



## Constitution Committee

### Corrected oral evidence: Future governance of the UK

Wednesday 7 July 2021

10.20 am

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Members present: Baroness Taylor of Bolton (The Chair); Baroness Corston; Baroness Doocey; Baroness Drake; Lord Dunlop; Lord Faulks; Baroness Fookes; Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield; Lord Hope of Craighead; Lord Howarth of Newport; Lord Howell of Guildford; Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury; Baroness Suttie.

Evidence Session No. 4

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 46 - 55

#### Witness

[I](#): Rt Hon Andy Burnham, Mayor, Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

#### USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

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## Examination of witness

Rt Hon Andy Burnham.

**Q46 The Chair:** This is the Constitution Committee of the House of Lords. We are conducting an inquiry into the future governance of the United Kingdom and have taken evidence from academics and politicians. Today we are taking evidence from two people. First, we will be hearing from Rt Hon Andy Burnham, who is the Mayor of Greater Manchester. Then we will be hearing from Lord O'Neill, who has considerable experience with the Northern Powerhouse. Welcome to you both. The first part will be with Andy Burnham.

Mr Burnham, you have talked a lot about your role and the potential future for metropolitan mayors. Can you start by giving us an overview of what you think is the main purpose of devolution, and how this has worked out since we started moving in this direction seven or eight years ago?

**Andy Burnham:** Thank you. Good morning to all members of the committee and thank you for this opportunity to address you. The purpose of devolution is twofold. First, it is to give all parts of England a stronger voice, a stronger representation. A theme that I will return to is that Parliament does not represent all areas of England equally and devolution begins to correct that. It is important to talk about English devolution as distinct from Scottish and Welsh devolution, because regional devolution is a very different concept.

Secondly, it provides the ability for the English city regions—and there is no reason why it could not be rural areas also—to do more for ourselves, to be masters of our own destiny, to make change happen from the bottom up and create a different kind of politics—a more involving, place-based form of politics rather than a party-first approach.

Its possibilities are quite vast and we are only in the early days of English devolution. The progress report is that in 2017 at the first mayoral elections in Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, West Midlands and Tees Valley, I think all of the mayors in those places would say that there was scepticism; the prevailing mood on the doorstep was one of “another layer, a white elephant, we do not need it”. The mood was very different this time and that was reflected in the votes in the four regions that I mentioned. I think the public in those places are saying quite clearly to Parliament, “We like this. We can see possibility in this. We want more of this” and I think that is where we currently are. We are at the end of the first phase, I think, but there is a big question mark as to what comes next.

**The Chair:** You mentioned Parliament not representing all places equally, in your words. How does that fit in with the view that we need stronger English representation within Parliament?

**Andy Burnham:** If you take a step back, and look at the Covid map of England, I think that is where we must start. I refer you to a report on Greater Manchester that Professor Sir Michael Marmot did at our request,

where he found that the death rate from Covid was 25% higher in Greater Manchester than the England average. We are not unique. There is a similar position in Lancashire, particularly east Lancashire, and parts of West Yorkshire and parts of the north-east. If you look at the map of where Covid has hit hardest, I think you have a pretty clear correlation between the impact of the virus and the places where housing is poorest, employment low paying and least secure and life chances lowest. It is a pretty clear correlation. Why do we have an England that is so unequal? I think because of centuries of governance that is not fair to all regions. I find it hard to put this point to this committee but the House of Lords, of course, does not reflect England in terms of geography, class, race—possibly better on gender but certainly has never represented all areas equally.

That is one of my reflections on my time in Parliament but nor does the House of Commons in the way that it works. It does in theory, because every single place is represented, but the way our parliamentary system works is that the governing party is pretty much asked routinely to rubber stamp what the Civil Service puts forward with only a Minister or two able to shape what comes up from the Civil Service. Equally, the Civil Service does not represent England in all of its diversity.

In a moment in time where all organisations in the country are being challenged, rightly in my view, to be more diverse, to reflect all parts of the country, all classes, all races, disabilities, gender, it strikes me that Parliament has nowhere near got its act together on this and we have a north-south divide and an unequal England because of the way we have been governed for centuries. There is no point me coming here today and not saying that, because I believe that to be the truth.

**Q47 Lord Dunlop:** Good morning. There are lots of issues in that answer and I am sure we will want to come back to a lot of them as the session goes on. I want to ask you about the arguments against devolution and how you respond to those. One of the arguments made against devolution is that it leads to more fragmented and less efficient decision-making and perhaps increases tension between different layers of government and Ministers are traditionally wary about losing control of things for which they are held accountable at the ballot box. How would you, as a leader of devolved government, respond to those concerns and how do you assess the added value of devolution?

**Andy Burnham:** There are two important issues there. First, on the fragmentation point, I think there is an onus on people leading devolved Administrations to collaborate and to create a degree of consistency in what we do so that English devolution does not end up in a hopeless postcode lottery. I will give you an example of how we are doing that, at our own instigation, not required by Government. In Greater Manchester we have brought forward a good employment charter, which we are linking to public procurement so that people bidding for public contracts will be more likely to secure those contracts if they are accredited as a Greater Manchester good employer. That is an example of how we can

make bottom-up change of the kind that I was talking about to Baroness Taylor a moment ago.

We have worked very closely with the Liverpool City Region and it has essentially adopted the same framework as we have. It calls it a fair employment charter, but it is the same thing. Now, as we see the concept of M62 mayors develop with the new Mayor of West Yorkshire, Tracy Brabin, Tracy has agreed to adopt the same. We have understood that we will not further our objectives if large companies working along the M62 corridor were being asked to do three different things by Liverpool City Region, Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire. I hope you can see that at our level we understand the need for consistency and collaboration, and I would say that this is true of our Conservative colleagues as well. The mayors as a group—we were the M9 and we are now the M10—have worked very collaboratively across party lines.

It is this point, Lord Dunlop, about leaving the parliamentary world and working more with a place-first rather than a party-first approach. I think it creates a different kind of politics and a different context in which politics is done, and I think that tends to lead you towards better solutions.

