

Constitution Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Future governance of the UK

Wednesday 7 July 2021

11.35 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. 5

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 56 - 68

Witness

I: Lord O'Neill of Gatley, Vice-Chair, Northern Powerhouse Partnership.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witness

Lord O'Neill of Gatley.

Q56 **The Chair:** That is a good lead into this session with Lord O'Neill, who is with us and has been listening to the previous session. Lord O'Neill, you have just been described as the architect of all this by Andy Burnham. As the architect, perhaps you can tell us some of your thoughts on the main purpose behind devolution and where we are at the moment. How is it going? Do you want to give us an opening approach and say where you are coming from on this or how you think we are at this stage?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: Thank you very much, Baroness Taylor and colleagues. Talk about having expectations raised. I will find a way of paying Andy back for that service.

I could spend far too long on this. Let me try to be selective and maybe pick out a few key points. First, as you are more than aware, my whole professional background is as an economist. I approached the issue of English devolution—or I did when I was first asked—as to what would make an economic difference. Secondly, as I am sure most of you know, a lot of it originated from my chairing of the City Growth Commission.

Thirdly, I tried to approach it from what would improve the collective fortunes of the United Kingdom; I emphasise the United Kingdom in this regard. It relates to a couple of things that Andy said. By the way, it was extremely helpful for me to have the chance to listen to Andy's responses to your many interesting questions.

The core to our approach has, by and large, stuck with me, even though I have adapted to many developments since; it is only eight years ago. Of the 14 city regions that we described as metro areas that had a population of 500,000 or more, four were outside England, hence why I refer to what Andy said.

There was a very interesting comment from, I think, the council leader of Glasgow that if they had more powers over what they did and had some additional accountability for it, it seemed to be not clear but reasonably highly probable that through time it might boost the productivity performance of many of those regions and, with that, boost the long-term growth trend of the United Kingdom. That is where I came from and where I have come from since.

Implicit in much of what Andy said—he might even have touched on it, I do not recall, but I am sure you all know—is that the UK is still, I think, the most centrally run country in the whole of the OECD. It is quite unique. It may be a coincidence, but countries at least at the G7 level—where, as evidenced by our recent hosting, we like to see ourselves as a core fellow colleague, if that is the right phrase—share a degree of geographic inequality of income, wealth and productivity with Italy, and we are way more disparate from an economic performance point of view than all other G7 countries, as well as many other OECD members. It could be a coincidence, because we are so centrally run, but it seems to

me that there are quite a lot of indicators to suggest that it is not a coincidence.

As to where we have got to within the northern powerhouse, particularly following recent developments with West Yorkshire, as Andy touched on, the five big city regions in the north have had some kind of movements, but, frankly, until the past two years it has been very limited to Greater Manchester and Liverpool.

West Yorkshire has taken endless years, and I say that partly because it raises an additional issue that Andy touched on, which is that the whole thing is stuck in the tribal politics of which colour any particular area is likely to go if they have an elected mayor. It seems to me that that has, sadly, dramatically influenced the style and the way in which the three Governments that have been in power since I first did this have approached devolution, as well as many people in local areas. It is highly relevant when you start exploring the issues of devolution beyond big urban areas, where the tribal politics gets even worse. I will stop there for now.

Q57 The Chair: You are telling us that some of this is structural, but some of it is also political. Your starting point is economic development. A lot of us remember when the regional development boards were there. There was a lot of concern that if they had too many powers they would try to bribe companies to develop in their area, which would lead to regional rivalries. Do you think that is still part of the backdrop of suspicion?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: Throughout this eight-year period, the reference back to the RDAs is constant and it still strongly influences some people. In fact, I think it still influences some of the advisers surrounding the current Prime Minister on the topic.

The parallels are obvious in principle, but in practice are limited pending the accountability and responsibility arrangements. A central part of the proposals that we made and which George Osborne and David Cameron took up is that you would not get any devolution unless there was a new level of elected responsibility to go with it, which of course is the elected mayors. That will make many aspects of the comparisons with the RDAs not particularly valid.

