair. Penny had wanted to come and chair, and that was her level of engagement and her desire to sit down with us and be one of us.

That is incredibly difficult for a Secretary of State with a very large portfolio to do, and one needs to look again as to whether it needs a specific brief for someone to hold. It should be someone who has both the passion and the time to give it the involvement needed. It has to be Cabinet-level, looking at that chair. We need to look more at ensuring that there is proper representation of people of colour around the table. From my point of view, within the faith communities and in terms of conversion therapy, they are the most exposed and their concerns need to be heard.

In 2017 this Government did one of the biggest surveys in the world of the LGBT community. 108,000 people responded, setting out our needs and priorities. We know what the community's needs are. We might want to refresh that, but we know what those priorities are. What we need is someone who wants to really listen to, engage with and push that forward, and the experts who can help you to do that.

My final point would be that, in order to have those experts, you may need to consider giving a per diem to those of us who are not paid by our jobs to be there. It is not a big point but it is what happens in other boards and councils that I happen to sit on. That might be something that would enable all to give their time, if they have the right expertise.

Q26 Chair: What I am trying to understand is whether it is more important to have a full-time, permanent Cabinet-level position on equalities or to have somebody in that role who is prepared to prioritise it alongside another job. Is it more important to have somebody with passion who is determined to get a grip of equalities or somebody full-time?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Paul Martin: Both would be good: somebody whose full-time brief was equalities and, I would say, inclusion, and who was passionate about it and able to work beyond their brief and be heard at Cabinet level. It has got to the point that, with the inequality that exists in this country being so deep-seated, and the challenges that this Committee is grappling with, it needs somebody at the most senior level to grab hold of it. We saw the extraordinary challenge to persuade not only the ONS but a range of other stakeholders to include a sexual orientation question in the last census. I was working on that for nearly 15 years in terms of trying to persuade the system to adopt that question. It is quite a simple, innocuous question to ask people the gender of the person they love, but the reality is that it caused extraordinary difficulty.

Part of the challenge was that we do not have, to coin a phrase of a previous administration, "joined-up Government". Sometimes just knitting together the individual elements can become a vast patchwork quilt of stitches and work. Having somebody whose role it is to stride across Government, maybe attached to the Cabinet Office, and to bring people together and to be a catalyst for change and a connector of people and ideas, would be really important. They have to be passionate about people and the level of inequality and exclusion that exists in this country, but they need to have a seat firmly at the Cabinet table, so that they can raise the issue. On just about every agenda item at a Cabinet meeting, there will be an access, inclusion and equality dimension, so it is a pretty big brief, if it was treated with the dignity and respect that it deserves.

Ellen Murray: I would broadly agree with Paul. Having somebody with the capacity and the resources to do this work is important. Maybe it is activist brain talking, but I cannot really conceive of doing this sort of work in equality and human rights without caring deeply that it progresses and that it is really important. My concern about the feasibility of this is that, if you are passionate about human rights or equality and inclusion at the moment, there is that growing likelihood that anybody is labelled an activist for that. I consider myself an activist, and it is not a dirty word, but when you see lawyers lawyering for people being called "activists" because it is related to an area of human rights, it does not bode terribly well if the people saying that are the people who ultimately set policy at the highest level.

It would be great for a person with that passion, knowledge and genuine enthusiasm for equality and human rights to be in that role, but if it were me or somebody with my approach to things, I would probably be crushed within a short period of time. When you are that into this sort of work, the realities of the current approach get very frustrating and damaging very quickly.

Jayne Ozanne: Capacity is key here. There is so much that needs to be done. It needs to be someone who has not just the willingness but the time and space to do it. I cannot imagine not having someone, as Paul



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and Ellen have already said, who has the passion for it. It is pointless appointing someone who wants it as a title but does not want to be the champion.

Speaking as someone who left the party at the same time, although we are not here to talk politics, what is needed is a rebuilding of trust between this Government and many in the LGBT community. They really need to see concrete actions that signal that they understand that it has not been a “happy period”. Things have been, frankly, going downhill for a year or two. We need to signal a massive change, and the only way you can do that is by making appointments that really matter, giving a seat at the Cabinet table and allowing people to believe that this Government truly want to embrace, honour and champion those who, frankly, need a voice more than anyone at the moment.

Q27 **Kate Osborne:** Good afternoon to you all, and thank you so much for coming to speak to us today. I would like to ask my first question to Jayne and Ellen. You have both spoken about how the Government approach to conversion therapy was a key factor in your decisions to resign from the advisory panel. Could you tell us, in your view, how receptive GEO Ministers were to discussions around conversion therapy? Ellen, could I start with you?

Ellen Murray: To be honest, Jayne is probably the person to talk to on this, because she has a lot more experience.