On the point about government—and I understand the point, having been a Government Minister—I think the problem is starting with the premise that Whitehall government works. I just said to Baroness Taylor that from the north of England's point of view it does not work particularly because it has not delivered the same quality of life here, the same health, the same life chances, as are enjoyed in the other parts of the country. Starting from the premise that it works is a problem. In the way that technical education has always played second fiddle to academic education, the idea that Whitehall has a perfect approach to policy is wrong because it prioritises some issues over others, some places over others.

The second point is that there is a problem if Whitehall takes its ball home when any mayor stands up to it. If we are saying that parts of England cannot be given the space to stand up for themselves and speak for themselves, I do not think we will ever overcome the regional divides that our country has. We have to get to a more mature relationship between the English regions and the centre. We are not there yet; we are on a journey towards that. Whitehall does not like being answered back and it is maybe the first experience of being answered back, not just on some of the rows over Covid but we saw that over the Northern Rail franchise. It received a shock when the north got organised and was quite clear in saying that what we had was not good enough.

I think we are in a phase where things are changing and the English regions are finding a stronger voice. That is understandably creating a reaction in Whitehall and people are saying, "We do not like this. We will have to put them back in their place", but that would be the wrong response. If you are going to level up this country, you cannot do it from Whitehall alone. Baroness Taylor and I were in a Government who tried to do that. We had a housing pathfinder scheme that tried to rebuild

Burnley and parts of east Lancashire and parts of the north of Greater Manchester from an office in Whitehall. Unsurprisingly, that does not work. If you look at the places that went under restrictions first in 2020 in the summer, parts of the north of Greater Manchester and east Lancashire, they were almost a perfect footprint of the original housing pathfinders of the Labour Government of the early 2000s. Top-down approaches to levelling up do not work. My message to the Government is: actually, our interests are aligned here. You want to level up, we want to level up, but the only way it will happen in practice is if we work together on that, such is the gargantuan scale of the task of levelling up the most deprived regions of our country.

Our interests are aligned and we need to understand what government's role is centrally, what our role is as devolved bodies, come to that accommodation and then realise that if we move together we will have a chance of levelling up in this country. If Whitehall acts on its own we may as well give up now because it just will not happen.

**Lord Dunlop:** Picking up on your theme of new politics and getting more mature relationships, that requires a culture change. Do you have any thoughts on what incentives could be put in place to achieve what might be described as better or good behaviour?

**Andy Burnham:** I think it is about the centre respecting the new bodies that it has created. I am not talking about the mayors and the status and the egos of the mayors—leave that to one side. The core of English devolution is combined authorities. These are clusters of local authorities, in our case 10 of them representing 2.8 million of our residents between them. That is an interesting vehicle to work with, to make consistent change happen across a large city region, which we would argue is the second city region of the country. They have to respect the entities that they have created and respect the fact that policy imperatives may be different in Greater Manchester from those in the West Midlands, so before they make a policy talk to us and let us work it out and get it right. That is the way that Greater Manchester has always worked. If you look back at the work of Sir Richard Leese, Sir Howard Bernstein and others over the years, you will find always that a pragmatic approach has been taken to these things, not an overly political approach.

Through this pandemic I have routinely been in the position of having decisions dropped on us without having had the chance to say, "But do you realise that the case numbers are higher here?" When the first lockdown was lifted I could barely believe it was happening, because of our case numbers. I was at the last minute trying to say, "Do you realise?" and I think it was lifted too early for Greater Manchester because there was not consultation.

Look at it in a different way, Lord Dunlop. Only in the last two weeks the Scottish Government imposed a travel ban on Bolton, Salford and Manchester without any consultation at all. National Administrations need to understand and respect the new bodies that have been created. I believe there should have been a role on COBRA for the English regions

at the start of this, not for every mayor but for one mayor to represent us all, perhaps.

I think that is where we are and we need to set out some of those arrangements in clearer working arrangements, where the devolved part of this knits into the central part of this. I think that Parliament is part of it—having proper representation for the English regions in Parliament and particularly in the House of Lords—but also having proper arrangements within Whitehall so that the voice of mayors can at least be heard before policies are set.

While it may not have seemed that way to you, I was in desperate conversations behind the scenes last year before tier 3 was imposed on Greater Manchester and I was saying that given how much people had suffered through that year we could not just have a two-thirds furlough imposed on us. It only spilled out into what it did when that got nowhere. I was reminded of my old world in Whitehall when negative briefings started to appear about me and my family in certain newspapers as that came to a head. I think some of the dark arts of Westminster are still deployed against people who challenge the way things are being done.

I say again, we need to act responsibly, work collaboratively and make it easy for the Government to work with us, but there is a quid pro quo there and it is Whitehall accepting it has to change a lot of its ways and the way that it interacts and talks and listens to people out on the ground.

We have lived through a long period, probably since the 1980s, which was not changed by the Government that Baroness Taylor and I were in, where the centre has not trusted local government. I think this has been a feature of political life in this country for at least 40 years now and it has to change. Practically no other country in the OECD has political governance arrangements as overcentralised as ours.

**Q48 Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury:** Good morning. Has the experience of Covid over the last 18 months or so changed your views about how you think devolution in England should develop?

**Andy Burnham:** A little. I think it has crystallised them. The pandemic generally has put incredible pressure on the arrangements for the way we govern and work in the UK and they have creaked under the pressure of that. A big example is the whole debate about test and trace in the early days of the pandemic. There was a decision to centralise when I think the correct decision would have been to localise. We have paid a price for that in that the system has not worked as well as it should have done. We also had to battle for basic data for much of 2020 about testing, tracing and isolation.

What it has revealed to me is just how strong the centralising instinct is within UK government, and I am talking not just about this Government. I am talking UK government as we have always known it or certainly as we have known it since the 1980s. That centralising instinct does not produce policies that then work on the ground. We are often left to try to

join up the dots or do quick workarounds on the ground of the way that Whitehall constructs policy. I think it has crystallised my views rather than changed them in any way.

**Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury:** Going back to the experience of Covid and the particular problems that you faced when there were different tiers during Covid for different regions, I completely take your point about how centralised government is in England. But it seems to me that one of the problems is that because England geographically is such a small country and people in one region are so very close to another region, when you have differences of rules or regulations between different regions, as we had during the Covid period, you have one lot of people saying, "It is not fair because we are being treated differently from another lot of people in the neighbouring region". Does that cause tensions and problems that might be difficult the more we devolve to regions?

**Andy Burnham:** The first answer is that I think it already has. I have often referred to this, but my experience as Chief Secretary to the Treasury was instructive when a former Member of the House of Lords, Joel Barnett—a dear friend of many on this call, I am sure—told me to scrap the Barnett formula because he did not think it was fair to the north of England. I have always said I have never met a politician who wanted something bearing his name to be scrapped, but he was adamant that it should be scrapped because it was not fair.

We have danced around these issues of regional equality, UK fairness, for many years. We have shied away from them and have found ourselves in a place that is not where we should be now. I think some of the resentment in the north of England that was being expressed in different ways at the ballot box is a product of all of that. I think Scotland and Wales have perhaps had more attention because of what feels like a serious threat that they may break away. I think in the north of England people feel that we do not threaten to do that, but we get neglected and look at the position that we are in.

More broadly, I do not think devolution is something to fear. I think the UK Government should set frameworks about entitlement of citizens to services and standards but then it is about how you deliver those things in different places. We should allow different places to come to different conclusions about how things are done. To be fair to the Government, I am not on here to say it is all bad by any means. I notice a real change now in transport policy, which is becoming much less contested territory than it was in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. The Government are moving to a position where there needs to be a guiding mind over transport nationally and at the city region level. It has given us the opportunity to bring our buses back under public control and integrate them with the trams Greater London-style with the transport system. They have given everywhere the choice, "Do you want to go for a bus system that is under public control or an enhanced partnership with the commercial sector?" and that is a legitimate devolved choice, Lord Sherbourne.

You can have a framework set at national level but then you can create the space beneath that for English regions to choose a particular route, prioritise a particular issue. I think that is the way to go: a governance framework for the country that allows more to be decided at local level. I think that is where we should go.

**Q49 Lord Howarth of Newport:** Good morning. You spoke of the case for devolution as being to allow people to be master of their own destiny in the places where they live. I think it is correct to say that more powers were devolved to Greater Manchester than to any of the other city regions. You also spoke of Professor Sir Michael Marmot's report on inequalities and life expectation in Greater Manchester. Do you judge that your existing freedoms and powers have enabled you to proceed as you consider best in addressing the social determinants of health in Greater Manchester? As you mentioned, that entails a whole range of policies: housing, skills, employment, health and much else. Have your powers and freedoms enabled you to do that, or have you been frustrated by a lack of certain devolved powers and by the lack of capacity to raise finance? Do you need more devolution? Do you think more devolution is needed in Greater Manchester and for other city regions?

**Andy Burnham:** The answer is yes. Michael's report is clear that if levelling up is to be meaningful in improving the health of the nation, substantial investment is needed, particularly in housing. If we are going to be serious about health coming out of this pandemic—as we should be, in my view; we should be putting health at the centre of everything coming out of this pandemic and I am talking about health in its broadest sense, physical, mental, social, emotional health—I think it is inescapable that you must start with housing. People cannot have good health without good housing. It is pretty much as simple as that. That is the foundation for everything.

As part of my work on homelessness, I went to Finland, where they have a project called Housing First and I discovered that Housing First is not a project; it is a national philosophy—maybe driven by climate, I do not know—but the philosophy is that housing must be a fundamental human right that runs through all government policy and all departments. Without it, kids will not succeed at school, you cannot give them the right start in life, you cannot build healthy communities.

If we are to respond to the Marmot review, we need substantial levers to change housing in Greater Manchester. Those are not just financial resources, although they should be. I think it could be borrowing permission, to be honest. We have a plan for 30,000 zero-carbon homes for social rent. I think the Government could work with us creatively on that to come up with loan mechanisms or other ways of financing or borrowing mechanisms. In fact, George Osborne created a housing investment loan fund for Greater Manchester that has been highly successful. If you look at the skyline of city centre Manchester now—I am not sure how many of you have been recently—it has fundamentally altered with many new high-rise buildings and it shows that it works



when you give borrowing freedom to local authorities and combined authorities.

Yes, on housing. I think there needs to be substantial change but it is not just finance, as I say. I think it needs also to be powers of regulation over the private rented sector. We now have a large private rented sector across England that is barely governed when it comes to the standards of the accommodation. ITV News has been doing a series of reports on this recently.

Coming out of the pandemic, combined authorities should be tasked by the Government to become much more serious about raising the quality of the housing stock in our communities. It is not just the physical health side of that. It is also the mental health side, because in large parts of the country that have been most affected there is a combination of insecure work and poor housing. People are living in environments where if they do not work they do not get paid, and if they do not get paid they will not be able to pay their rent. Consequently, that insecurity chips away at their mental health. That absorbs their mental well-being and drains it away.

I think good work, good housing and good transport are the fundamentals of building healthier, more liveable communities and I would say to the Government: empower combined authorities now coming out of this to level these places up. Levelling up cannot be done solely through big infrastructure projects such as HS2 and Northern Powerhouse Rail, important though those projects are. Levelling up should start with people in their homes and communities and their work. That is more likely to level up some of the most deprived parts of the country.

**Lord Howarth of Newport:** How are we to get to a more coherent, more comprehensive scheme of devolution? What should be the process of negotiation? I assume that it will be between the mayors and central government to get a more rational set of arrangements that enables mayors to do the job that they are elected by their local communities to do.

**Andy Burnham:** It cannot be everything overnight, and I recognise that, but we were certainly on a path from 2015 onwards. I give credit to George Osborne—as advised by Lord O'Neill, who you are about to hear from. I think it got off to a pretty good start. There were lots of things in the original Greater Manchester devolution deal that were good, but some of them have not happened. An example is the devolution of train stations. We think that they could be critical infrastructure for us to build homes around and regenerate communities, because train stations are neglected assets in many of the towns of Greater Manchester. They are not even accessible to our disabled residents; they do not have step-free access. It does not all have to be high policy. This can be some simple stuff, but that was blocked somewhere in Whitehall and it never happened.