Q58 Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury: Good morning. Do you think that the experience of the last 18 months during the pandemic has thrown up issues, problems and challenges that have made you think that we need to make further changes in devolution in England?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: By and large, yes. It might be particularly flavoursome or unique because of the current central government. A lot of it confirms the game playing, if I might call it that, with devolution. As Andy touched on, I think it has highlighted at times that it is not treated seriously. Again, in this sense, the tribal politics gets in the way. Yes, I think that the last 18 months has highlighted it. The evidence was there before, even with the previous Government, and with the one that I was briefly a member of as a Minister.

Particularly with the lockdowns and aspects of testing and tracing, or compensating for aspects of lockdowns, yes, I think it has.

Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury: What would you like to change?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: I would like to emphasise in that regard something, again, that Andy touched on. I would hope that we are in the earliest days of devolution, and it feels to me that we probably are. I often used to say, from my perspective at the earliest days, that the idea that you just did one devolution deal and that was it was ridiculous.

Linked to a number of questions that many of you asked Andy, quite what should ultimately be devolved to regions of England on one level is not known. It should depend on the evidence as one goes through time. I cannot understand why everything to do with certain things, such as adult skills, is not devolved, and I have believed that since the days of the City Growth Commission. It is not clear to me why BIS, BEIS or the Department for Education has any role in somehow presiding over some national adult skill strategy. It makes no sense whatever.

On tax-raising powers and aspects of spending powers, I think it is a bit dangerous to have a strong stance, given where we are starting from and have travelled from, as to what needs to be devolved and what does not. Listening to Andy reminded me of things that I have thought about in the past. Many of you will be familiar with the United States, for example. Many states have significant differences in their local tax-raising powers, and it seems to function. Why could that not be the case here at some point? I think the tourist tax that Andy touched on is a very interesting example that could easily be applied.

Q59 **Lord Howarth of Newport:** Could you enlarge a bit on what you have just been talking about? From your perspective as an economist, and given your particular concern for the improvement of productivity across the country, how do you think devolution needs to develop? What changes, what priorities and what degree of urgency do you want to see?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: If I knew with precision all the answers to our productivity challenge, I guess by now I would be sitting on my own Caribbean island. It is something that I have spent endless time in my life trying to think about. I do not want to understate the complexity of the issues to improve productivity. That said, I think some of them are reasonably clear.

Our ongoing attainment and achievement in primary and secondary education, for a country of our historic standing, is very low and very disappointing. Covid-19 has not only highlighted that but looks, from virtually all available evidence, to have made it worse. In the context of a discussion about devolution, I question the presumption, which has dominated since the previous Labour Governments and certainly through the past three Conservative Governments, that having a completely centrally run education system, academy schools and simply better teachers is the answer to everywhere in England. I am extremely dubious about that.

Ultimately, of all the things that are relevant for productivity, in my view education is probably the single most important. It is a closed-door discussion with the Department for Education and important people who have influenced government education policy certainly for the past three Conservative Governments and maybe a bit before. I think they are mistaken. As I have said on adult skills, quite how a bunch of admittedly almost definitely quite bright and well-intended people in Westminster can understand the nature of what is needed for the skills requirements in the north-east relative to those of Cornwall, I do not know. It is basically nuts. But that is what we have—to give you probably the two most important things that, I think, ultimately relate to productivity.

There are many others, such as local transport. There appears to be some kind of movement on local transport, as Andy said, but quite why London can have had an integrated transport system for 25 years, maybe more, but other parts of urban England cannot, I do not know. Why? It does not make sense.

Q60 Baroness Suttie: You heard the question that I asked Andy Burnham about characterising the Government's attitude to greater devolution. Do you think that tribal politics remain dominant in the Government's attitude towards increased devolution?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: I hope not, but I suspect so.

Baroness Suttie: How can we overcome that? Do you think it is possible to overcome it?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: I may be in sympathy with that, reflecting on the earlier discussion and what I have just said myself. It is relatively early in the whole process of devolution, and in that sense it is an experiment for everyone. Andy touched on an important and interesting point about when the idea of elected mayors first came about. I was heavily involved in the Greater Manchester one. Most of the leaders of the 10 regions of Manchester were initially against having an elected mayor. It took some pretty last-minute intense discussions between them to get over the hurdle. It was probably because they thought, "Yes, we might get some more money, but what difference will it really make?"