Jayne Ozanne: I have been party to 10 letters from different groups asking to meet with the Secretary of State or Kemi Badenoch. Those involve my interfaith advisory board, the Ban Conversion Therapy coalition, survivors, the chair and vice-chair of the Ozanne Foundation, and others. I have had responses to two of those letters and I was never given a chance to meet, apart from when I then called on the fact that they had yet to meet with any survivors. That level of engagement has been abysmal.

One of the first things that we did as an advisory panel—and it was publicly minuted—was to set up a working group on conversion therapy. In our first meeting, on our agenda was an item on conversion therapy and I was asked to present on that, which was a great honour. As an action point of that, we set up a small group of me and three other panel members. When we met, we then agreed to create a broader group and to invite people. We had meetings in June, July and August of 2019. It felt like there was a desire to engage, to listen and to put a work plan together, and that work immediately stopped in September 2019. That is a date I have mentioned before.

That was 18 months ago. Since then, it feels as though there has been very little engagement with those of us who, frankly, have a lot of expertise in this area. As I understand it, there have been a lot of meetings with small groups of very specific faith leaders who have had concerns, and many would see those as the perpetrators of conversion



therapy, not the abusers. I would be interested to know how many times Kemi or, indeed, Liz have met with faith leaders. I was told that there was a meeting in Number 10 back in March or April 2019 with faith leaders. None of the faith leaders who I had suggested—senior members of the Church of England who had been involved in the debate that agreed to ban and to call on the Government to ban conversion therapy—were invited. Again, it was just a small group of evangelicals.

I fear that they have been listening to a very small group. They have not engaged with the broad level of faith leaders that we would suggest, or, indeed, with survivors. Most importantly, they have not met and, given that they are the people to take this forward, I found that really puzzling.

Q28 **Kate Osborne:** Paul, how receptive do you believe the GEO Ministers were to discussions around conversion therapy?

Paul Martin: As has already been said, it is a game of two halves. In the very early days, there was a very receptive response. Many of us were extremely surprised that the national survey raised such a large number of people who had experienced conversion therapy. That came as quite a big surprise to many of us, who were unaware of the extent of it. That has given rise to the opportunity for experts like Jayne to come forward and talk about it. Jayne and other survivors have talked really passionately about it and made us really understand and own the issue in a way that we had not previously.

In part, the survey, the establishment of a panel and the early relationship with the Ministers enabled conversion therapy to be put on the agenda. I do not know whether you would agree, Jayne, but it was not really there before. Organisations like mine had come across people from faith communities or people who were older and who had been through and experienced conversion therapy, but not to the extent that the survey was indicating or that we have heard subsequently from the greater attention and focus.

The panel enabled conversion therapy to become an issue that we are now more familiar with. Jayne is the expert on this and has talked about how Ministers have not met with survivors, listened to experts or responded. The current Government response does not go anywhere near enough or quickly enough to the real need of people who are experiencing conversion therapy today. It is a game of two halves.

Q29 **Kate Osborne:** Please all feel free to come in on this, but if I can go back to Jayne on this initially, the Government have now announced a consultation on conversion therapy before a bill is brought forward. What is your view of this, and what impact will this consultation have on the LGBT+ community?

Jayne Ozanne: I have been very vocal about my complete anger around yet more delay, because that is how I perceive this. We have had three years of consulting with interested parties—arguably not survivors, as I



have explained—but what we need to be doing is consulting on a bill. We need to see a bill. We have been working on wording, legislation and definitions for three years now. We have good international precedents in what came forward in Australia. Queensland passed a bill in December that everyone in the international community who I work with feels is the gold standard. We have a broad agreement around a definition that Alicia Kearns MP allowed us all to gather around back in November. I have no idea why we are delaying yet more.

We all know that, even when we see a bill, it is going to take time. What people truly do not understand is that, whilst we delay, lives are being impacted and even lost. Those who continue to practise this get free advertising, because they are constantly brought on air to talk about why they want to carry on doing it. Most importantly, young people's lives—and older people's, but it is often young and young adults—are being damaged, often beyond repair. Delay is just inexcusable when we have made commitment after commitment to do something, and now we are just seeking more time.

I am beyond angry now. I do not trust the Government's decision to say they want to do something. We saw the negative impact of consultation around the GRA reform and how that, frankly, did not work, and it is going to be exactly the same here. We should not be determining public policy that protects individuals by public vote. Most of the public do not have a clue about this. I really was very distressed to read about a consultation, and I applaud Lord Smith and Baroness Kennedy, who, in the House of Lords last night, voiced their major concerns on yet more delay. I believe that Baroness Williams said that she had agreed with them on that. There are questions to be asked as to why we have to have this consultation.