Skills devolution is something that all mayors of all political persuasions want. It has been blocked in the Department for Education. Basically, we

were on a good path and to be fair to Theresa May and Philip Hammond, they continued it. They devolved substantial chunks of transport funding to us that is being well used in Greater Manchester at the moment. The Government who came in with all of the big rhetoric about levelling up have stalled progress on that journey. We hope that this committee might be able to persuade them to come back to it, because it is the right journey for England to be on at this moment in our history. It will create a more cohesive country.

To come back to the theme I was talking to Lord Dunlop about, it will create a healthier way of doing politics and less alienation in the English regions. Having more agency really matters, and I think that was reflected in the results of the mayoral elections just gone. You can build from the bottom up. If you adopt a place-first rather than a party-first approach you are starting from a point of unification. People all care about the place, whichever party they vote for. It creates the conditions for a better way of doing politics and it starts to neutralise the alienation that we have seen going up in the forgotten parts of England over the last decade.

**Q50** **Baroness Suttie:** Good morning. Following on directly from that, how would you characterise the current Government's attitude towards greater devolution?

**Andy Burnham:** It is hard to say, Lady Suttie. I really am not sure. I think it is mixed among different members of the Cabinet and different government departments. I think the Prime Minister understands what I am saying, because we have a Prime Minister who is a former mayor. It is not necessarily understood across the wider Whitehall world. For what it is worth—as you know, they do not always listen to me, I think that much has been comprehensively shown over the last 12 months, but if they were to—I think there is an opportunity for alignment here, where their political interests could become aligned with our long-term interests.

I do not believe that levelling up will happen unless you have the combined authorities that are now running the big English city regions very engaged in it and empowered to lead it. It will not happen in any other way. I cannot see how it will happen. You cannot level up with a fund at national level that you make everyone bid to and go on bended knee to government to get a little bit of funding for a train station. That is not levelling up. Levelling up is when you come to a city region like ours and you back us to create a London-style public transport system that is integrated across bus, tram and train, which is what we intend to do. Levelling up is giving Greater Manchester London-level fares. How can it be the case that a single bus journey in London is £1.55 and yet it can be over £4 here in Greater Manchester? How can it be right that public transport is most expensive in the poorest parts of the country? That is a fact at the moment.

What I am saying to the Government is that if you come to us and back us to create that, we have a plan to get there within three to five years. I have taken a decision under the Bus Services Act 2017 to bring buses

back under public control for the first time in 35 years. That creates the opportunity within this parliamentary cycle to integrate buses and trams with a London-style Oyster daily cap. By the next general election the Government could say that what has happened in Greater Manchester is genuine levelling up. Of course, Greater Manchester unites prosperous towns in the south of Greater Manchester with what you might call the red wall towns like the one I used to represent in Leeds, or Heywood or Middleton. I think we are aligned here. "If you want to level up the country and prove that you are levelling up the country by the next general election, you need to back us now. We will work with you in a non-partisan way, because we want the same thing." I think there are some in government that understand that, but I hope that all of government can be persuaded to understand that.

This Government have alighted on absolutely the right theme for this moment in our country's history. The question is: are they prepared to do everything that is needed to level up the country? A public transport system that has bus fares of £1.55 for 2.8 million people connecting them to opportunity and making a more productive economy is levelling up. The question is do the Government want it or is it just a slogan like the Northern Powerhouse and the Big Society? That is an open question at the moment.

**Baroness Suttie:** Do you think there is much appetite for place first, rather than party first?

**Andy Burnham:** Massively, hugely, I really do. Bear in mind that I understand the party-first world of Westminster, and I know it is less so in the House of Lords, but it is there. The starting point of Westminster is party first. That is what dictates the way the whole thing rolls. I can remember being in meetings with business organisations shortly after being elected, saying that I am going to adopt the place-first approach, because I remember working on issues such as Hillsborough with Theresa May. The more I learned in Parliament about being tribal and all the rest—you see change comes when you act in that way. You make change when you reach beyond your own little world, if I can put it that way.

I came through all of that. I went through the election of 2017 and clearly people of all political persuasions voted for me and I was very conscious of that and they have done again in 2021. I remember being in meetings with business organisations saying, "We are going to adopt the place-first approach" and people waking up a bit and thinking, "Right, okay, we can work with this. This sounds good". I think devolution like that is progressing that way in pretty much all of the devolved combined authorities of England. It creates a much better place for people to come into and contribute.

If I can reference very quickly my work on homelessness, I created a homelessness action network when I was elected that is a combination of public, private, voluntary, community, faith—all walks of life in Greater Manchester society came together with a goal of ending rough sleeping. It has been an incredibly empowering thing to be involved with in the

way in which people have contributed to it. It is just a taste of how different things can be if we come together with empowering things that everyone believes in and then every sector can make its contribution. I do not think you can get that through a very tribal approach to politics.

**The Chair:** Tempting though it is to continue talking about tribal approaches to politics I think in the interest of time we had best move on, because we have quite a few issues that we want to cover.

Q51 **Lord Howell of Guildford:** I want to come to the question of funding arrangements, money, resources, which is central to this whole story. It is true that the 2015 Treasury team under George Osborne did give quite a lot of relaxation on borrowing and spending, which was very welcome. Do we need to consider further funding arrangements to get away from some of the complicated formulae of the past? How can one face up to the eternal Treasury obsession with macrobudgetary and monetary control, highly centralising instincts? Do you think that levelling up includes more local tax-raising powers as well? How would that go down? Would that be politically popular in your area?

**Andy Burnham:** Thank you, Lord Howell. On your first question about how the Treasury breaks out of its controlling mindset, I think it is about trust—trusting people to deliver and recognising that if you create all this bureaucracy because you do not trust people, it is wasteful of people's time and is an impediment to delivery. If you are always asking people to bid for these national pots, everyone will say the same. It is so wasteful of everyone's time. It would speed up levelling up if money was devolved to combined authorities—if we were trusted to spend that money.