The most objective way of answering your question, Baroness Suttie, is with evidence. What is interesting, in my view, is that, in the places that have been the earliest pioneers, there are tentative signs from the very limited regional economic data that we have, something called GVA, that Greater Manchester, and especially Manchester itself—it has not trickled out to all the different regions of Greater Manchester—and the West Midlands are performing better than other parts of the country and, for much of that period, better than London. It might be a complete fluke, but I suspect it is not.

Then, partly separately, but it may be related to it, there is the popularity of the concept. It is quite interesting, from the limited chance I have had to explore the numbers, that the turnout for the last mayoral elections was stronger than for the first one, which is an important sign,

in my view. If evidence cannot force central government policymakers to change, I do not know what will. I hope it would.

Q61 Lord Howell of Guildford: You made mention of local funding and the aspects of devolved financial situations of local government. In my lifetime, we have seen a dramatic fall in the proportion of local spending that was funded by local taxation and local funds. When I started in government it was about 30% or 40%, and now it is little more than 10%. Do you see that reversing again? Is there a trend there? Is this just part of a wave that goes up and down over the decades, or in this digital age are there permanent forces that will compel a reduction in central control by the Treasury and other departments?

Secondly, if there is a move to more local financing, will part of it be retention of business rates? I think there have been some pilot plans or pilot discussions about retaining business rate revenue for local authorities. Do you see a shift in that direction as well?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: My strongest answer about these things and whether this is a big strategic change is that I do not know. Time will tell. Partly linked to how I answered the previous question is that I think it will depend on evidence. I hope so. There seems to me to be a conceptual case for shifting, going back to what I said about how peculiar we are as an OECD country. If you look particularly at the economically larger countries around the world, many have a very different general political and social structure. In Germany, the US, China—even China—the power of local government is much bigger than it is here and, as you pointed out, it used to be here a long time ago.

I hope this is the beginning. I would hazard a very speculative guess that the evidence on the most peculiar voting habits that appear to be coming out of recent general elections may be reflective of it. If you look at some of the probable complexities of their natural base which the advisers to this Government have to think about, there are contradictions all over the place. That might be reflective of people wanting local needs and desires to be taken more into account. There is quite a lot of anecdotal evidence for that.

I hope this is the beginning. We still have to have a significant shift. There have been some experiments with business rates. Andy touched on how he had used his own mayoral precept in Greater Manchester. If you look at some of the other countries around the world and just think about it conceptually, why is it impossible for some of these places to have their own preferred levels of taxation, business rates being the prominent one that gets discussed but potentially not the only one? In the United States, local income taxes are levied in some places and in other places they are not.

Lord Howell of Guildford: That is very comprehensive. Thank you very much.

Q62 Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: I have a question about the industrial strategy. You and I have talked about this before and we did a joint

exercise. This is the eighth industrial strategy since I was born. The first one, the central economic strategy, started on the day I was born in 1947, and that has bitten the dust. It is two words in the very title of the Department of Business, Enterprise and Industrial Strategy. Like an engraving on a tombstone that is gathering moss, it is just there and that is how it survives.

You have talked about our very peculiar country, and industrial strategy relates to the constitutional question because it is an attempt to integrate within plurality and to bring all these strands together beneficially. What is it about this country that we cannot stick at it, Jim? This is the eighth failed attempt to stick at it in our lifetime. What is wrong with us?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: Lord Hennessey, if you do not know the answer to that, then none of us has a chance, because you think about these issues more than most people I have sat and listened to in the House. It is madness. I do not think this will cause me any constitutional problems, but I stayed as the Commercial Secretary to the Treasury for three months after the change of Government after David Cameron.

In my naivety, in my limited experience, I was shocked by how dramatically apparent priorities had shifted purely on the whims of special advisers, presumably because of their perception or maybe the reality of what the elected leader thought about certain issues. I was truly shocked. It seemed to me to be not really based on any evidence. The way the concept of industrial strategy gets bounced around is a very powerful and illustrative example.