Q30 **Kate Osborne:** What impact will it have on the LGBT+ community? I also share your frustration, for what it is worth, but how might it impact on the community?

Jayne Ozanne: As I say, it impacts the lives of people who are constantly being subjected to this. It allows perpetrators to carry on believing that the Government are not going to be very serious about banning this, and they carry on with impunity. The bigger issue is that it is yet more proof to the LGBT community that this Government are creating a hostile environment, do not have their best interests at heart, have not listened to the concerns around the need for urgency, and are putting yet more obstacles in the way of something that is quite simple.

I do not want to put words in Paul's and Ellen's mouths, but they have talked about having very low expectations. Many will probably think, "There they go again. Of course they were going to do a consultation. They were never really committed in the first place". It is the fact that we are leaving people vulnerable and continually doing so, without understanding the real, raw impact on people's lives that angers me most. It is just time that we got on and did it.



Q31 **Kate Osborne:** I could not agree more. Paul, is there anything you have to add regarding the consultation? Why do you think the Government are taking so long to bring forward proposals to ban conversion therapy?

Paul Martin: I agree wholeheartedly with Jayne. We cannot reiterate enough that every day of delay means that people are being harmed and self-harming as a result of this insidious practice. In all honesty, the Government are trying to square the circle and to keep too many competing philosophies and priorities. It is impossible. You just have to ban a practice that results in people enduring significant harm to themselves for the rest of their lives. Jayne speaks about this much more eloquently than I, and I fully support her position and what she said. This Government should not delay. There does not need to be additional consultation. More than enough evidence has been generated. What we need is very determined, decisive and timely action.

Ellen Murray: What Paul and especially Jayne have already said sums it up perfectly, but this Government have a bit of history in terms of using consultation on various equality or human rights issues really just to kick the can down the road. Consultation can be very useful politically as a stopping block. A culture war can be very useful politically. It is sensible to be critical of when consultation is used like this, when there is such overwhelming evidence. Sometimes it feels like consultation on climate change, where there is so much evidence. Consultation and spending an inordinate amount of time to get such little value that has not already been discovered is sometimes just avoiding the difficult political decisions that need to be made.

Q32 **Bell Ribeiro-Addy:** What key changes should be included in a bill specifically to ban conversion therapy?

Jayne Ozanne: As a coalition, we have put forward a long list of changes. We need to ban all practices that seek to change, cancel, cure or suppress someone's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, but that is just part of the problem. It is a very significant part, but we need to look at how we stop the advertising and promotion of this. We need to look at packages that support victims and give them the very specific trauma counselling that they need. We need to look at whistleblowing policies, so that we can identify and map who the perpetrators are.

We need education programmes that work with those who would want to continue this practice—and I am thinking specifically of religious and cultural leaders—to understand the harm that is going on. Bringing in the medical health and mental health professionals who can testify through hard evidence of that would be useful.

We also need to train professionals—teachers, medical health professionals and social workers—in ways of being able to spot and highlight people who are at risk and seem to be going through this. There is a reason why this has been hidden for so long, and I speak out of



personal experience. The level of shame at going through this is high. The level of rejection from friends and families is exceptionally high. It is often not until 20 years after you have gone through it that you are prepared to talk out about it, so we need people who can spot the signs and spot people at risk, and put in protections around them.

On the questions that have been asked about why the Government are delaying, it is very clear that they are not of one mind on the issue of religious practices, i.e. prayer and spiritual guidance, or on matters pertaining to the trans community. The truth is that the UN and the international community are very clear on this. I do not know if this is for now or for later, but the UN and international law are really clear about the need to guard against harmful religious practices. We do that already in the UK and have done over the years.

To me, all of this points towards something much bigger that we need to get our minds round, and that is to do with spiritual abuse. How do we protect people when religion goes bad, for want of a better word? It happens in all religions, sadly, and we are getting to learn about that more. We talk about emotional, physical and sexual abuse, but if we could truly understand, define and guard against spiritual abuse and work with religious groups, who themselves recognise that that is a fact, we would be in a far healthier place as a society.

I come back to the fact that we need to ban all practices, including those that may seem benign to some but are far from it, which include prayer and spiritual guidance, which are targeted at an individual and have a predetermined outcome that says you cannot be anything other than heterosexual and cisgendered. It is that predetermined outcome and forcing someone down a road, rather than giving them a safe space to explore and accept who they are, that does all the damage.

Q33 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Whilst you are there, Jayne, and thinking specifically about the issue of prayer, we need to be very careful when legislating against religious practices as forms of conversion therapy, just to make sure that freedoms are not infringed. Do you have any suggestions for us as to how prayer could be included in this bill without infringing religious freedoms?