I will give you a couple of examples and I come back to what Theresa May and Philip Hammond did, because they did do some good things. The Transforming Cities Fund was a transport fund that was devolved to the combined authorities. I was surprised to find in 2017 how much latitude they gave us over how it should be spent. We received £243 million under that funding—and it was a four-year cycle—and I decided to prioritise walking and cycling for the majority of it. I appointed Chris Boardman to lead the development of something we call the Bee Network, a segregated walking and cycling network for Greater Manchester. I thought I would be in an argument about it, but I was not, to my great surprise. We were empowered to get on with it and because we were empowered to get on with it, it is being built now. We will build 150 kilometres of the Bee Network this year because we have got on and made it happen.

Another example is the original funding that George Osborne gave to us as part of the original devolution deal. I think it is called the earn back funding, which we used to extend the tram—the Metrolink—to the Trafford Centre. We created a new line that runs past Old Trafford, Trafford Park industrial park and then on to the Trafford Centre. That was delivered way ahead of schedule, because the Treasury got out of our way, basically, and allowed us to do it. Delivery is the answer to it. If the Treasury wants cost-effective delivery, it has to trust people more

and get out of the way a little bit and let people get on with it. Transport for Greater Manchester has a long track record of delivery and there is no point tying it up in red tape. Let it get on and do it.

I accept that there may be other parts of the country where the bodies that would be devolved to are less mature and more support might need to be put in place there, but generally the Government should lose the controlling mindset and the philosophy that everyone outside London in the regions is hopeless and they will waste money if they are given any. That has to go.

On the second point about tax raising, I have raised my mayoral precepts. Not every mayor has done this but I have raised mine. I think the key is being clear with people about why you are doing it. I had two specific purposes in raising my mayoral precept. We are talking double-figure pounds, not hundreds of pounds. One was the work on homelessness, because the public were crying out for a much better response on homelessness. Tonight in Greater Manchester we will have over 500 people in a scheme called A Bed Every Night, part-funded by the mayoral precept, which is ongoing support for people who would otherwise be sleeping rough. That has helped us get our rough sleeping numbers right down.

Secondly, I said I would give a free bus pass to all 16, 17 and 18 year-olds in Greater Manchester to help them go to the college of their choice, to help connect them with opportunities in apprenticeships, and that has proved very popular. Not everybody will agree with it but most people agree with it. You can raise tax revenue for specific purposes.

To go further, a tourist tax is something a government might look at. People expect it when they stay at a hotel in a second city of a European country and I do not see why that should not be something we could look at. We could decide whether or not we levy it. A workplace parking levy could be made easier to levy. There are other things that they could do that might be more baby steps towards more fundamental tax-raising powers. I am not crying out for those at the moment. I do not want to run before I can walk but I think we should have more control over public spending that is currently being spent in Greater Manchester. I am talking about the DWP budget, the post-16 skills budget. We need to see this as a journey towards full devolution, is the way I would describe it.

**Lord Howell of Guildford:** Yes, but you have talked about fundamental constitutional change in other forums and down the road it would be a question of transferring tax powers from central to local, less tax centrally and more tax locally. Is that not something we are going to have to face eventually?

**Andy Burnham:** I think so, if you follow through the logic of what is being said, but it may not be on income tax. You might look at the way transport is taxed, for instance. There are changes coming to vehicle excise duty, given the way that is working, and fuel duty and so on. There are ways of looking at and thinking differently about these things as society changes. Personally, I always argue for a land value tax. I think we undertax land in this country, which leads to the non-productive

use of land and you have land banking by the private and public sector. A reform of land taxation that might include council tax could be done with the support of combined authorities, and I think there is territory to explore here. I am not going to sit here and say that I have all the answers, but I think the time has come to open up a debate about how this might develop.

I am convinced that devolution to the English regions is beginning to lay the foundations for how this country will prosper in the 21st century. I think on the climate crisis the change that is driven bottom up will get us there, not legislation dropped on us top down. The city regions are going to be the early adopters of the new technology that will get the country to 2050 on climate. I think digitalisation and decarbonisation are bottom-up forces that cities around the world will be leading on. If we do not free up and empower our English cities, I do not think the English economy is going to be what it should be in the rest of the 21st century. These questions are now quite urgent coming out of this pandemic.

**Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield:** Andy, I was very interested in the way you unfolded your philosophy at the beginning of this session: collaboration and consistency across all the place bases of government. I must admit place basis is not a concept I have heard before. I do not know if it is your own but it is very interesting, "Please talk in advance to us. Do not drop policy on us". Would I be right in thinking that Government's abandonment of the industrial strategy—for which there was a very high level of consensus across the parties—at the end of March, largely unnoticed, was a classic example of you being dropped on? Were you consulted by BEIS before that happened, or not?

**Andy Burnham:** Thank you. I lost you a little bit in the early part of that question.

**Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield:** I was trying to summarise what I thought your philosophy was in the way that you explained it. It was very interesting, particularly place basis of government. I have not come across that phrase before. It makes it sound like "Blue Peter".

**Andy Burnham:** Not quite. It was a place-based approach.

**Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield:** Oh, place-based. My hearing is the problem, I am so sorry. Ignore me.

**Andy Burnham:** That is okay. It is not far away. Your "Blue Peter" thing sounds quite interesting. I quite like the sound of that. What I mean by that is taking the whole-system approach in any defined geography or locality, a one public services approach in that area, which is what we are increasingly trying to do. I chair a Greater Manchester reform board where all public services are in the room with colleagues from the voluntary sector as well. It allows you to break down the silo culture of Whitehall, join up services around the citizen and the place, so you could call it person based or place based. That is what is possible with devolution. You can come up with much more coherent solutions when you get all public services tilting in the same direction. I could say more

about this, Lord Hennessy, but that is what I would say a place-based approach to delivery is.

**Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield:** What about the industrial strategy? Were you given any advance warning?

**Andy Burnham:** We were strongly committed to that policy drive and again that was a product of the May Government that we fully supported. We had great support from the Business Secretary at the time, and also the Chancellor, and our document still stands. Lord O'Neill may have a view on it but we did a lot of work on it. We had our frontier sectors—the digital economy, the green economy, health innovation and materials and advanced manufacturing, which is a strength of Greater Manchester—but at the same time we knitted that with our foundational economy, the drive for good work for all and lifting standards at that level. A huge amount of work went into it with partners from the universities, particularly the University of Manchester, and the chamber of commerce.

This is one of the frustrations of Whitehall. We feel we had a long-term document and then the Government change: "Oh, that is out of fashion, that phrase, now. Get rid of local industrial strategy". To be honest with you, that is a large part of what is wrong with the governance of this country. When we are dependent only on Whitehall you lose the long perspective of policy. The Whitehall deckchairs change, the personalities change, the language changes; there is something new; a new fashion is introduced that is designed to appeal to certain newspapers. People on the ground are left frustrated because we have been led up the hill with writing the local industrial strategy. Devolution probably allows people to take the long view and the long view matters if you are levelling up Greater Manchester. The goldfish mentality of Whitehall is a frustration at times, and the local industrial strategy is a prime example of it.

Q52 **Lord Hope of Craighead:** Good morning. My question is whether greater symmetry across the regions is desirable or achievable. I think there have been 10 devolution deals agreed to date and they are not all with city regions. One of them was Cornwall, so they are spread across the country, and the question is whether greater symmetry is desirable. There is a problem that in public services—if you look at policing and health services, for example—there is a lack of geographical harmony there too, which is why I have added to my question whether greater symmetry is achievable. Would you like to comment on those two issues?

**Andy Burnham:** It is certainly desirable, but I think we need to be more pragmatic about the extent to which it is achievable. Going back again to the Government that Baroness Taylor and I were in, we went for a highly symmetrical approach to English devolution which would have been based upon the English regions, but it fell at the first hurdle. I was a strong supporter of north-west devolution and we were going to be the next to go under the Prescott plan at the time. I think this is where politicians always have to learn and take stock, that you have to go with where—I hope you can still hear me. I froze for just a second there.

**The Chair:** We can still hear you. Are you frozen?

**Andy Burnham:** I lost you for a second.

**Lord Hope of Craighead:** Yes, I am sorry, I think we lost you as well.

**Andy Burnham:** My apologies. I was saying that I learned from that failed attempt at English devolution that you need to go with where people are. I think George Osborne's plan started with where people are, the geography that people identify with, which in our case is Greater Manchester. I am 51 and I think that anyone under 50 does not relate to the old Lancashire where I was born. I was born in Liverpool, Lancashire, and I think that is a distant memory for a lot of younger people now. People affiliate to Greater Manchester now, certainly the under-40s. Go with what people identify with, and I think that is a better starting point. There is a strong and developing Greater Manchester identity.

To answer your point about symmetry, I think we can offer a form of devolution to all parts of England and the map can be filled in. I do not think there is any reason why rural areas cannot have a form of devolution. Allow a bit of flexibility for people to come up with arrangements that are right for them, but absolutely fill in the map. Do not leave it half completed, then lead people on a journey, maybe. They may draw down more powers as they continue down the devolution path.

I hope you got enough of that without me breaking up too much, Lord Hope. I think yes to symmetry but be practical and pragmatic about it.

**Lord Hope of Craighead:** Yes, I have picked you up and it raises a rather interesting point. The present system has been described as a menu with specials, so that you can pick and choose according to the needs for the particular area. I think you are saying that you accept that, although obviously with as much symmetry as possible, and that room should be there for specials according to the needs of different regions and areas.

**Andy Burnham:** Absolutely, and we should see it as a journey not as an end state once the devolution deal is done. Allow places to ask for more or give something back. It will evolve. We must see English devolution as a journey to a different form of governance for the country in 20 years' time. It is very important to give everywhere the chance of a devolution agreement and to continue to work towards a level of devolution that is right for that area. I was answering the point from Lord Dunlop before; it is legitimate to place requirements for consistency and cross-working between regions.

You mentioned public bodies not sometimes sharing the same geography. We have the North West Ambulance Service, so it is outwith our geography, whereas we have Greater Manchester Police, Greater Manchester Fire, but because they had a long-standing Greater Manchester operation it is not a problem. There was a Greater Manchester Ambulance Service some years ago and it worked. I would not be too hung up on it all having to precisely fit together. I think there can be a degree of flexibility and pragmatism, but generally you are right.



As a quick aside, Wales and Scotland also need to think about regional devolution. I think Scottish devolution has gone the other way. It has hoovered things up to the national level—possibly for political reasons, I do not know—but it has had a vision of things being Scotland rather than bearing the name of cities and places. As I was saying to Lord Hennessy, I think the 21st century economy will be built bottom up. That will be where the drive comes from and places that are overcentralised are going to struggle. I think it creates a political alienation in the long run, because if places feel disempowered they are not in the right place to engage in the 21st century change that we are seeing. I think devolution of the kind I am talking about should go across all parts of the UK.

**Baroness Fookes:** I was very interested that you spoke about Cornwall. I represented Plymouth for many years—a long time ago now, admittedly. At that time it was extraordinarily difficult to get the counties speaking to each other, let alone co-operating together, with Cornwall and Devon very often at loggerheads, both suspicious of what for them were big cities such as Plymouth and Exeter. Have you any advice or tips as to how the West Country can best learn from the arrangements that have been made for these big city areas? I would like to see us starting from where people are, but what is your advice?

**Andy Burnham:** It is a good question. I have talked a lot today about how national government needs to change but local government also needs to change. The bit about local government that frustrates and even infuriates me at times is the parochialism of it, the pettiness of it—not always but sometimes—the failure to see a bigger picture. I think the move to combined authorities is a challenge to local government as well, to rise above local dispute and parochial considerations and see the bigger picture of Devon and Cornwall working together potentially with the West of England Combined Authority. We often talk passionately about the north and the way the north has not had what it deserves, but you could absolutely make the same argument for parts of western England or East Anglia. There are pockets of what you find in the north across the south of England. I am not wanting this to look divisive in that sense. I absolutely recognise that there are other neglected parts of the UK.