It led me to the conclusion, which so far appears to have been incorrect and not borne out by evidence, that the power of special advisers in influencing these things is far too big, particularly because they are not themselves democratically elected. It seems crazy and, linking it to the devolution question, it appears today to be linked partly to tribalism—that because a lot of our big urban areas happen to have Labour-elected mayors, it is seen as something not to pursue purely for that reason. It is just crazy.

On an industrial strategy per se, in a way my own thoughts on that are slightly different, particularly in the complex modern era where the linkage between services and industry in some areas in particular is so vague and so complex that one has to be a bit careful. To have a proper core economic strategy—let us call it that—that defines the principles behind what a Government should do seems to me to be a must. The way it bounces around is incredible, and I think it is separate issue to devolution that is a bit of an unfortunate state of affairs. Quite how our system has allowed us to get to this position I do not really know. I did not mean it jokingly, Peter. You must have stronger grounds for understanding it than most of us.

Lord Hennessey of Nympsfield: I pass on that, Chair.

The Chair: What you are saying is that, while we keep looking at the structural issues, the political big picture very often cuts across that.

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: Yes.

Q63 **Lord Hope of Craighead:** My question is about architectural menus, if I can mix my metaphors a bit. One of the striking features of the various powers that have been devolved is that there is a lack of symmetry. Take public services. Greater Manchester has gathered together almost all the powers you could think of for public services, but the others do not seem to have done that. When you look at things like finance, most of them have the business rate supplement, but Sheffield and Tees Valley do not. Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire have the community infrastructure levy, but the others do not. It is very patchy. Does that disturb you, and is one struggling with an impossible task because of a lack of harmony among the different regional public services? Is that the problem, or is it lack of initiative?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: I listened with great interest when you asked Andy that question and equally to Andy's answer. It was a constant focus in my mind when I was trying to preside over implementing it when I was in government. I was responsible for overseeing the responses when the Treasury reached out and invited English regions to submit their ideas for devolution.

It is very complex, and the easiest way for me to answer you is again to default. This is a pretty recent journey that we have started on. Secondly, the core of the complexity, going to the heart of your question, is the acceptance of accountability and the complexity of the issue, as well as the central diktat. I will try to be brief in the rest of my answer, because it is quite complex.

I know for sure, because of the scale of my involvement in different areas of England, including, importantly, many I talk to on an ongoing basis, that a lot of areas do not feel confident that they have the ability to run and take responsibility for these issues and so shy away from them. Health was touched on briefly, and I guess is probably one of the things that you are saying about Greater Manchester.

In the brief focus on this under the Cameron-Osborne Government, they were eager for other parts that had some devolved responsibilities to request some powers in health, but they all shied away from it, rightly or wrongly. Then there were others who never got beyond the idea of accepting an elected mayor but would ask for all sorts of responsibilities to just be handed over without showing any ways of necessarily taking the responsibility and accountability for the success or otherwise.

I defaulted, and I still think, updated to today as I think about it, that a different journey, which I touched on earlier, with regard to the responsibilities is acceptable so long as there is a realisation—it often seems to me that there is not, partly because of the tribal negotiations of these things—that devolution is not a one-off position but a journey to be travelled.

Lord Hope of Craighead: You describe it as a journey. Are we stuck where we are or is there a way forward? If so, who is to take the process further forward? Is it up to the individual authorities themselves, or is

there a possibility of some initiative being taken from the centre?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: In the spirit of presuming that everybody has the right positive intentions, an idea that I have put to the Treasury a couple of times in the past two years is to give funding powers to raise the research and analytical capability in many areas of England. This could be particularly important if we were to have combined authorities in rural areas. Part of the problem that so many rural areas currently have is that they simply do not have the capability to even structure properly how they would request devolved powers in a way that they could be accountable for.

One way for a well-intentioned central Government who were interested in giving more devolved powers—and I do not think that the expense would be particularly high—is to give the resources to put these people in place. An often forgotten or unappreciated reason why Greater Manchester was one of the early pioneers is that, probably in the wisdom of Richard Leese and Howard Bernstein, it decided to fund its own research group inside Greater Manchester Combined Authority, but there are very few others that have that today. That might be a way of making notable progress that would not demand far too big additional resources.

Lord Hope of Craighead: Thank you very much.