Jayne Ozanne: People talk about infringing religious freedoms. With all due respect, without unpacking it, religious freedom is very clear that you can have whatever internal belief you want. The way that freedom of religion is written into international law—and forgive me for saying it—is that there are two parts to it. One is that you are free to believe whatever you like in your conscience, but how you choose to manifest and practice it can be legislated against when it causes harm. This is a very good example of that, and that is why Queensland and Victoria have included religious practices such as prayer in their bill. That is what we need to do here.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

I was careful in my previous answer to set out the three criteria: that it is targeted at a specific individual; that it is one-directional in outcome; and that, although I did not say this before, it is often done by someone in a position of power. When we are talking about prayer, we are talking about four or five hours of intense prayer, where you are often encouraged to be sick and you have people laying hands on you, holding you down on the floor or, in my case, hitting me with a bible. We are not talking about a nice cup of tea and a five-minute prayer here, but about something that goes through every aspect of your life.

Most importantly, it leaves you with a sense of shame and guilt for not being the person you believe is acceptable, right and proper, and it is that constant messaging and targeting of your psyche that causes so much harm. Freedom of religion and belief is frequently legislated against. It is what we do on forced marriage, female genital mutilation and hate preaching.

Perhaps the most relevant example is the smacking ban, where the Evangelical Alliance and others wanted to allow smacking to continue, because it believed that the scripture encourages people to chastise their children—the “spare the rod and spoil the child” sort of thing. It campaigned very vigorously to be allowed to continue to smack, but, as a society, we realised that the child had rights and that we should guard against that, so against their freedom of religion and belief we put in safeguarding. That is exactly what we are asking for here.

It is the lexicon that perhaps needs to change. I would not call what I went through, or what others in religious settings go through, prayer. I would call it hate prayer, because it, sadly, comes from the position of hating LGBT people and causes you to hate yourself.

Q34 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Thank you very much, Jayne, and thank you for sharing your experience. Are there any other impacts from this type of practice on individuals that you would like to share and have not already covered?

Jayne Ozanne: We did a survey in 2018 with the GEO and a very eminent board of statisticians who oversaw it, which aimed to get at people who have been through conversion therapy. 468 of the 4,500 people who responded had been through it, although I would offer that the figure is much higher. A lot of people do not realise that what they have been through in church or cultural settings would often fall under the definition of conversion therapy.

We know, from that, that there is a whole range of practices that people have gone through, through talking therapies in the medical health profession to prayer and exorcism, and through aversion therapies. When we did the same survey on gender identity with the trans community last year, we saw that, sadly, the level of violence was extremely high, as was the withholding of food and the level of verbal abuse. In both cases, we saw cases of corrective rape, chemical interventions, and people being



told to drink various potions—just the most horrendous forms of abuse. In both cases, we realised that the impact in terms of people’s tendency to attempt suicide or have suicidal thoughts was twice as high as those who had not been through it.

The evidence that I can quote from various studies is very clear about how harmful this is, but this is a whole range of practices. When it gets to religious practices, we do need to understand that it is not just a little two-minute prayer, but something that is very specific. There is a whole set of case studies on the banconversiontherapy.com website and, indeed, on my own blogsite viamedia.news. We run a whole series of Christian LGBT people talking about the horrendous abuse that they have been through, which is often quite violent and scary, as well as, sadly, traumatic to their psyche.

Q35 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Just because you are in such good flow at the moment, Jayne, the Prime Minister himself, in response to a letter from the Evangelical Alliance, said that the Government would allow such practices to continue. I was wondering what your views are on that. I am sure I can guess; you may be able to skip over that quite quickly. Could you reiterate to us how prayer can be included in the ban on conversion therapy? Could you expand on it?

Jayne Ozanne: Yes, of course, and forgive me for not mentioning it before. As I understand it, what the Prime Minister said in his letter is that he was keen to allow “appropriate pastoral support”. “Appropriate” is the key word there. Appropriate pastoral support or guidance is when someone is given a safe space where they can explore who they are, and whoever they find themselves to be when they get to that point of peace is acceptable. Inappropriate pastoral support is when they are mandated that they have to conform to a certain norm. We need to look carefully at what is seen as appropriate and inappropriate.

What the Prime Minister also mentioned in his letter—and it is a word that the Secretary of State used last week in her statement after the Queen’s Speech—is coercion and “non-coercive” practices. It is important that I flag that I am very concerned about trying to introduce this concept of coercion, because it is impossible to prove in law. We have various examples in other bills where the word “coercion” has been used. It has meant that nobody has been able to be prosecuted, because the victim has to take the stand and try to prove why they are coerced or not.