I think the argument is to say that if you create combined authorities by being less petty and less parochial, because you are coming together to say we are going to try to do something together, you create a vehicle that the UK Government can use to work with and provide funding to. It is not for me to comment on matters of Yorkshire and Yorkshire politics but they have struggled a little bit with finding the right solution and some of the disagreements around One Yorkshire or different entities. I think they have finally recognised that they need to do something and hence we have a Mayor of West Yorkshire now, which is great to see.

It is about everyone adopting perhaps a slightly more mature approach to things in both national and local government and serving up the entities. There is no point just moaning that the train line does not come down to Devon and Cornwall, as people do, and I understand why they do. Serve up a solution, a vehicle for how you can extend transport to

Devon and Cornwall and bring the economic regeneration that transport will allow. That requires people to work together and think bigger than perhaps we sometimes do. I hope that answers the question, Lady Fookes.

**Baroness Fookes:** Yes, that is a very helpful response. At the other end of the scale, you mentioned the habit of Whitehall being centralised. Is there a case for trying to alter the Civil Service outlook, which I gather from what you have said is a bit of a barrier? Ministers come and go; the Civil Service remains. Is there a case for trying to make the Civil Service more aware of the regional approach?

**Andy Burnham:** Yes, absolutely. I think we have had a few goes at this and I am not sure we have ever got it right. If you go back to the old days, we had government offices in the north-west and in all parts of the country. To be fair, they had some strengths. There was something in that. I would not say it was perfect but there was something good about the way they worked. From my time in Whitehall as an adviser and then as a Minister, I also remember how they were treated as hopeless outposts by the power brokers at the centre. They were not taken that seriously. They had something important about bringing different government departments together on the ground in a region.

More recently—and this has happened under all government—there is the idea of, “We will send the Treasury to Darlington” or, “We will send MHCLG to Wolverhampton”. I am not necessarily saying that was bad because it is better that they are there rather than all clustered in London, but that is not devolution. It is not levelling up. It is a pretence at levelling up but it is not real levelling up.

Here is my solution, Lady Fookes. I think reform is needed. In the same way that the Foreign Office sends people around the world, civil servants need to be sent more around their own country if they are going to be good civil servants, understanding all parts of the UK. Recreate the Government Office for the North West but do it in the combined authorities and ask civil servants to work within the combined authorities. To be fair, we have had a little bit of that, a little bit of secondment from the Treasury, and we welcome it. I think more of that would be a good thing, either people on secondment or still permanent employees of their government departments but working and hearing the conversation at our level.

Homes England has done a bit of that and has collocated within our building. Highways England has collocated in the West Midlands. There is a bit of that, but a lot more of that where it is not separate government organisations but government based within the bodies that are the regional entities that are making the changes happen would join everything up a bit better if we worked in that way.

**Baroness Fookes:** Thank you for some very sensible suggestions.

**Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield:** A footnote question to the symmetry point, what I regard as a false symmetry. Andy, you used briefly the phrase the red wall, but for me it is clumsy thinking, it is sloppy

correspondence, they are slackers. What is so similar about industrial Deeside right across to Tyneside, Lancaster right across to Hull? To lump together all the areas to the east and west of the Pennines into some kind of red wall is linguistic litter. Do you not find it deeply patronising when you are dismissed as a kind of people beyond?

**Andy Burnham:** Absolutely, no question, it is the homogenous north, is it not? There is a sense it is xenophobic. I do not know but that is the undertone of that phrase. Those who are seeing politics in this way these days are at real risk of underestimating the working-class communities of the north of England and of seeing them in all their diversity and all their beauty. It is a patronising phrase, no question.

We have to use those phrases sometimes. The reason I use it in my context is that Greater Manchester itself is very diverse. You have seats that changed hands from Labour to the Conservatives in 2019, such as Heywood, Middleton and Leigh, and I was using it in that context, but you look across Greater Manchester and you see a real diversity of different places. We have our own north-south divide. The north of Greater Manchester is considerably poorer than the south.

The strength of devolution in our context is getting away from those labels and bringing all of it back together again in a coherent plan where everyone is being lifted and everyone is engaged and benefiting. I will give you a very quick example. Lord O'Neill knows about this because he has helped with it. We have created a mayoral development corporation in Stockport. It is the first mayoral development corporation in the country that focuses on a town centre regeneration and it is building 3,500 homes beneath those famous railway arches close to public transport. We are rebuilding Stockport interchange. It is very exciting. It is all done to a master plan and that is a plan to level up Stockport.

We are now going to take that template to Middleton, north of Greater Manchester. It is about getting away from some of those labels. It is a good example of how if you have a strong city centre it can lift the towns around it rather than allowing the country to get into this sort of dangerous "towns good, cities bad" debate, which we are getting into a bit with the language of the times that we are living in. It is culture wars language of "We do not like what goes on in cities, we are all about towns now". You have to be about both together and showing how a strong city centre such as Manchester can lift Stockport and Middleton. That is what we are on with proving.

Q53 **Baroness Doocey:** Good morning. Would more significant reforms to the UK's territorial constitution be helpful to manage relations between London, the nations and regions? If you believe it would, what do you think would be the best model?

**Andy Burnham:** I did reference very briefly the difficult exchange we had with Scotland recently. To his great credit, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Michael Gove, invited me to the UK Covid Committee to debate our differences and ultimately we resolved them. It was after the event, it had already happened. I come back to what I was

saying at the start. There is a case for a more clearly set down protocol between all devolved Administrations in England. I still think the English devolved Administrations are fairly invisible to the centre and even to the Administration in Scotland. I am not going to say Wales because we have a strong relationship with the Welsh Government, probably because of the party connection but also we are connected. The north-west of England is connected to north Wales and we are looking at a north Wales/north-west of England partnership at the moment, which is quite exciting.