Q64 **Baroness Fookes:** That leads me to the feeling that symmetry as an aim or ambition is the wrong one. Do you agree? I had the impression from Andy Burnham that his mantra was that you start from where people are and work up from there.

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: Yes, particularly in a democracy like ours the goal of symmetry is obvious and desirable. To have it as a stated, controlling, guiding light to everything that is done would be a mistake.

Baroness Fookes: I wonder whether you might suggest, Lord O'Neill, how we set about this. You have indicated funding to see where people need extra help. Could you expand on that a little?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: To give some colour to what I am trying to say, I go back to the request under the Cameron-Osborne leadership, where literally all regions of England were encouraged to submit their desires for devolved power. If I recall correctly, 41 submitted them. The advice that I was given by officials is that less than 10 were evidence-based. Some of them were a simple request: "Yes, we would like devolution. Can you tell us what we should do?"

If you had an approach that was symmetry-based, you would say, "Yes, we'll design for you all that we think is right". The downside to that, again, is immediately the presumption that the centre knows best. Especially with specific examples like skills, as I have argued a couple of times already, the centre is highly unlikely to know best. If you delve into issues in the north-east of England, the education and skills challenge is very different between Northumberland and Gateshead, for example. The idea that the centre can design what they need is difficult, which raises the possibility that that might be true in many geographies

of England. If you do not have people with the research or analytical capability in those local areas, you do not know.

Baroness Fookes: Is your suggestion that there should be some help in getting them to find the evidence, or do you just leave them to stew?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: The first part of my answer is to repeat what I said to Lord Hope. A very constructive way of moving to a better place would be a central government offer to fund the analytical capability across all local areas of England.

In the spirit of not holding back the most ambitious—this goes back partly to the question that I think Baroness Taylor touched on at the start—you want to see some evidence to bring all participants into the belief that this can help the collective interests of 55 million people in England, or whatever the number is. You want to see evidence of some success, so you cannot really hold back the most ambitious and the most capable while you are trying to make sure that everybody has the chance to do it themselves.

Baroness Fookes: Certainly not, but why is it all or nothing? Why can you not have some given the go-ahead and others given the support they need?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: No, sorry, I must have miscommunicated what I was trying to say. I completely agree with that, Baroness Fookes.

Baroness Fookes: Okay, thank you.

Q65 **Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield:** Can I ask you a bit more about the link between constitutional arrangements and economic performance? Sixty years ago or more when I was a grammar school lad in the West Country, I tried to find out how the system works, and I got Anthony Sampson's *Anatomy of Britain* as a school prize. You may well have read it at the same time in your grammar school, Jim, I do not know. Anthony Sampson was trying to find out two things: who had the power, and how to get the country to modernise, which is pretty well the basis of this morning's discussion as well. If you went back to your old school in Greater Manchester and some bright kid in the sixth form said, "Can you explain for me the importance, which you stress, of constitutional arrangements, devolution, productivity and the rest of it, what are the linkages?" how would you do an Anthony Sampson and reply to that?

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: This is such a tough question. First, I will point out that, fortunately or not, I went to a comprehensive school. By coincidence, it was the first year of the comprehensive system. It had been a grammar school, but a lot of the kids in the very small sixth form I was in would not think about these issues at the time, to be honest. I found myself trying to reflect on it when I heard you ask Andy a cousin of this question.

Am I too much of an economist, and should one not want to give the importance of economic goals per se to some of these constitutional matters? It is something that I want to think about more. As a parallel, in my role chairing Chatham House, I often think—and it is something

that has helped me learn as an adult—that there are big issues that drive individuals’ feelings and contentment other than pure economic matters, whether they be indirect or direct. I want to just say all that.

As it relates to issues of English devolution, my strongest belief remains that the prime reason to explore it is to deal with the remarkable difference that exists and has grown over my adult lifetime and before in the economic performance of the country. It is quite shocking when you look at it globally. It raises the distinct possibility that it does not need to be that way.

There are obviously very big, powerful global economic forces that have contributed significantly to the economic structural weakness of some regions of England and, for that matter, the rest of the UK. But, as evidenced by some of the experimenting of the past eight years with West Midlands and Greater Manchester, and maybe the first signs of it in West Yorkshire, it goes back to the crucial central role of accountability in devolution. If areas are prepared to think in a different way to the circumstances that caused their decline and to do things differently, it seems to me that, without the necessary constitutional change to allow that, we will not give them a chance to get out of the circumstances the global system has contributed to and probably ended up determining for them.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: Thank you.