Far more importantly, the vast majority of people, like me, chose willingly to go through this. We were not coerced in that sense. We did it because we truly believed it was the right thing to do, even though I ended up, sadly, in hospital fighting for my life and going through a breakdown that took me to one of the darkest places I hope I never go back to. I did not realise the harm I was doing to myself. International law is very clear that it is a state’s duty to protect its citizens from such harmful, degrading practices, which it has called torture.



We cannot introduce the concept of coercion. It is legally dubious and, most importantly, does not cover the vast majority of people who are going through this.

Q36 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Thank you very much, Jayne. I want to go back to Paul and Ellen and the question I first asked about any further key changes that should be included in a bill to ban conversion therapy.

Paul Martin: We are in the same coalition that Jayne leads and has so eloquently outlined. All I would say is just reiterating what she said. The key issue for us is about banning all practices, and particularly all harmful religious practices. That responds to the points that you were asking before about how you talk about protecting prayer. That is something very different than harmful spiritual practices and abuse.

Jayne has really clearly laid out some of the areas that she and the coalition would like to see included in the bill. What I would add to her statement is that it is unsurprising to learn about the horrendous levels of mental health and of substance misuse that are taking place in LGBT communities, as well as the amount of self-loathing, self-harm and self-hatred that many LGBT members of our communities internalise and manifest in harmful behaviours.

What will be really difficult to think about is how the informal conversion therapy takes place, as Jayne said—the people willingly going into this who do not feel they are being coerced, but feel internal shame and hatred about their identity, because that is how they have been brought up and how they grow. We know that there are many therapists in this country that will pathologise somebody's sexual orientation or gender identity and will identify that as the thing that needs to be somehow changed. That would not necessarily come under the banner of conversion therapy but would be much more informal.

There has been some really good work that the Department of Health was previously involved in under the coalition Government, with ministerial signing of an outlawing of that kind of practice in any publicly funded therapy. Many of the counselling institutions have banned that from taking place. The challenge, of course, is that that does not mean that, informally, those practices do not still go on. If I was to go along to a therapist and was talking about my internal shame at being a gay man being at the heart of the behaviours that I was engaging in, the therapist would not latch on and say, "Maybe it is because you are gay that you are behaving in that way".

What we have to be really careful about is fully understanding just how unregulated this area is and how precise we have to be with the approach that we take and the protections that we put in place. Jayne and the coalition have studied this really closely. When she says that we have to be really anxious about the word "coercion", we have to really listen and respond positively, because there are really harmful consequences from what Jayne has identified as spiritual abuse and layperson abuse that



could place in the privacy of a counselling or therapist's room. We have to be really careful that we step through this very precisely and make sure that we do not create inadvertent loopholes that people can use later on to justify what is, essentially, incredibly harmful and self-harmful behaviour.

Q37 Bell Ribeiro-Addy: Thank you very much, Paul. Ellen, is there anything that you would like to add in terms of key changes in a bill?

Ellen Murray: Jayne said perfectly the vast majority of it. Just to pick up on something that Paul said, it is also worthwhile considering the places where things effectively operate as conversion therapy but are not recognised or called as such. There was a decreasing, for the longest time, but now perhaps slowly growing risk of that happening in places like gender-affirming healthcare in different settings, where, effectively, the outcome is very similar to conversion therapy.

The other thing that I would say is about ensuring that those who have gone through this, survived it and been victims of it are able to get access to the support that they need and that that is provided for in any legislation put forward. However, in terms of specific legislation, I would be more familiar with the devolved and transferred stuff here in Northern Ireland rather than in Westminster.

Jayne Ozanne: I am not sure if this is at all appropriate, so it is for you and the Chair to say, but I have a very short two-minute video of a trans lady who has shared her experience of prayer and exorcism, and the impact it had on her. The reason I am suggesting showing it is that people just need to understand the full impact of what we are trying to ban. I would suggest you look at the viamedia.news website to view that, if you need to.

Chair: Jayne, if you could send the link to the clerks, they will circulate it to the Committee. Thank you.

Q38 Nicola Richards: The GEO made 75 commitments to the LGBT Action Plan. In your opinion, how dedicated are GEO Ministers to achieving these commitments?

Jayne Ozanne: The Secretary of State is very keen to have an international conference. We know that she wants to ban conversion therapy. The conference is not the top priority for the community. As a panel, we have said that more than once. I was one of the ones who advised against her trumpeting having an international conference whilst we are, seemingly, taking so many steps backwards. That is the lowest of the priorities. What we need to look at is tackling homophobic bullying, hate crime, health problems and funding that has been slashed to many of the support networks. We need to finally see this ban on conversion therapy, but none of those have happened.