Yes, is the answer. I think these things need to be set down more. I think there needs to be a Cabinet committee of the nations and regions so that the regional voice is heard at the centre all the time. As I said at the start, I think there is a case, I am afraid to say, for the reform of the House of Lords so that the English regions are fully and always equally represented in Parliament.

**Baroness Doocey:** Do you believe the mantra “Westminster must devolve more power” is ever going to work or do we need a system where certain powers sit locally as of right; in other words, a completely new and rebalanced constitutional settlement?

**Andy Burnham:** Is it going to work? It is up to Westminster and Whitehall because clearly they hold all the powers. At the moment we cannot demand them of right. I think the learning experience for me from last year is what happens if you have a fundamental disagreement with the Government at the moment? If you do, there are many people who have said to me, “You cannot speak out about your concerns about tier 3 because it might close off the support we are getting for the levelling-up fund or whatever it might be”. The danger of the current arrangement is it almost forces the English regions to go on bended knee and plead for help rather than be heard as an equal partner within the governance of our country.

As I was saying to Lord Hope, if you go where the people are—I refer the committee, Chair, to the research from the Centre for Cities on attitudes towards English devolution—it is strong and growing. The public like it because they can feel it is changing things, albeit in small ways at the moment. It is creating a different way of politics being practised.

Of course, the frustration, Lady Doocey, is that it is not in our hands at the moment. But I hope, with the committee’s help, we will make it clear that the genie is out of the bottle and I do not think you can put it back now. The north is not going to go quieter again now. That is an absolute given. People have absolutely found their voice through devolution, no question about it. We are not going to accept the treatment that we have traditionally had, which is often an afterthought when it comes to big spending decisions.

Things have changed, the genie is definitely out of the bottle, but it is still the case that Whitehall is controlling the pace of English devolution and there is not the ability at the moment to demand by right what we are given. In some ways, we are in the advocacy stage. We have been given a platform and a voice and we are using that platform and that

voice. Whitehall does not like it very much, but how are we going to get a more equal England if we do not use our voice to say, "This needs to be fairer, this needs to be different"? I think we are in that phase at the moment. There is a genuine uncertainty as to what comes next. What does come next out of the pandemic? I do believe that if levelling up is the defining mission of this Government, it is going to have to embrace English devolution more enthusiastically.

**Baroness Doocey:** Thank you. I did not notice you were on bended knee at all. Perhaps I missed that.

**Andy Burnham:** Behind closed doors, Lady Doocey. I am a different person when I am—

**Baroness Doocey:** Your answer to whether we need a completely rebalanced constitutional settlement is probably yes. Thank you very much.

Q54 **Baroness Corston:** Is a change of political and administrative culture required by Whitehall and, if so, what would it look like?

**Andy Burnham:** Yes, it is. It is a belief in all parts of the country being treated equally and fairly and I do not think that is the starting point for large parts of Whitehall. I think there is a mindset that not all areas are equal and not all people are equal, I am afraid. That is as I observed it. I have great admiration for the UK Civil Service, I do not say this out of spite or out of animosity. I have great affection for Parliament. All I can say to you is having been on the journey I have been on, I cannot help but think that quite significant culture change is needed.

I remember the most transformative moment of my life was when I went as Culture Secretary to Anfield in 2009, on the 20th anniversary of Hillsborough. I had been told not to go by the UK Civil Service. I went because I know that city well, as you know, and by going I think a city that was crying injustice for 20 years finally was heard. Left to its own devices the Civil Service would never have listened and opened things up. I use that example because I think that is indicative of the level of culture change that is needed here. All places are not heard equally in our country.

I hope that this committee will seriously address that question because it has led us now to a dangerous place where the politics have become quite polarising in the country. We have lived through fractious politics over the last decade and we have to come through this pandemic with something better. This is the moment to change, I believe.

Q55 **Lord Dunlop:** We have heard that England lacks a distinctive voice in our governance arrangement. Can the views of England and the English regions be more effectively represented in the reform for managing intergovernmental relations that the Government have currently embarked upon, given that, as you have acknowledged, the character of the Scottish and Welsh Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive is different from the metropolitan combined authorities?

**Andy Burnham:** Thank you, Lord Dunlop, it is an interesting question. I am not going to pretend that I have a fully formed view on what you have said. I understand the Government have gone cool on the English votes for English laws within Parliament. I do not fully understand the background as to why. What I will return to in answering your question is seeing the UK through the prism of the nations and sometimes the clash between the nations possibly is part of the problem.

We need to see it more as regions, and regions together—regions of Wales and Scotland. North Wales will have its own feelings of neglect, I guess, not necessarily because of what the Welsh Government have done but because geographically it is more remote and it is in a very different place from south Wales. We have lived through a period where nationalism has been on the rise in all its forms. English votes for English laws is almost a response to that, but English nationalism is problematic because England is so different and unequal.

I have not fully thought this through. I come back to the place-based approach that I was talking to Lord Hennessy about because you create a healthier culture if all places are more masters of their own destiny. You then create the conditions where we do not end up with highly nationalistic approaches to politics. You just have a country that will be more at ease with itself, more able to shape its own destiny at every level.

If all parts of England had a degree of devolution, I would not object at all to one of the mayors among us being nominated to sit at the Cabinet table to represent England from a devolved perspective. I definitely do not see this as an exercise in English nationalism, I absolutely see it as a way of improving the governance of the country, improving the politics of the country and closing some of the divides that our country has. Devolution hitherto has been addressed too much through the prism of nationalism and not enough through the prism of improving people's lives, improving governance and closing divides, and that is what I am all about.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much indeed, Andy Burnham, for your time this morning. We ranged very widely and we appreciate the way in which you have answered our questions. Thank you for that. We will move on to taking evidence from Lord O'Neill, but it is good of you to give so much of your time.

**Andy Burnham:** We appreciate your interest and thank you to all members for your excellent questions. I hope I managed some coherent answers and I am pleased to be the warm-up act for the real architect of devolution in England, who will now give you the real story.