Q66 **Baroness Doocey:** Good morning. Do you believe that more significant reforms to the UK’s territorial constitution would help to manage relations between London and the nations and regions? If you do, what do you suggest would be the best model?

Lord O’Neill of Gatley: I do not think I am sufficiently expert in all the details of the constitutional structure of the UK to feel confident about answering your core question. When you asked Andy that, I was hoping that you would get such sufficient colour from him that you would not ask me. I do not know the answer, but I do know, linked to what I just said to Lord Hennessy, that whatever it is, it needs to be done in a way that allows for something better and different for regions of England.

Baroness Doocey: I love the fact that you have said, “I don’t know the answer”. I think it is so wonderful to have the confidence to say that. Well done. Can I ask you something else that you might not want to answer or may feel that you do not know the answer to?

Lord O’Neill of Gatley: It is not that I did not want to. It is just that I know I do not know.

Baroness Doocey: No, I know that. Do you feel that Westminster and Whitehall suck power and money to the centre? Can anything be done to break that?

Lord O’Neill of Gatley: Yes, I think they do. It links to so many of the circular aspects of issues that we have been focusing on. I typify much of the journey of somebody who has had a decent education. You go to university and then essentially decide to live in London. That is it. All bar

one of my close childhood friends from Manchester—I hope some of them will not get to see the *Hansard* record of this, because some people might think, “Oh, God, he doesn’t regard me as a friend”—have lived in London all their adult lives. A lot of it is not conscious. Some of it is. Having experienced the wonderful opportunity to be a Minister inside the Whitehall bubble, I know that it is not called the Whitehall bubble for nothing.

The Chair: Yes, indeed. Those of us who were northern MPs who refused to move to London were often considered to be not quite serious enough about our futures.

Q67 **Baroness Corston:** Is a change of political and administrative culture required in Whitehall? If so, what would it look like?

Lord O’Neill of Gatley: My clearest and probably quickest way of answering this question—I think we raised this idea in the City Growth Commission report that we published in late 2014—is to say that if we had a system that was truly committed to devolution, one could conceive of Whitehall departments that would no longer need to exist, not the day after but through time. I think you need that kind of mindset to truly buy into the principle of devolution for England regions. In that sense, I strongly agree with what Andy said about moving some parts of some departments to the regions. It is token gesture stuff, in my view.

Q68 **Lord Dunlop:** Jim, do the English regions need a more powerful collective voice in our governance arrangements, not least when it comes to arguing for a fair share of resources and tackling the chronic regional economic inequalities that you have talked about so powerfully?

Lord O’Neill of Gatley: I think the answer is yes, but again linked to my answer to Lord Hope, in which I re-emphasised the journey and some of the tribalism that in my experience happens within regions, I would say that one has to be careful about rushing to put that in place.

I know that at times, just from a northern perspective or from the perspective of the so-called northern powerhouse, probably as long ago as four, maybe even five, years ago there were voices calling for some kind of northern powerhouse representative at the Cabinet level who was representative of the then elected mayors. There were only really three: Tees Valley, Greater Manchester and Liverpool.

Still to this day in the north-east—it gives me a chance to mention this—because of its own tribalism we have a mayoral authority for only the north of the Tyne. It is very suboptimal from the perspective of where I come from. Pleasingly, I gather that as a result of some of their own experiences with Covid there is a renewed attempt to change that locally.

In principle, if I link it right back to where I started from, if all 10 of the English urban-based areas had elected mayors, I think it would make sense. It might make some sense to do it before that. Yes, I think they should have a bigger voice.

Lord Dunlop: That is very clear.

The Chair: Lord O'Neill, thank you very much for your time this morning. I am glad that you were able to listen to the earlier session, because you were able to dovetail in some of your answers to what we heard. We appreciate learning from your experience and getting your perspective on these very intriguing and quite difficult issues. Thank you for your time this morning, and thank you to all committee members.

Lord O'Neill of Gatley: Thank you very much.