To be fair, the GEO officials have been committed to trying their best to push that work forward, and I would not want this session to come to an



end without us applauding their work. I am not sure how much interaction they have had with their Ministers, but they have tried to take that forward. I would suggest that the priorities that the Secretary of State has talked about are not the ones that we would like to see happening as a community, apart from conversion therapy.

Q39 Nicola Richards: Thank you. Paul, do you have a view on how dedicated Ministers are to achieving those 75 commitments?

Paul Martin: The commitments came out of the research. Even though there are 75 of them, they were themed in about eight or nine thematic groupings, so it made perfect sense when we saw what came out of the research and how that ended up as priorities in the action plan. What has got lost in all of this are some really good news stories of the Government making really good progress on a number of those actions. We were given performance-monitoring data on progress against those 75 actions. There was quite significant progress against a number of them. Some were completed.

In the discussions, members of the advisory group have differences of opinion about whether they would see some of those actions as being completed compared to GEO's assessment, but that was a helpful dialogue and debate. The unfortunate focus on the current ministerial team and their change of direction means that the really good progress that had been undertaken has been lost and missed, which is really disappointing.

I do not think the current ministerial team are committed to the action plan. It is not their plan. My experience of many Ministers over many years is that they like to state their own priorities. Therefore, I do not think the action plan is something that the current ministerial team values or is promoting. As an advisory panel, we tried to engage the Secretary of State and the Equalities Minister in dialogue about that. We tried to help reframe and refine it, and to have a discussion about how they could maybe make some of these priorities their priorities, but that was not possible, sadly.

The LGBT team at GEO has been greatly diminished. As I previously said, many team members were relocated during the pandemic and allocated to other parts of Whitehall. As often happens in the civil service, some of those people have not returned, so there are fewer people in the LGBT team than previously. Of course, GEO is being restructured anyway, so we are still waiting and we do not know how that restructure will have an impact on the LGBT team and their work.

The reality is that the action plan does not seem to be current policy. I have not heard any reference to it. It is something that I am sure you will ask the Secretary of State next week. At the moment, we are in a situation where it is unclear what the Government priorities are, and the current administration's focus on the international conference and GRA reform are not priorities that the community would have identified. The



biggest tragedy about the huge amount of focus on GRA reform over the last couple of years is that, had anybody asked trans and non-binary communities, they would have said that that was not their number one priority for reform. They would much more have preferred to have seen progress take place in gender-related healthcare and priority being given to that.

Ellen Murray: What Jayne and Paul have said is accurate. There did seem to be a lot more work in the early days under the first Minister. The priorities that seem to remain do seem to be what the other two have identified, and especially that international conference. I have had to step away from a lot of human rights work over the last year because of the effect it was having on health. In my international work, which is the majority of the work that I do, the idea that the UK would hold a conference like this as a world leader would be received with various levels of humour in different settings.

In terms of the priorities as identified by communities, the initial research was really useful in terms of laying those priorities out, but as things have developed, as Paul said, a lot of those priorities have either shifted or have been misidentified by Government in terms of what order they need to be tackled in. A lot of those more difficult issues, as Paul mentioned, are much more likely to be identified by communities as priority, but we have seen very little meaningful movement on them, although there have been some successes.

Q40 **Nicola Richards:** GRA reform was one of the key commitments in the LGBT Action Plan. What conversations, if any, did the GEO have with the LGBT Advisory Plan in relation to GRA reform?

Jayne Ozanne: At our July 2019 meeting, we had a presentation of the consultation results. I would stress very heavily how confidential this was, because the level of response was quite high but also quite polarised. We had quite a full and frank discussion at that point. It was a good discussion. It was at our second meeting. I would defer to Ellen as to how she felt it went, but, from my point of view, that whole meeting was the panel at its best.

To me at least, there then seemed to be silence until we heard the Secretary of State talking to you in April, and we then wrote to her asking to meet to talk to her about it, because our advice and concerns had not been sought. We had a meeting on 1 June, where we raised our concerns at quite a basic level. I must be honest: the conversation was quite shocking to me. I do not know if Ellen and Paul will remember the level of misunderstandings that there were on certain issues to do with trans and non-binary people. That was after things had been announced, not before.

Paul Martin: My recollection is quite similar. I seem to remember spending too much time talking with the Secretary of State about toilets at that meeting, which no one was prepared for or expecting. The reality



HOUSE OF COMMONS

is that, as I said previously, GRA reform was not a priority of the community. It was not something that we had recommended, but something that we responded to. The ministerial changes meant that there was a change in approach and style. As Jayne has pointed out, we learned about what the Government's intentions were after the Secretary of State had given evidence to you. That really clearly identifies where the breakdown occurred.

What I will say about that very first meeting is that we had a very frank and honest conversation and officials were quite candid in terms of the outcome of the consultations, their deliberations, and what they thought was and was not politically achievable. We were equally candid in terms of how we thought the community would respond and what the views were. As Jayne said, Ellen really needs to answer, but my perspective is that it was a positive start and a very unfortunate end position that meant that nobody's needs were really met in any meaningful way.

Ellen Murray: I would agree. Those initial meetings—and especially the one that was relatively focused on GRA reform—were really productive. The panel had some really good discussions about it and it helped level up the knowledge that the panel had in general. Everybody was fairly competent already, but it did help in terms of the nuances. On the interaction with the GEO, it was relatively positive as well.

The consultation data was useful to have. The consultation was very flawed and limited, and very much clipped the wings in terms of what was possible from the outset. I am a dual citizen of Ireland and I live in Belfast, so if I get in the car, in an hour I am in a place with a very different system. That is perhaps a political reality that I have got used to here—there is an understanding that things can be different, whereas the willingness to look outside the island of Great Britain was quite frustrating.

In terms of how that moved forward, the announcements made and our panel meeting with the Secretary of State afterwards, with those conversations about toilets and these quite basic misunderstandings about what this was all about, were another nail in the coffin for how confident I felt in the Government doing anything useful on this.

Again, GRA reform is important and certainly a priority, but is nowhere near, for example, as Paul has mentioned, gender-friendly healthcare or those things that much more regularly affect people's day-to-day quality of life and ability to get on with their lives. GRA does impact on that significantly, but it is not at the same level and is not usually as urgent.

The level of discussion at Cabinet-member level and from Government in general on this topic has been abysmal. It is fair to say that the UK is considered as one of the most hostile European nations in this respect on this specific discussion. That has changed a lot in the last few years. Public discussion has shifted enormously. That negative development has not been stopped by Government, and a lot of the confusion around



HOUSE OF COMMONS

these issues from Cabinet-member individuals and policy in general, and, like conversion therapy, the drawing out of this into endless processes, has made that worse for communities on the ground.

We see a very different thing here in Northern Ireland, where we have that exposure to the Republic and a very different reality where the sky does not fall and it is still pinned up there pretty securely. My international human rights colleagues have been looking at the UK with concern and dread for a while now on this topic, and it is not seen as a positive representation of the UK at all in this area of human rights. It has not gone well.

Q41 **Nicola Richards:** Another commitment was to improve the Government's understanding of the issues faced by non-binary and intersex people. Have you seen any progress in this area?

Jayne Ozanne: At that July meeting, I know we touched on this and I believe there was going to be a consultation, which was going to report back. I have not heard a single word since that July 2019 meeting, although we did stress how important it was, because we also talked about it in relation to the census and how intersex and non-binary people felt deeply misunderstood. That all fed into that "hostile environment" comment. I have not heard anything since that meeting as to how that was taken forward.

Paul Martin: It has got worse for trans, non-binary and intersex people in this country. Ellen's point about how, from a human rights perspective, we have a very poor reputation globally is something that we need to take really seriously. It feels like we are losing our way. Again, there were good intentions at the start. There was a sense that the survey of 108,000 people had not identified enough clarifying information for non-binary people, and of "let us get some more research and evidence". Correct me if I am wrong, Ellen, but I do not think that research has been published. I certainly do not recall seeing anything come out, and certainly nothing came via the advisory group.

Ellen Murray: I certainly cannot recall seeing or hearing anything on that. The dates mentioned by Jayne and Paul are correct. There were some useful conversations at the panel in the first instance on these topics. There is such a wealth of information that the panel could have brought in terms of connections to communities, especially with groups that are historically much more difficult to access or much less represented in this sort of data, but I have not heard a single thing since then.

Q42 **Nicola Richards:** Ellen, in your resignation letter, you wrote that one of the reasons for you resigning was because of the Government's "abandonment of trans people's rights to healthcare". Could you elaborate on that?



Ellen Murray: It is a longer-term thing and not one specific event. There has been a developing crisis in gender-affirming healthcare—or trans healthcare, however you wish to phrase it—in the UK for a number of years now. The capacity issues that have been identified for decades have slowly been festering and getting worse, with waiting times climbing up.

It is predominantly the Government's willingness to use trans healthcare as a part of this culture war that has been going on in the wider human rights discussions at a national level, especially in the public media. Globally widely discredited ideas have been thrown in around the protection of children's rights or bodily autonomy, especially for disabled people. A lot of the very harmful rhetoric that anti-rights campaigners have been proposing for a number of years has been legitimised, especially that adolescents or disabled adults are incapable of making decisions about their own healthcare.

These are the things that the UK Government are very happy to represent in other aspects of law. Mental health law is not fantastic in the UK; it is not really fantastic anywhere, but it is not fantastic in the UK. There are provisions for those sorts of protections. The use of this very tiny community of people who need a specific type of healthcare for pretty straightforward reasons as a moral lever for broader conversations on and approaches to human rights is something that I do not accept. I think it is unacceptable.

On the ground, in the communities that I have contact with, both here in Northern Ireland, where we were without healthcare for adults for multiple years up until very recently this year, and in the NHS in Scotland and Wales, people are going into enormous debt to access private care. They are having to travel abroad. They are going without the basic care that they need to get on with their lives. The reasons for that are nonsense. The reasons put forward to prevent these major changes that are required do not stand up to scrutiny. They are based in nothing but moral arguments and social conservatism, which is not acceptable in human rights issues.

Q43 **Nicola Richards:** Are there any other unmet commitments within the LGBT Action Plan that you are concerned about the Government delivering on? Do you think that the deadline will be met of delivering these commitments by the end of this Parliament?

Ellen Murray: I do not think that the deadline of this Parliament is particularly feasible, especially given the big topics that we have all discussed and which have made very little progress. In terms of other priorities, the other two, being based in England, would have a better idea of that on the ground, because a lot of them are devolved or transferred in Northern Ireland, so they do not really apply here. I would be surprised if the action plan was completed by the end of the next Parliament. I started with this work in Northern Ireland and got used to how dysfunctional it was here. I would like it to have worked better than



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Northern Irish politics, but I do not really have much hope in it being rolled out by then.

Jayne Ozanne: I have been operating for many months now under the belief that the action plan is dead. I do not see, frankly, how any of the action points that had yet to be implemented will continue to be implemented without the ministerial support that they need. It is one of the things that we, as a panel, when we have met privately as a group, have been terribly concerned about. That is why we put our own priorities to the Minister, trying to draw on what we saw as the most important of those 75.

I am not convinced that the Minister is across the full breadth of the action plan. That may be unfair, but it is not something that she has referenced. When we asked her about it, she talked about her own priorities. Framing it in the way you have there in terms of the question of whether it will be met, I do not think they have any intention of opening it up to see what is in it, putting it very bluntly.

I would add to what Ellen said. We have seen a rise, as you will be aware, of transphobia in Britain. We have heard of people talking about a “trans ideology”. There are groups who are actively campaigning and lobbying MPs, one of which is the LGB Alliance, which I believe has met with Ministers. I would like to understand—and perhaps you could ask—whether the Ministers have met with any trans groups to hear the other side of the story. I find it deeply concerning that they may be willing to listen to people who would be undermining the very right of Ellen and other of our colleagues to exist. That concerns me very deeply, which is why I am bringing it in at this point.

Paul Martin: I do not think it is possible for the commitment to be met within the timeframe, for a number of reasons: the LGBT team at GEO is greatly diminished; the budget that it was originally allocated has disappeared; the advisory group that was established has been disbanded or has ceased to exist; and the Minister and Secretary of State have not responded to anybody’s enquiries about their future intentions.

I do not know whether you have seen our letter of 6 January to the Secretary of State, but we can certainly share it with you. In that we outline what we think the priorities should be for the duration of the action plan. They are summarised under research, monitoring, health and wellbeing, education, and asylum and mitigation, and some cross-cutting themes that we agreed as a panel.

Hopefully, from the evidence that we have given today, you can get a sense that the original panel of 12 had great intentions to do the very best that it could on behalf of our communities and to ensure that the action plan was not just delivered but was exceeded. We tried to be as thoughtful and as conscientious as we possibly could be. Even to the very last bit, just before Jayne and Ellen stood down, we were still offering that good intention, that help and that assistance.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

One of the things that I am greatly saddened by is that, in the evaluation of this period, we are going to focus on what did not happen as opposed to what did happen. There was some really good progress that Theresa May's Government achieved, and the ministerial team that she appointed approached this with really good intent. That, in itself, is a really good story from the journey that Theresa May went on from Home Secretary, given this brief, to Prime Minister. We can see a really good and positive arc of growth, understanding and development.

It is an unfortunate state of events that we find ourselves in, but I still think that, if you were to go back and ask all of the panel members if they would be prepared to reconvene and re-establish, many of them would. I can only talk about the positive conversations and the intellectual challenge that we had. Ultimately, we did not just sit there all agreeing with each other and meekly doing what we were told. We engaged in a very robust way. Had we been given more opportunities to be listened to and more access to decision makers, we would have had a better and more meaningful impact, but there were some things that we did that were very positive.

Chair: Can I just take this opportunity, before drawing the meeting to a close, to thank all of our witnesses for having come to give evidence? It is very much appreciated and, I am sure, incredibly useful and timely ahead of our session with the Secretary of State that is coming up. Thank you very much.